

PAST C.S.S.A. QUESTIONS on Hamlet

LEVEL 2 / 2 UNIT QUESTIONS

1975 Level 2

"HAMLET conveys to the audience a powerful sense of the mortality of man. The play emphasises human weaknesses, the instability of human purpose, the subjection of humanity to fortune. It is a most depressing play".

1976 2 Unit

"Hamlet is immersed in a situation where there is no certainty. There is doubt about the nature of the Ghost, doubt about the morality of executing its commands even if it speaks the truth, doubt about his fitness to undertake the task, doubt about the value of the action. In reaction to the shock of being made aware of the court, honesty, in every sense, becomes an obsessive concern of Hamlet". (Marsh)

Do you see Hamlet in the same manner as the commentator Marsh does?

1976 2 Unit

You have been given the following four descriptions of HAMLET:

- (a) It is a revenge play.
- (b) It is a play concerned with the nature of evil.
- (c) It is a play about death.
- (d) It is a play about "not knowing for sure".

How would you place the four descriptions in order of aptness and why?

1977 2 Unit

"HAMLET is a play about a young man's disillusionment with life."

Is this the impression you gain from the play?

1986 2 Unit

'Hamlet is weak, effeminate, all talk and no action. He can analyse every aspect of a problem, yet never do anything about it.'

'The last thought on Hamlet, thrice stressed, is that he was a soldier and the soldierly virtues are courage, intelligence, resolution, quick determination, ruthlessness. Hamlet was endowed with them all.'

What is your assessment of Hamlet's character?

1987 2 Unit

To what extent is Hamlet affected by the women in the play?

In your answer refer to the following passages and to your knowledge of the play as a whole.

PASSAGE 1: ACT 1, Scene 2

HAMLET: O that this too too sallied flesh would melt,

PASSAGE 2: ACT 3, Scene 1

HAMLET: Soft you now,
The fair Ophelia! - Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins rememb'ed.

PASSAGE 3: ACT 3, Scene 4

GERTRUDE: O Hamlet, speak no more!
Thou turn'st my very eyes into my soul,

...

HAMLET: How is it with you, lady?

GERTRUDE: Alas, how is it with you,

PASSAGE 4: ACT 5, Scene 1

LAERTES: Lay her i' th' earth,
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring!

LEVEL 1 / 3 UNIT QUESTIONS (Harder)

1975 Level 1

"I believe that we can read Hamlet's speeches with interest chiefly because they describe so well a certain spiritual region through which most of us have passed and anyone in his circumstances might be expected to pass, rather than because of our concern to understand how and why this particular man entered it". (C.S. Lewis)

In the light of the following soliloquies, and any other apt parts of HAMLET, discuss Lewis' assertion.

(a) HAMLET: O that this too too solid flesh would melt,

(b) HAMLET: O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

(c) HAMLET: To be, or not to be, that is the question:

(d) HAMLET: What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed?

1976 3 Unit

Hamlet, the man with the supposedly high morals, succumbed to the level of the surrounding corruption. He lies, he assumes madness, he is deceitful, he savagely murders his opponents. He lowers himself by using the weapons of his enemies. The final chaos is created by him.

Is that too black a picture of Hamlet, his motives, his methods? Is he a typical rationaliser who convinces himself that the end justifies the means?

1976 3 Unit

A young modern director, Charles Marowitz, had the following to say on Hamlet: "I despise Hamlet. He is a slob, a talker, an analyser, a rationaliser. Like the parlour liberal or the paralysed intellectual, he can describe every facet of a problem, yet never pull his finger out. You may think he is a sensitive well-spoken fellow, but, frankly, he gives me a pain in the stomach."

If you were to direct a production of HAMLET, how would you direct the person playing Hamlet to interpret his role? Would your directions be along the same lines as those of Marowitz?

1977 3 Unit

"There is a basic conflict between the nature of Hamlet himself and the role of avenger that he must assume".

Is this the 'problem' of the play? Support your opinion with close reference to the play

1993 3 Unit

Revenge is a form of wild justice.

Revenge plays are seldom about justice, but rather are excuses for excessive violence and sensationalism.

Do you agree?

In your answer refer closely to Hamlet

PAST H.S.C. QUESTIONS on Hamlet

LEVEL 2 / 2 UNIT QUESTIONS

1975 Level 2

What is the importance of the following soliloquy for your understanding of the play as a whole?

HAMLET. . . . Now I am alone.

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!

. . . The play's the thing

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king. Exit.

Act 2, Scene 2,

1976 2 Unit

How does the following passage support the view that political scheming is a significant element in HAMLET? Base your answer on a close reading of the passage.

Enter King, Queen, Polonius, Ophelia, Rosencrantz, Guildenstern, Lords

KING: And can you by no drift of conference

Get from him why he puts on this confusion.

Grating so harshly all his days of quiet

With turbulent and dangerous lunacy ?

. . . POLONIUS: I hear him coming. Let's withdraw, my lord.

[Exeunt King and Polonius.]

Enter Hamlet

- Act III, Scene 1

1977 2 Unit

"Hamlet's obsession with his own problems makes him insensitive to the sufferings of others."

Examine this statement in the light of your understanding of the play.

1986 2 Unit

You will find printed below three views of Hamlet expressed by other characters in the play.

State briefly what these partial views show us about Hamlet, and discuss how we may arrive at a fuller understanding of Hamlet the character, and so of HAMLET the play.

(a) KING: 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
(I.2.89-99)

(b) OPHELIA: My lord, as I was sewing in my closet,
Lord Hamlet,
(II.1.81-91)

(c) FORTINBRAS: Let four captains
Bear Hamlet
(V.2.416-421)

(NOTE: The quotations from Hamlet printed here follow the text of the Challis Shakespeare.)

1987 2 Unit

Read this passage carefully:

HORATIO: . . . And let me speak to th' yet unknowing world
How these things came about.
(Challis HAMLET, V, 2, 398-405).

Explain three or four of the points which Horatio makes in his account of "how these things came about."
What else do you think should be added to Horatio's summary in order to explain more fully the tragic events of HAMLET?

In your answer, you should consider the involvement in the tragedy of at least three of the following:
Claudius; Gertrude; Hamlet; Laertes; Ophelia; Polonius.

You may also refer to other characters in the play.

LEVEL 1 / 3 UNIT QUESTIONS

1975 Level 1

"Hamlet is too much the student of justice to be an effective instrument of justice."

Is this the impression you gain from the play?

1976 3 Unit

"Despite his villainy, Claudius has qualities that can attract the sympathy and even the admiration of an audience."

1977 3 Unit

'Hamlet is no "sweet prince". In pursuit of his revenge, he becomes increasingly ruthless, callous and cruel.'
In the light of this statement, examine some of Hamlet's relationships with other characters in the play.

1993 3 Unit

'It is the darker side of human nature which fascinates the audience in these "tragedies of blood".'
Discuss the ways the dramatist has explored and exploited this fascination. In your response make close reference to the play.