

# Shakespeare's Tragedy

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Please Silence Cell Phones

# Baroque Drama

- Dark characters
- Complex motives
- Extreme or unnatural passions
- Complex Plot: plots within plots
- Morbid, horrific, and spectacular endings
- Appearances are untrustworthy—Reality and Illusion are blurred
- Emphasis on Spectacle

# Tragedy

- Aristotle's definition: Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its *katharsis* of such emotions. . . .

# Tragic Hero and Harmatia

- Harmatia: Fatal Flaw
- The tragic hero must have something that appears Great or Admirable; otherwise his fall would not be noteworthy
- Despite his greatness, he must have a flaw, as this is what precipitates his fall
- We Admire, Judge and Pity the tragic hero

# Mature Tragedies

- 1600 and 1605
- Hamlet
- Othello
- King Lear
- Macbeth

# Categories of Tragedy

- Revenge
  - Hamlet
  - Othello
- Ambition/Power
  - Macbeth
  - King Lear
  - Julius Caesar
- Love
  - Othello
  - Romeo and Juliet
  - Antony and Cleopatra

# Hamlet and Baroque

- Ghost—Magical and Mysterious
- Illusion and Acting: Claudius the King; Hamlet and his madness; Ophelia and her madness
- Play within the Play
- Interpretative Complexity: Does Hamlet love Ophelia? Why 'get thee to a nunnery?'"
- Falsity: Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; Poisoned Sword of Laertes
- Psychological Complexity and Character Motivation: Why does Hamlet hesitate so long?

# Revenge Theme: Fathers and Sons

- What should Fathers pass down to their children?
- **What do children owe to their fathers?**
- Memory of injustice weighs heavy on Hamlet, Ophelia, and Laertes
- Ophelia is unable to seek revenge as a woman; goes mad
- Laertes and Hamlet are forced by Memory of Fathers to seek vengeance

# Theme: Memory

- **Memory** of deceased demands mourning: part of what stinks in Denmark is that there was **not sufficient time for mourning**
- The cycle of violence is unavoidable
- Hamlet had no other choice: honor and memory demand vengeance
- His choice creates ethical dilemma: Orestes
- Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Orestes, Aegisthus
- Cycle of Violence is like a **Disease**

# Hamlet and Players

- They recite verses from Pyrrhus
- Son of Achilles who kills the aged King Priam while his wife, Hecuba, looks on
- Foreshadows the vengeance of Hamlet, like the vengeance of Pyrrhus against Troy
- He asks the players to perform "The Murder of Gonzaga"
- These theatrical choices reveal design, not madness and underscore Revenge Theme

# Hamlet Summary

- The flaw that creates the whole tragedy is really the lust of King Claudius for his Sister-in-law, Gertrude and his murder of his brother, Hamlet's father
- This sets in chain a series of actions that draw others in and force them to commit crimes, intentionally or accidentally
- Ophelia deceives
- Polonius spies and plots
- Gertrude commits adultery
- Laertes uses poison
- Hamlet accidentally kills Polonius and incites Ophelia's suicide

# Antony and Cleopatra

- Antony is a Great Man—a Roman general who rules half the world
- Octavius rules the other half
- Cleopatra rules Antony

# Marc Antony

- Great Roman general who is divided between Stoicism (Roman) and Epicureanism (Egyptian)
- Desire for Honor and Love
- Fatal Flaw is his love
- Fallen Hero: He is a great man—as indicated by how loyal his men are—yet his personal passion will feminize him and destroy his army
- Renaissance ideal—Greek mind in a Roman body: loves music, arts, wine but still a military man (Adrian Noble, Royal Shakespeare Theatre)

# Cleopatra

- Unique female character?
- Mixture of queenly authority and sensuality
- Brian Murray (Royal Exchange Theatre): “She’s like the positive side of Lady Macbeth. I think Shakespeare was fascinated by that kind of woman, who exerted huge power over men and was obviously sexual and charismatic.”
- Complex: vivacious, seductive, willful, profound, etc

