

Literature questions course work

Literature, William Shakespeare



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The Dramatic Form and Riders to the Sea

A major difference between dramatic form and other literary forms is its desire to “embody the human experience not only visually and aurally but profoundly (as a true representation).” (Clugston, 2010, 13. 3). This means that whilst it utilises poetic and literary techniques, it engages its audience through its presentation of setting, its actors’ portrayal of characters, the expression of language, emotions and its presentation of values which are implicit to the play and the human condition equally. This is presented in John Synge’s *Riders to the Sea* his presentation of his characters as being true representatives of Ireland in the early twentieth century – a real account of realistic people including detail such as “I hung [the rope] up this morning, for the pig with the black feet was eating it.” (Synge, 1904, 1: 1). It is these minor details which enhance the play’s realistic presentation of people living their lives to dramatic effect.

Synge, J. (2004). *Riders to the Sea*. Montana: Kessinger Publishing.

Clugston, R. W. (2010). *Journey into Literature*. California: Bridgepoint Education Ltd.

Macbeth as Tragedy

Macbeth is heralded as one of the greatest tragedies to have ever been written and it is when its subject matter is considered: the human condition. Macbeth's theme is the unbridled lust for power and success; Macbeth's quest, driven by Lady Macbeth's influence, is demonstrative of this fact. In Act 1, scene 5, Lady Macbeth resolves to push her husband towards success stating that she fears he lacks "th' milk of human kindness" to take the steps necessary to make himself king" (1: 5: 15). Lady Macbeth consciously decides, in this scene, to manipulate her husband into murdering Duncan and becoming King. Wishing to appease his wife, Macbeth is drawn into her plan which further compounds his humanity as a man who is torn between being morally correct and immorally powerful. In this sense, the play's tragedy is Macbeth's loss of humanity in the face of such unrestrained desire to exceed his potential.

Shakespeare, W. (1995). *Macbeth*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Comparing and Contrasting Literary Forms

Often literary forms blur the lines of definition by using literary techniques which are more traditionally associated with other forms. For example, in Leigh Hunt's *Jenny Kissed Me*, the poem has a narrative quality, "Jenny kissed me when we met" (Hunt, 1838) which sets the scene and introduces characters, much like a short story. However, its personification of time is purely a poetic technique. The short story gives the reader just enough

information to be engaging but without producing swathes of description – choosing instead to provide narrative voice, characters, plot and settings which allow the reader to engage with it on an individual, personal level.

Drama relies more heavily on performance to present its narrative.

Frequently, instead of having a single perspective, a play presents the views of several characters with the audience often knowing more than the characters themselves such as in *Macbeth* with the audience knowing who the murderous culprit is when the other characters do not.

Hunt, L. (1994). *Leigh Hunt and the poetry of fancy*. New Jersey: Associated University Presses.

Shakespeare, W. (1995). *Macbeth*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Performance in Drama and Poetry

In drama and poetry, their full impact rests on the shoulders of the performer – particularly in drama. A play is written to be performed by actors who enhance the language and the play's message with expression, emotion and actions. Drama is designed to reflect the human experience truthfully and so, it is best demonstrated through performance. For example, in Act 5, scene 1 of *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth sleepwalks through the castle saying “Out, damned spot; out I say.” (5: 1: 32) and the scene is designed to be spooky and to demonstrate Lady Macbeth's insanity. To make this happen, the words require performance and staging to enhance their meaning.

Equally so in poetry, a poem can often be improved through a strong performance. For example, the poem *Half Caste* by John Agard is designed to be spoken with a broad, Caribbean accent and, in doing so, the poems' form

and rhyme scheme immediately become apparent. Sometimes, simply just saying the words is not enough but performing them can make all the difference.

Shakespeare, W. (1995). *Macbeth*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Agard, J. (2006). *Half Caste and other poems*. London: Hodder Education.