



Vaulting Ambition

DESIRE AND CORRUPTION IN SHAKESPEARE'S MACBETH

AS90053: FORMAL WRITING - 3 CREDITS

1.5: PRODUCE FORMAL WRITING



Achievement	Achievement with Merit	Achievement with Excellence
Develop and structure ideas in formal writing.	Develop and structure ideas convincingly in formal writing.	Develop and structure ideas effectively in formal writing.
Use language features appropriate to audience and purpose in formal writing.	Use language features appropriate to audience and purpose with control in formal writing.	Use language features appropriate to audience and purpose with control to command attention in formal writing.



Outline

This task is a culmination of our study of William Shakespeare's Tragedy, **Macbeth**. This is an opportunity to explore the techniques of language, structure and conventions of theatre that Shakespeare employed to convey his strongest themes

CENTRAL QUESTION

Macbeth is referred to only as **The Scottish Play** by actors and theatre-makers, such is the dark power of the play. How does Shakespeare exploit the conventions of language and theatre to fill his play from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty - and moreover, why is this so essential to the universal meaning of the play?

Preparation

SUMMARY

1. Keep a personal summary of key events in Macbeth, including a wide range of cogent quotations.
2. Identify **a range of key language features and dramatic conventions** that you can see supports Shakespeare's intentions in Macbeth.
3. Draft a practice paragraph that explores Shakespeare's intentions in reference to a single speech by a single character. Expand on the use of language and dramatic conventions in this self-selected passage.

EXAMPLE, in reference to Act V, Scene 5:
"Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow..."

Shakespeare, in his tragedy **Macbeth**, is preoccupied with the relationship between humanity and the forces that are beyond our control. Macbeth, who has just learned of his wife's untimely death now considers his own life to be "like a walking shadow". It is through his use of metaphor, and the interplay between symbols of light and dark, that Shakespeare communicates his idea of the nature of death. In his metaphor "a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more, Shakespeare is comparing our lives to that of an actor on stage, which is characterised as being full of self-obsessed bluster, but ultimately transient and of no import. This serves to underline Macbeth's own sense of futility as all his plans and machinations have lead him to the point where he is alone, a widower, facing almost-certain defeat and realising the dark forces in which he placed so much faith have been playing with him and his dire ambition.



The Final Piece

SIZE

Once your initial research and preparation is completed, the final piece should be written in the form of a literary essay. While there is no specific word limit, making an effort to keep it to **1000-1200 words** will allow you to keep your argument focussed.

CONDITIONS

The final piece will be written in class over **4 periods**. You may use your online journals to complete the writing and some superficial feedback may be sought as part of the initial drafting process.

SCOPE

Your proficiency with spelling, grammar and punctuation will aid the clear and effective communication of your argument, as will conforming to a clear structure with your writing.

ADVICE

You are advised to refer to examples of critical essays that you have been exposed to as part of the genre study in order to refine your understanding of how such a piece can be constructed for effect.

Seek feedback from your teacher in the early stages of your drafting in order to ensure you are on the right track.



Exemplar

LEON ZHUBI

How do the studied poets and Shakespeare use literary techniques to show how people respond to forces in the world over which they have no control?

The Shakespearian play 'Hamlet' and the poems 'On My First Sonne' written by Ben Jonson, 'Do not go gentle into that good night' written by Dylan Thomas and 'A Song in a Storm' written by Rudyard Kipling **are all layered with the same brickwork.** They are all constructed by men that have had the agony of death piled upon them. **These men live under a dark cloud.** All of the studied texts contain an array of literary devices that are used to explore the themes of fate, death, social position and predisposition. The narrator, antagonist or main characters of all studied texts embody various stages of deliriousness and have been twisted by the agony of the aftermath of death. Shakespeare's son and Ben Jonson's son both died in real life and the latter even makes a direct reference to his son as "his best piece of poetry".

