

Course: Classical Drama (9057) Semester: Spring, 2024

Level: BS English

ASSIGNMENT No. 1

(Units 1-4)

Q.1 Discuss the significance of the chorus in Oedipus Rex' How does the chorus serve as a commentary on the events of the play, and what thematic elements does it emphasize throughout the unfolding tragedy?

Ans:

The Significance of the Chorus in Oedipus Rex

In Sophocles' Oedipus Rex, the chorus serves multiple critical functions, acting as a commentator on the events of the play, providing thematic depth, and reflecting the moral and societal norms of ancient Greek culture. The chorus, composed of Theban elders, helps to frame the narrative, offer reflections on the actions of the characters, and guide the audience's emotional and intellectual response to the unfolding tragedy.

Role as a Commentary on Events

Narrative Function:

Setting the Scene: The chorus helps establish the context and background of the play. At the beginning, they describe the plague afflicting Thebes and the despair of its people, setting the stage for Oedipus's investigation.

Example: The chorus's opening odes lament the city's suffering and express hope that Oedipus will once again save Thebes, just as he did by solving the riddle of the Sphinx.

Providing Insight and Interpretation:

Interpreting Actions: The chorus often reflects on the actions and decisions of the characters, providing insight and interpretation that help the audience understand the deeper significance of these events.

Example: When Oedipus and Creon argue, the chorus steps in to calm the situation, showing the importance of reason and unity. They emphasize the need for calm and thoughtful consideration rather than rash decisions.

Offering Wisdom and Advice:

Voice of Reason: The chorus frequently offers wisdom and advice to the characters, acting as the voice of reason and caution.

Example: They advise Oedipus to consult Tiresias, the blind prophet, when seeking the truth about Laius's murder, highlighting the importance of seeking divine insight and wisdom.

Thematic Emphasis

Fate and Free Will:

Inevitability of Fate: One of the central themes emphasized by the chorus is the inevitability of fate and the limitations of human free will. They underscore the idea that no one can escape their destiny, a belief deeply rooted in Greek tragedy.

Example: After Oedipus's true identity is revealed, the chorus reflects on how even the greatest of men cannot escape their fated outcomes, reinforcing the tragic inevitability of Oedipus's downfall.

Divine Justice and Moral Order:

Divine Retribution: The chorus often highlights the role of the gods in maintaining moral order and administering justice. They emphasize that divine retribution is inescapable and that human beings must respect and adhere to the will of the gods.

Example: When Oedipus blinds himself, the chorus comments on how his suffering is a result of his own actions and hubris, suggesting that he has brought divine retribution upon himself.

Human Suffering and Compassion:

Collective Suffering: The chorus represents the collective suffering of the people of Thebes, providing a broader perspective on the impact of the tragic events. Their odes express communal grief and empathy, highlighting the shared human experience of suffering.

Example: Their lamentations for Oedipus's downfall and the suffering of Thebes emphasize the widespread impact of the tragic events, evoking a sense of compassion and shared humanity.

Emotional and Moral Guidance

Emotional Resonance:

Evoking Sympathy: The chorus helps to evoke sympathy for the characters, particularly Oedipus, by

expressing emotions that resonate with the audience. Their reactions and reflections guide the audience's emotional response to the tragedy.

Example: When Oedipus realizes the full extent of his actions and blinds himself, the chorus's sorrowful reaction enhances the emotional impact of the scene, helping the audience feel the weight of his suffering and despair.

Moral Reflection:

Contemplating Ethical Questions: The chorus encourages the audience to reflect on the ethical and moral questions raised by the play. They explore themes of justice, responsibility, and the consequences of human actions.

Example: Throughout the play, the chorus reflects on the nature of guilt and innocence, the responsibility of leaders, and the importance of truth and justice, prompting the audience to consider these complex moral issues.

Conclusion

In Oedipus Rex, the chorus serves as a crucial narrative and thematic device, providing commentary on the events of the play, emphasizing key themes such as fate, divine justice, and human suffering, and guiding the audience's emotional and moral response. Their role enriches the dramatic impact of the tragedy and offers profound insights into the human condition, making them an indispensable element of the play.

Q.2 In what ways does the character of Tiresias contribute to the development of the plot and the unfolding of the tragic events in 'Oedipus Rex'?

Ans

The Role of Tiresias in Oedipus Rex

The character of Tiresias, the blind prophet, plays a pivotal role in the development of the plot and the unfolding of the tragic events in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. Tiresias's interactions with Oedipus and his revelations about the truth serve as crucial turning points in the narrative, driving the action forward and deepening the themes of fate, knowledge, and blindness.

