

Consider kenneth branagh's screen version of hamlet essay



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The play, "Hamlet", was written over four hundred years ago, by the famous play write William Shakespeare. For that reason, the language and jokes in the play are difficult to understand for the people of the twenty first century. Shakespeare writes in poetry and blank verse for the more elevated characters in the play, also using rhyming couplets to end scenes. However, prose is the style for the lower class of his characters. Many screen versions have been made of this play, but Branagh's adaptation is one of the only versions that keep the original dialogue from this Shakespeare classic.

This play tends to be very popular with the people of modern society, whether as a film version or a theatre production. The reason it's so popular is because it deals with the issues that most of us have to face in modern day life, for example, it contains a breakdown of trust and friendship, and it faces such issues as morality and mortality. "Hamlet" has been given a 'revenge tragedy' plot by Shakespeare. When we say 'tragedy', as in the modern usage, we don't just mean a sad event, it is a particularly literary genre.

'Tragedy' has a number of characteristics, taken originally from Greek drama, and developed by later dramatists in Europe and Britain. There is a predominant flowering of 'tragedy' in Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. In a 'tragedy', the protagonist is usually someone of high position and he or she is the central character. Also, the protagonist falls from their high position, generally to their death. In this fall other people are brought down in a fatal flaw, this flaw causes a reverse in fortune. 'Tragedy's' have the biggest effect on the audience than any other literary genre.

There is identification, where the member of the audience ' identifies' with the protagonist; there is always suspension of belief; it is also a vicarious experience – this is where we go through something at second hand, this allows us to encounter danger and death without actually going through it; lastly, the audience goes through such catharsis as pity and fear. Because it is a ' revenge tragedy' it means that something has happened to the protagonist to make him want revenge, and it is whilst taking their revenge when the tragedy aspect happens.

There are quite a few characters in " Hamlet", which influence the proceedings of the play, firstly we have Hamlet, and he is the Prince of Denmark, son of the Queen, Gertrude, and nephew to Claudius. At the very beginning of the play, he is presented with a great problem, the ghost of his father appears to tell him of how he was murdered by his brother, Claudius, and then he demands revenge, placing a moral imperative on Hamlet. Hamlet isn't sure for a while, and he pretends to be mad for a certain amount of time.

But when he knows what his father said was true, by putting on a play where the player king is killed in the same way which Claudius killed King Hamlet, the expression on Claudius' face had guilty written all over it. So, once he had proven the truth of what his father had told him, to himself, he is resolute and fearless in his acts to get revenge. The Two Brothers of " Hamlet" are King Hamlet (deceased) and Claudius. King Hamlet is the father of Prince Hamlet, he died before the play begins, and therefore we only see him as a ghost.

But other characters in the play, particularly Hamlet, speak of his courage and merits. Claudius is the brother and murderer of the dead King, and is and now King of Denmark himself. He married Gertrude shortly after the death of King Hamlet, much to the disgust of Hamlet. Claudius, at first, seems to be a genuinely courteous and efficient man, but as the play goes on he is revealed as a ' smiling, damned villain'. The next six characters are described to be the Victims Of Disaster.

Firstly, Gertrude, the Queen of Denmark, killed in Act Five Scene Two. Since she married Claudius she acquiesces in all of his plans. Polonius is the one who triggers off the action in the play, he takes himself very seriously, and he has two children Laertes and Ophelia. He is killed by Hamlet in Act Three Scene Four, he was hiding behind a curtain whilst Hamlet was talking to Gertrude, Hamlet thought he was Claudius and stabbed him through the curtain.

Next, Ophelia, daughter of Polonius, sister of Laertes, she and Hamlet are in love, but sometimes it doesn't look that way, for example, in the ' Nunnery' scene (Act Three Scene One), Ophelia gives Hamlet back his ' remembrances', this angers Hamlet and he lets loose on Ophelia all the bitterness he has been feeling since his mothers marriage to Claudius, ' Are you honest... Are you fair? Get thee to a nunnery! ' Here Hamlet is saying that Ophelia is impure, and that her lies cloud her beauty, Ophelia's distressed by Hamlets treatment of her. Ophelia kills herself, by drowning, in Act Four Scene Seven.