# Theme of Dotage

- The period of old age : the time when a person is old and often less able to remember or do things
- But primary definition then was to be “mad” or peevish.
- To dote was to go against reason and to be excessive in affection
- **Dotage is Antony’s fatal flaw**

# Opening Speech

- Philo: Nay, but this **dotage** of our general's **O'erflows the measure**: those his goodly eyes,  
That oe'er the files and musters of the war  
Have glowed **like plated Mars**, now bend, now turn  
The office and devotion of their view  
Upon a tawny front. His captain's heart,  
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst  
The buckles on his breast, reneges all temper  
And is become the bellows and the fan  
To **cool a gipsy's lust**...

and you shall see in him

The **triple pillar of the world** transformed  
Into a **strumpet's fool**. Behold and see."

# Dotage and the Fall: III

- Context: Battle
- Scarrus: "She once being loofed,  
The noble ruin of her magic, Antony,  
Claps on his sea-wing and, like a **dotting  
mallard**,  
Leaving the fight in height, flies after her.  
I never saw an action of such shame:  
Experience, manhood, honour, ne'er before  
Did violate so itself."

# Failure of Leadership

- By abandoning land battle and not listening to loyal troops, he brings on his own fall, trusting rather in Egyptian (female) ships
- Soldier to Antony:

"O, noble emperor, do not fight by sea:

**Trust not to rotten planks.** Do you misdoubt  
This sword and these my wounds? Let th'Egyptians  
And the Phoenicians go **a-ducking**: we  
Have used to conquer standing on the earth  
And fighting foot to foot."

Soldier: "By **Hercules**, I think I am I'th'right."

Canidius: Soldier, thou art. But his whole action grows  
Not in the power on't. **So our leader's led,  
And we are women's men.**"

# Antony Effeminized

- Context: Octavius discusses Antony and his reputation in Rome

- Caesar: "From Alexandria

This is the news: he fishes, drinks and wastes

The lamps of night in revel. Is **not more manlike**

**Than Cleopatra, nor the Queen of Ptolemy**

**More womanly than he....** You shall find there

A man who is th'abstract of all fault

That all men follow."

- Think of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth

# Macbeth: Tragedy of Ambition

- The Value of Power
- Is the Pursuit of Power necessarily bad?
- Does the Pursuit of Power change a Man in ways beyond his control?
- What happens to a man who has no limits on his Power?
- What is the proper Moral Check on Power?

# Contrast of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth

- They are both ambitious
- Yet the murder of Duncan haunts him and drives him mad; she seems cool and calculating and never loses control
- He, as warrior, has a warrior's code of ethics; this is what creates his Guilt
- She, as woman, appears to be driven by the desire to have the power of Man; but she is not fettered by a male warrior ethic

# Lady Macbeth Rejects Femininity as Weakness

Come, you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
Of direst cruelty. Make thick my blood,  
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
Th' effect and it. Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring  
ministers...

# Acts of Power Demand More Acts of Power (III.1)

- One act of Power leads inexorably to others
- Plots Murder of Banquo out of Fear
- "To be thus is nothing,

But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo  
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature  
Reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he  
dares,...

There is none but he  
Whose being I do fear; and under him  
My genius is rebuked, as it is said  
Mark Antony's was by Caesar.

# Macbeth's Love of his wife humanizes him in his Fall

She should have died hereafter.

There would have been a time for such a word.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow

Creeps in this petty pace from day to day

To the last syllable of recorded time.

And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle.

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing

# Conclusion

- Shakespeare follows Greek principle of Harmatia
- The violent resolution of his tragedies does evoke Katharsis
- But he is Baroque and not classical in showing and multiplying the Acts of Violence
- Tragedy is provoked by Natural Order being disturbed: Gender, Social Hierarchy, Sexuality