1. Catalyst for Plot Development

Revelation of the Truth:

Tiresias's Prophecy: Tiresias is the first character to explicitly reveal the truth about Oedipus's

identity and his crimes. His prophecy sets off a chain of events that lead to the tragic realization of Oedipus's fate.

Example: When Oedipus insists that Tiresias tell him the truth about Laius's murder, Tiresias reluctantly reveals that Oedipus himself is the murderer. This revelation is a crucial plot point, as it initiates Oedipus's investigation into his past and his eventual discovery of his true identity.

Driving the Investigation:

Initial Reluctance and Provocation: Tiresias's initial reluctance to speak and his cryptic responses provoke Oedipus's anger and suspicion, intensifying the conflict and driving Oedipus to pursue the truth more aggressively.

Example: Oedipus's confrontation with Tiresias escalates when the prophet hints at Oedipus's guilt but refuses to elaborate. Oedipus's frustration and accusations against Tiresias and Creon further complicate the plot and deepen the tension.

2. Unfolding of Tragic Events

Conflict with Oedipus:

Accusations and Denials: Tiresias's prophecy leads to a significant conflict with Oedipus, who refuses to believe the accusations and accuses Tiresias of conspiring with Creon. This conflict highlights Oedipus's hubris and his inability to see the truth, both literally and metaphorically.

Example: Oedipus's harsh accusations against Tiresias and his dismissal of the prophecy illustrate his tragic flaw of hubris and his resistance to accepting his fate. This denial sets the stage for his eventual downfall.

Symbolism of Blindness and Insight:

Irony of Blindness: Tiresias embodies the theme of blindness and insight. Although he is physically blind, he possesses the inner vision to see the truth about Oedipus's identity and fate. In contrast, Oedipus, who has physical sight, is blind to his own reality.

Example: The contrast between Tiresias's physical blindness and his prophetic insight serves as a powerful metaphor for the play's exploration of knowledge and ignorance. Oedipus's journey from ignorance to knowledge is marked by his interactions with Tiresias.

3. Deepening Thematic Elements

Exploration of Fate and Free Will:

Inevitability of Fate: Tiresias's prophecy underscores the theme of fate and the inevitability of destiny. Despite Oedipus's efforts to avoid his prophesied fate, Tiresias's revelations highlight the inescapable nature of the prophecy.

Example: Tiresias's insistence that Oedipus is the cause of Thebes's suffering and the murderer of Laius emphasizes the idea that fate is predetermined and unavoidable, reinforcing the tragic structure of the play.

Knowledge and Self-Discovery:

Path to Self-Discovery: Tiresias's role in the narrative is crucial in leading Oedipus toward self-discovery. His revelations force Oedipus to confront his past and piece together the truth about his origins and actions.

Example: Tiresias's cryptic statements and prophecies serve as catalysts for Oedipus's investigation into his past. As Oedipus uncovers the truth, the audience witnesses the tragic irony of his journey from ignorance to self-awareness.

Conclusion

Tiresias's character is integral to the development of the plot and the unfolding of the tragic events in Oedipus Rex. His prophecies and interactions with Oedipus drive the narrative forward, create dramatic tension, and deepen the thematic exploration of fate, knowledge, and blindness. Tiresias's role as the blind prophet who sees the truth contrasts sharply with Oedipus's journey from sight to blindness, both physically and metaphorically, underscoring the tragic dimensions of the play. Through Tiresias, Sophocles highlights the complexities of human knowledge and the inexorable nature of fate, making him a pivotal figure in the tragedy of Oedipus.

Q.3 Explore the theme of morality in 'Doctor Faustus'. How does Faustus decision to sell his soul to the devil reflect the moral and ethical dilemmas presented in the play and what are the consequences of such choices?

Ans:

The Theme of Morality in Doctor Faustus

Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus is a play that delves deeply into the theme of morality, exploring the ethical and spiritual consequences of Faustus's decision to sell his soul to the devil. This decision encapsulates the play's central moral and ethical dilemmas, reflecting the conflict between the pursuit of knowledge and power and the eternal consequences of abandoning spiritual salvation.

Faustus's Decision and Moral Dilemmas

1. The Pact with the Devil:

Ambition and Overreach: Faustus, a highly accomplished scholar, becomes dissatisfied with the limits of traditional forms of knowledge and seeks greater power through necromancy. His ambition leads him to make a pact with Mephistopheles, exchanging his soul for 24 years of unlimited knowledge and magical powers.

Example: Faustus's opening soliloquy reveals his frustration with the confines of conventional learning and his desire for more profound and forbidden knowledge. His willingness to engage in necromancy and make a pact with the devil demonstrates his overreaching ambition.