Hamlet, the main character in the play 'Hamlet' feels that life is holding him back, and to die quicker is good fortune. **"When we have shuffled off this mortal coil" is a metaphor that suggests that he wants to rid himself of the strangling chain that fate has placed upon him.** The degree of Hamlet's despair is demonstrated by his feeling that he had no choice to be born, he feels life has been forced upon him. Hamlet believes life to be a burden, which perhaps means that he holds no value for life. Using the theme of fate, **Shakespeare presents Hamlet as having no choice in life and suggests he is becoming a toy figure for a higher force to play with.** Hamlet feels like an actor because he is always being controlled or is bound to do things. Shakespeare uses a 'theatre stage' semantic field to show this, culminating in Hamlet putting on a play within the play to show how his father was killed by the King. **The reason Shakespeare used a play to interpret the events was because he wanted to give Hamlet control of the actors to make him the director of fate.** This was in stark contrast with reality wherein Hamlet felt controlled by fate.

The idea of fate is a connecting theme ripe among Shakespeare's literary works. Fate is the idea that sometimes you are born under a bad sign and life is about learning to play with the hand you were dealt. Fate is a very useful literary technique because it allows authors to foreshadow in order to create a semantic field to surround a text. Hamlet's fate has decreed him to a position of constant social judgement because of his royalty. Ben Jon-

Even though the author is writing about several texts, he is successful in using metaphor to clarify the main points he is wishing to make - his introduction is functional and a pleasure to read

Specific reference to select quotations and analysis of the language effects created by authors to convey meaning.

Compelling conclusions reached which are cogent and supported by sophisticated detail.

Developing argument further by providing additional evidence of the author's intentions as seen in the use of features of the dramatic form



son's 'On My First Sonne' holds a slightly more accepting view of fate. Ben Jonson believes that his child was lent to him "seven years tho' wert lent to me...Exacted by thy fate on the just day" The literary device being used here by Jonson is personification. He is personifying fate by saying that it physically extracted his son in the terms of a lender and a loan.

This suggests Ben Jonson knew that there was a supernatural plan to take his son from the world at an exact time and that even through all his misery he can do nothing but accept it. Ben Jonson believes that his child was lent to him, thus believing that he never truly owned his heir. These beliefs correlate with those of a devoutly religious person. People who believe in God are told that God owns everyone and therefore has the power to take life away and God is omni-benevolent so loves everybody, and if he takes life away then it was for the best. Ben Jonson agrees with this by stating relief that his son "scap'd worlds and flesh's rage" Ben Jonson is accepting that life does not belong to him, and he is just a mere actor in a supernatural entity's play set. Due to the time that these texts were written, both men would have to some extent believed in God, however the contrast was Hamlet did not accept this deity's doing, whereas Ben Jonson felt helpless.

One line from Rudyard Kipling's 'A song in a storm' that suggests fate cannot be tamed is "Be well assured, though wave and wind, Have mightier blows in store" This imagery depicts fate to be a kind of cackling death monger. Traditionally sailors are very proud of their heritage and it is with acceptance that they operate under fate's eye. A song in storm often presents fate more as an obstacle than a binding clause in life's constitution. "Then welcome fate's discourtesy". The literary device used here is foreshadowing, and it once again emphasises that fate can embody evil, however as sailors of the seas, they are subject to work in accordance with this.

The studied texts all tack with death. Hamlet often expresses death using euphemisms. The least subtle example of this is "to be, or not to be" this is a euphemism because 'not to be' is substituted for death. A very common factor of all of the studied texts is to shy away from using the words 'dying' and 'death' and merely expressing life as not existing any more. This perhaps correlates with a fear of death from either the characters/narrators or indeed the poets themselves.

"Whose phrase of sorrow conjures the wand'ring stars and makes them stand" is the most potent quote about death in Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be". Hamlet is expressing his love for Ophelia and his lust for her death. He describes the stars (the planets) as standing up in respect for Ophelia's death, as she is that important for him. This is another metaphor used by Hamlet that example his obsession with death. Death is littered in Hamlet's life.



Shakespeare typically uses the idea of fate to make death prominent in his plays. This is similar to the “shuffle off this mortal coil” quote because it gives death respect, releases the feeling that the “calamity of so long life” will always end in death, death will always win. This is a sense of real hopelessness, that Hamlet demonstrates by expressing his need to survive through life. The difference between the connotations of the language used by a depressed person and a sane person are quite drastic. Hamlet is feeling the need to survive, to get through it. Whereas more sane and positive people view life as an experience and focus on the positive things in Hamlet’s life. For instance, he is king to be, he has a high social position and therefore is more fortunate than many of the civilians soon to be under his rule.