After that we have Laertes, son of Polonius, passionate in defence of his family honour, as we see in Act Five Scene One. Lastly, we have Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, said to be Hamlet's school friends, summoned to the court Claudius, then used as tools to spy on Hamlet. The Survivors of the play are Fortinbras and Horatio. Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, becomes King of Denmark at the very end of the play. Horatio, dear friend to Hamlet, always trusted and at all times gives sensible advice. The characters used in Act Five Scene One are Hamlet, Horatio, Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes, Ophelia (deceased), a Priest, and two gravediggers.

Act Five Scene One begins with Hamlet and Horatio observing two gravediggers preparing a grave, which we know is Ophelia's but Hamlet doesn't, this is a drama technique where the dramatist lets the audience know something before some of the characters get to know, in this case the dialogue concerns the person to be buried. But before Hamlet realises whose funeral is about to take place, he talks with Horatio about human flesh and blood returning to earth, and how you could be King whilst alive, but once dead you have nothing.

Whilst in this conversation with Horatio, Hamlet is slowly walking towards the open grave, so he is now preparing himself mentally for his mortality, at the same time as physically moving towards the grave - this is the very reason why this scene is such an important one in the play. Once the funeral procession arrives and Hamlet realises who is to be buried in the grave, he and Laertes fight over the grave, competing in their love for Ophelia. The scene ends with Hamlet swearing vengeance and the King telling Horatio to 'wait upon him'.

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In both the film and the play the scene starts off light heartedly, but gradually becomes more and more serious as the scene goes on. Straight away the differences start emerging between the stage and screen version. In the film, Kenneth Branagh has chosen, for the setting of the churchyard, the middle of a misty forest on a winter's night. Whereas, on stage, the performing area would be empty for the graveyard, and the grave would be an open trapdoor in the centre of the stage.

Branagh has decided to change the setting for the film to give more atmosphere to the drama that is unfolding. As Hamlet approaches death and mortality not only emotionally but spiritually, it is mirrored by his actions on the stage and the screen, to be exact, he starts by watching from afar then proceeds until he is literally in the grave, this shows how much is maturing in a small amount of time. By this point the audience is already anticipating what is going to happen when Hamlet realises who is to be buried in the grave, and what he will do when the funeral procession arrives.

Hamlet is coming to terms with his mortality because he has realised that he is going to die whilst taking his revenge on Claudius. 'The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, That ever I was born to set it right.' At this juncture Hamlet is saying that everything is completely disordered, why should he have to put it right. We know that Hamlet will show his true side during bad times, because in drama character is revealed through conflict rather than good times. Once one of the gravediggers leaves, Hamlet watches the remaining gravedigger.

He is disgusted with the way that the gravedigger handles the skulls. Both on stage and in the film, a skull is thrown up from the grave, and lands in full view off Hamlet and Horatio. However, in the film, Hamlet and Horatio enter from thick forest and stand behind some trees watching the two gravediggers go about their work. But on stage they would enter, either from the left or from the right of the stage, and just stand there talking. Another difference from this part of the scene is that, in the film the gravedigger is digging with a trowel, whereas on stage he would be using a spade.

Kenneth Branagh has decided to make a change here because in a theatre the audience is sat away from the stage, therefore, they would not see something small, like a trowel. Whilst in a film you can use such techniques as zoom, consequently you wouldn't need something as big as a spade to be seen by the viewers. The jokes between the two gravediggers are preparing us for a more serious subject. 'What is he that builds stronger than either the mason, the shipwright, or the carpenter... 'A gravemaker'. The houses he makes last till doomsday. '

This joke between the pair reminds us of the finality of death and gets the audience thinking. As Hamlet is thinking about the gravediggers he mentions Cain. Cain was the first murderer in the Bible, this is ironic because Cain killed his brother, Abel, and the "Hamlet" is about a brother killing a brother. The reasons for killing Hamlet though are different for the reasons of killing Abel, Claudius killed Hamlet because he wanted his wife and the throne, whereas, Cain killed Abel because he was jealous that God accepted Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's, so one was greed and the other jealousy.