2. Ethical and Moral Conflicts:

Rejection of Salvation: Throughout the play, Faustus experiences moments of doubt and remorse, but he ultimately rejects opportunities for repentance and salvation. His internal conflict is depicted through his interactions with the Good Angel and the Evil Angel, symbolizing the moral and ethical choices he faces.

Example: The Good Angel urges Faustus to repent and seek God's forgiveness, while the Evil Angel persuades him to remain loyal to his pact with Lucifer. Faustus's struggle between these opposing influences highlights his moral dilemma and the battle for his soul.

3. The Pursuit of Power and Knowledge:

Misuse of Power: Despite his initial grand aspirations, Faustus's use of his acquired powers is often trivial and self-serving. He performs magic tricks and indulges in hedonistic pleasures rather than pursuing meaningful or noble goals, reflecting his moral decline.

Example: Faustus uses his powers to summon illusions for entertainment and to satisfy his own desires, such as when he conjures up Helen of Troy. His actions reveal his moral corruption and the futility of his pursuits.

Consequences of Faustus's Choices

1. Spiritual Damnation:

Inevitable Doom: Faustus's decision to sell his soul results in his eventual damnation. The play's climax and resolution underscore the irreversible consequences of his pact with the devil,

highlighting the theme of eternal damnation for those who forsake their souls for worldly gain.

Example: In the final scenes, as the 24 years come to an end, Faustus realizes the gravity of his choices and the inevitability of his fate. His desperate attempts to escape damnation and his pleas for mercy underscore the tragic outcome of his moral transgressions.

2. Moral and Psychological Torment:

Inner Conflict and Despair: Faustus's internal conflict and psychological torment intensify as he approaches the end of his 24 years. His remorse and fear of eternal damnation reflect the deep moral consequences of his actions.

Example: Faustus's final soliloquy is a poignant expression of his despair and regret. He laments his fate and begs for more time to repent, but ultimately, he must face the consequences of his pact, leading to his damnation.

3. Moral Lessons for the Audience:

Didactic Purpose: Marlowe's play serves as a moral lesson about the dangers of overreaching ambition, the consequences of forsaking one's soul for temporal gains, and the importance of repentance and redemption.

Example: The chorus's closing lines reinforce the moral message of the play, urging the audience to heed the lessons of Faustus's tragic downfall and to seek a righteous and pious life.

Thematic Exploration of Morality

1. Conflict Between Good and Evil:

Symbolism of Angels: The Good Angel and Evil Angel represent the moral conflict within Faustus, symbolizing the struggle between his higher aspirations for goodness and his lower desires for power and pleasure.

Example: Their appearances at crucial moments in the play emphasize Faustus's ongoing internal battle and the moral choices he faces.

2. The Limitations of Human Knowledge:

Hubris and Downfall: Faustus's pursuit of forbidden knowledge and his hubris in challenging the divine order lead to his downfall. The play critiques the Renaissance ideal of limitless human potential and the pursuit of knowledge without moral constraints.

Example: Faustus's tragic fate serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of intellectual hubris and the ethical boundaries of human ambition.

3. Redemption and Damnation:

Possibility of Redemption: Despite his rejection of repentance, the play suggests that redemption is always possible through genuine repentance and faith in God's mercy. Faustus's failure to repent underscores the importance of moral integrity and spiritual salvation.

Example: The moments when Faustus contemplates repentance highlight the potential for redemption, but his inability to follow through with genuine remorse leads to his eternal damnation.

Conclusion

In Doctor Faustus, the theme of morality is intricately woven into the narrative through Faustus's decision to sell his soul and the subsequent consequences of that choice. The play explores the ethical and spiritual dilemmas faced by Faustus, emphasizing the conflict between ambition and morality, the limitations of human knowledge, and the eternal consequences of forsaking one's soul. Through Faustus's tragic downfall, Marlowe delivers a powerful moral lesson about the importance of repentance, the dangers of overreaching ambition, and the ultimate triumph of divine justice.

Q.4 Discuss the role of the Good and Evil Angels in 'Doctor Faustus'. How do these symbolic figures represent the internal conflict within Faustus and contribute to the moral and spiritual choices he faces throughout the play?

Ans: The Role of the Good and Evil Angels in Doctor Faustus

In Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus, the Good and Evil Angels serve as symbolic representations of the internal conflict within Faustus. They embody the opposing forces of morality and temptation, guiding and influencing Faustus's decisions and highlighting the ethical and spiritual choices he faces throughout the play. Their interactions with Faustus provide a dramatization of his inner turmoil and the moral consequences of his actions.

Symbolic Representation of Internal Conflict

1. Personification of Conscience and Temptation:

Good Angel:

Symbol of Conscience and Redemption: The Good Angel represents Faustus's conscience and the possibility of redemption. This figure embodies the voice of reason, morality, and Christian virtue, urging Faustus to repent and seek forgiveness for his sins.