‘Do not go gentle into that good night’ tackles death by using a delicious euphemism “Good men, their last wave by,” This euphemism is layered by sacrificial context as well as its more subtle euphemism of the last wave. The last wave means quite bluntly, that it was their last before death, however the thought that the soldiers could know that it is their last wave is quite harrowing. This poem draws comparisons with ‘A song in storm’ because the roles of a soldier and a sailor are similar, they both symbolize the peak of selfless loyalty. The soldiers and sailors know they are at risk of death, but operate purely out of kindness and hold an affinity with their fellow countrymen or with their job.

Do not go gentle into that good night also possess the beautiful line “Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight” The wordplay used in this phrase is centered around the word “grave”, indicating two things, one being that the men are feeling fraught with danger, the other being that they are moving towards their grave by continuing to fight in the good night. “Near death” reinforces the soldier’s knowledge that they are very likely to die doing their job and characterizes their willingness to fight anyway. Dylan Thomas proceeds to say that the soldiers now see with blinding light, thus recognizing and addressing the notion that before death men become enlightened and see things with more knowledge than they did before. This idea suggests that forces out of our control can be compromised with knowledge and experience.

“Though wise men at their end know dark is right” reinforces the idea that the soldiers know that they would be dying for a good cause, this suggests that violence can be justified and the right thing to do, this is a surprisingly common theme among all four literary works. In the modern world death is not longed for and very often feared, however the antagonist Hamlet wishes for death to be cast upon him. ‘A song in storm’ and ‘do not go gentle in the good night’ both accept death as an eminent and necessary part of life. Ben Jonson is the only author that shows regret that death has happened. “Will man lament the state he should envy?” inquires Jonson, querying why he is feeling grief, when he knows that his child has escaped life’s harsh reality. Jonson addresses the circumstances with more than a heavy heart,



whereas all other characters/antagonists in the studied texts do not concede they could feel any grief or regret about death. This contrast is perhaps because Ben Jonson did not die, his son did. This difference suggests the effect that death has upon loved ones is worse than the effect death has on its' recipient.

"On my first sonne" also infers that death is more of a punishment for the people close to the person that was evicted from existence. "As what he loves may never like too much" is a sombre reference to the harsh reality that his love was vanquished by death, furthermore he expresses the notion that death was aware of his love and punished him for it, as a retribution for dependency. The idea that Ben Jonson was dependent on his son is an abstract concept, as usually it is the child who is dependent on their father, this standard relationship is portrayed in Hamlet. The whole premise of the play is Hamlet showing his loyalty to his father by trying to and eventually succeeding in avenging him.

Do not go gentle into that good night uses rhythm to show the significance and sudden impact that death has. The entirety of the poem is in iambic pentameter barring one crucial repeated line. This means that each line has 5 beats in it and is read in line with these parameters. So when the line "rage rage against the dying of the light" is not in this meter, it propels itself to the forefront of the stanza, it is quite clearly the ugly duckling of the verse. The rhythm actually sharpens the content of the line by the use of a beautiful metaphor. The dying of the light symbolizes the dying of the iambic pentameter. The dying of the light also suggests that the end is nigh for the verse by using foreshadowing. Foreshadowing is, in this case, used to create an atmosphere when being performed. The iambic pentameter also adds an element of atmosphere when being read.

There is also the observation that when poems are read in rhythm, the words seem to slip off though tongue. This can sometimes conflict with the words in the poem, however when a poem is in free rondo, the words can sound spiky and angular. The meanings of words in poems in free rondo become more potent too. 'On my first sonne' for example is afforded a more sombre phonetic sound because its free-flowing nature is supposed to mimic life's nature. This leads me to believe that death of the poet's son was supposed to happen and therefore part of the nature of life.

All of the studied texts put a lot of importance and emphasis on death. This respect for death can only be carried out by the living which makes me, as the reader, feel that it the fear of death that underlines society. Shakespeare, Jonson, Kipling and Thomas believe fate to be an obstacle that cannot be overcome. The characters chosen by the authors to believe this feel varying degrees of anger and despair about it. The characters all in one way or another, reflect the society of the time they were written.