In Act Three Scene Three, Claudius tries to repent his sins, but he wants to keep what he has stolen. As one of the gravediggers depart, the remaining individual starts to sing. His song begins with a verse about when you are young and in love, and the second verse is a lot more serious, talking about aging, and that once you are older it's as if you were never young. The structure of this song is rather like that of the scene. Starting off light heartedly then finishing off on a more serious note, in the scenes case with death and burial.

So, once Hamlet and Horatio approach the gravedigger in the film the dialogue is matched by cinematography, sometimes using reaction shots, showing the listeners face. The background of these shots is mist going through the trees in the forest. The lighting used at this point by Branagh is 'up-lighting', this gives this part of the scene an eerie effect, and none of these could be achieved to the same capacity on stage. Also, the camera angle shows several skulls, rather than just one, seen in the stage version.

Hamlet is the only character in Shakespeare's tragedies that has wit. Nevertheless, he is a very philosophical man. To be, or not to be, that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end to them. To die - to sleep, no more... ' At this point, Hamlet is not pondering suicide, but merely having a philosophical debate about whether you should let your troubles be or fight against your troubles and do something about them.

Ophelia feels that there is plenty of lost potential in Hamlet, she describes the Hamlet that 'was' in the 'Nunnery Scene' (Act Three Scene One), and the Hamlet she describes is the one we never see: O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown! The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's, eye, tongue, sword, th'expectancy and rose of the fair state, the glass of fashion and the mould of form, th'observ'd of all observers... ' Whilst watching the gravedigger handling the skulls, he gives us examples of who or what the skull might have belonged to.

It is here that he realises that it doesn't matter what who and what you are when you're alive, once you are dead and rotting in the earth, you have nothing and you are nobody. ' Hum, this fellow might be in's time a great buyer of land... he very conveyances of his lands will scarcely lie in this box... ' Here Hamlet is saying that when this skull, that the gravedigger had just pulled from the ground, was in a 'quick' humans head, he might have been a rich land owner, but now he is dead he can't take his land to the grave with him, so now it what he achieved in his life is meaningless.

Throughout this section of the scene Hamlet's dialogue and ideas are in an abstract form, jargon, jokes, and puns. It is not until this point that Hamlet approaches the edge of the grave, and he begins to question the gravedigger, exchanging puns and jokes.

Later on in this conversation, Hamlet takes the opportunity to have his say about the corruption of the court in Elsinore. Also, in this conversation we are reminded of when Hamlet was born, because the grave-maker has had the job since the 'last King Hamlet o'ercame Fortinbras... that very day that young Hamlet was born... ' Whilst mentioning when Hamlet was born, the <https://assignbuster.com/consider-kenneth-branaghs-screen-version-of-hamlet-essay/>

gravedigger mentions that Hamlet was sent to England because he was mad, this also shows how corrupt the court is, because one piece of information has gone all the way down the classes, from King to peasant.

This shows that Hamlets plan, to be in an anti-disposition, pretending to be mad has worked, and fooled the whole country because he fooled the court. When the gravedigger and Hamlet are exchanging quick fire remarks, Branagh has chosen to use the 'quick cutting' technique, this is where you edit quickly from face to face, this could not be done on stage. It is also in this conversation that we realise how successful Claudius has been in covering up his crimes, even the gravedigger is sure that Hamlet has gone mad and has been sent to England to recover, this shows again just how corrupt the court of Elsinore is.

The stage of this conversation is the discussion of the physical aspects of death, like rotting and decay; here the physical horror of decay is brought to Hamlet. The gravedigger picks up the skull and places it next to his own head, Branagh puts this in as a close-up, so we are in effect seeing what lies beneath, this would not be so apparent on stage. Once the gravedigger identifies the skull to be Yorick's skull death becomes real and personal for Hamlet. 'Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him...' Personalisation of the skull gives it meaning to Hamlet.

In the film adaptation, Hamlet has flashback memories of Yorick; this cannot be done on stage either. Once death is personal to Hamlet, Shakespeare has made the character both fascinated and horrified, this is an interesting combination, as we rarely see these two feelings put tighter in drama. The

thought of decomposition links in with Hamlet's views on the court and of women, both the corruption and tainting of. As Hamlet looks at what has happened to Yorick, he dislikes his mother's artificiality even more.

Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come' Hamlet is saying that she can paint as much make-up on as she wants, but everyone looks the same after decomposition. Also here, there is a juxtaposition of Hamlet's own head and the skull of Yorick, showing vividly the fact that he's becoming aware that under the skin there are the bones, all which will be left - this is what he is saying indirectly to Gertrude in the above quotation. This is also put into context with what T S Elliot talking about Webster, Webster was much possessed by death, and saw the skull beneath the skin. '

At this point Hamlet steps back from the grave, as if defending himself from death by philosophising; this is what we call a distancing technique. A funeral procession enters, but not with the usual ceremonies, at this time in the film Hamlet and Horatio retired behind a thicket and some trees, whereas, on stage they would just return to the side. As soon as the funeral procession enters, the audience know that it is Ophelia's funeral, yet Hamlet still does not know that she is dead.

This brings tension along with expectancy from the audience. When Hamlet sees Laertes, he is somewhat generous in his description. ' That is Laertes, a very noble youth. ' Hamlet still doesn't realise its Ophelia's interment until Laertes says ' A minist'ring angel shall my sister be... ' It is said all the way through " Hamlet" that Hamlet had lost potential, well, it is felt by the

audience and the characters that Ophelia also had plenty of potential, most with visions of where she would be once older, the Queen said ' I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife... '

Subsequently, Laertes gives the Priest a verbal smack in the face by calling him ' churlish'. This brings death even closer to Hamlet's home life. But still, Hamlet stays silent, like in Act One Scene Two, in the court, where Claudius is speaking, we can see Hamlet dressed in black saying nothing. Laertes now curses Hamlet because he killed his father and drove his sister to death, and then Laertes leaps into the grave and starts to be hyperbolic. Hamlet is stung by Laertes' performance of grief, Hamlet the hauteur of a Renaissance Prince.

Hamlet then comes out from hiding saying This is I, Hamlet the Dane' Then Hamlet and Laertes grapple. In the film, Laertes jumps out of the grave and grapples with Hamlet, but on stage Hamlet and Laertes grapple in the grave – this is symbolic because when they fight in Act Five Scene Two they both end up fighting to the grave, as they both die, is this a foreboding to what is going to happen. In this fight between the two, Shakespeare makes Laertes the aggressor, in order to keep sympathy for Hamlet. The Queen puts this sudden burst down to Hamlet's manic depression and tells the party that he will be calm in a while.

Hamlet agrees to have a dual with Laertes; oblivious of the fact that Laertes' sword would be poisoned. Hamlet talks to Horatio just before he goes to the duel, in which he faces his death. Horatio says he's lost this bet because Laertes is a class swordsman. But Hamlet says that he is favourite because

he has been in practice whilst Laertes has been in France. But then he says something in contrast of his confidence, 'Thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart; but it is no matter.'

Saying this phrase as if someone had just walked over his grave, again coming to terms with his own mortality. The duel is immediately arranged, and we see the King arranging the chalices. Hamlet and Laertes then fight. There is some confusion, and the swords are exchanged; the poisoned sword wounds Hamlet, and the Queen drinks from the poisoned chalice, prepared for her son. The truth is then revealed about Laertes and Claudius' plan. Hamlet strikes Laertes with the poisoned sword, but not before he begs forgiveness from Hamlet, and forgives him for killing him and his father.

Hamlet then turns to Claudius and forces him drink from the poisoned chalice. So now dead are Laertes, the Queen, and Claudius. Whilst Hamlet is dying, Horatio offers to end his own life, but Hamlet stops him so that there is someone to tell his story. On stage the play ends with Young Fortinbras entering on a diplomatic visit. Whereas, in the film, Fortinbras and his army raid the castle, and Fortinbras takes the throne, it is unknown why Branagh chose to have this ending, he probably thought that it would be more spectacular than just carrying off the bodies, like on stage.