Example: The Good Angel's consistent pleas for Faustus to turn away from his pact with Lucifer and repent highlight the potential for redemption and the importance of adhering to moral and spiritual values.

Evil Angel:

Symbol of Temptation and Damnation: The Evil Angel, on the other hand, symbolizes the temptations of power, pleasure, and sin. This figure encourages Faustus to pursue his desires and continue his pact with the devil, representing the allure of earthly gains and the rejection of spiritual salvation.

Example: The Evil Angel's persuasions to embrace the benefits of the dark arts and dismiss thoughts of repentance illustrate the seductive nature of sin and the consequences of yielding to temptation.

Contribution to Moral and Spiritual Choices

1. Influence on Faustus's Decisions:

Moral Guidance vs. Temptation:

The dialogues between Faustus and the angels highlight the moral and spiritual choices he faces.

The Good Angel's appeals to Faustus to repent and the Evil Angel's encouragement to pursue forbidden knowledge and power create a dynamic tension that reflects his inner conflict.

Example: When Faustus contemplates repentance, the Good Angel's urging to seek God's mercy contrasts sharply with the Evil Angel's enticements to revel in his newfound powers. This duality emphasizes the struggle between his better judgment and his ambition.

Moments of Decision:

The presence of the Good and Evil Angels at crucial moments of decision underscores the gravity of Faustus's choices and the potential for redemption or damnation based on his actions.

Example: During key moments, such as when Faustus wavers in his commitment to Lucifer or when he is on the verge of repenting, the angels' interventions serve to amplify the stakes of his

decisions and the moral consequences that follow.

2. Thematic Exploration of Free Will and Moral Responsibility:

Embodiment of Free Will:

The Good and Evil Angels symbolize the exercise of free will and the moral responsibility that comes with it. Faustus's ability to choose between repentance and damnation reflects the theme of free will and the notion that individuals are responsible for their own salvation or damnation.

Example: The angels' contrasting advice serves as a constant reminder that Faustus has the power to choose his path, and his ultimate fate is a result of his own decisions. This emphasizes the play's exploration of free will and moral accountability.

Reflection of Internal Struggle:

The internal struggle between the angels mirrors Faustus's psychological and spiritual turmoil. His vacillation between the path of virtue and the path of sin is externalized through the angels' conflicting influences.

Example: Faustus's moments of doubt and the ensuing dialogues with the angels highlight his internal struggle and the tension between his desire for power and his fear of eternal damnation. This externalization of his inner conflict adds depth to his character and underscores the moral complexities of his situation.

Dramatic Function and Audience Engagement

1. Enhancing Dramatic Tension:

Conflict and Suspense:

The interventions of the Good and Evil Angels heighten the dramatic tension of the play. Their conflicting advice creates suspense and engages the audience in Faustus's moral journey, making them more invested in his fate.

Example: The angels' appearances during critical moments, such as Faustus's final hours, serve to intensify the drama and the audience's anticipation of his ultimate decision and its consequences.

Moral Instruction:

The angels' roles also serve a didactic function, providing moral instruction to the audience.

Through their interactions with Faustus, the play reinforces the consequences of sin and the importance of repentance, aligning with the moral and religious themes of the time.

Example: The Good Angel's persistent calls for repentance and the Evil Angel's enticements to sin function as a moral allegory, teaching the audience about the dangers of temptation and the value of spiritual integrity.

Conclusion

The Good and Evil Angels in Doctor Faustus are crucial to the play's exploration of morality and internal conflict. They symbolize the opposing forces of conscience and temptation, guiding Faustus's decisions and reflecting his moral and spiritual struggles. Through their interactions with Faustus, the play dramatizes the ethical dilemmas he faces and underscores the themes of free will, moral responsibility, and the consequences of one's choices. The angels' roles not only enhance the dramatic tension but also provide moral instruction, making them integral to the play's structure and thematic depth.

Q.5 Analyze the political elements in 'Hamlet'. How do issues of power, corruption, and political intrigue shape the events of the play especially considering the political backdrop of Denmark and the consequences of King Hamlet's death?

Ans

Political Elements in Hamlet

William Shakespeare's Hamlet is not only a profound exploration of individual psychology and existential dilemmas but also a compelling examination of political power, corruption, and intrigue. The political backdrop of Denmark, especially following King Hamlet's death, significantly shapes the events of the play and illuminates themes of power and moral corruption.

Issues of Power

1. The Struggle for the Throne:

Claudius's Usurpation: The play begins with a political crisis stemming from the sudden death of King Hamlet and the swift ascension of Claudius to the throne. Claudius's seizure of power through the murder of his brother and his subsequent marriage to Queen Gertrude illustrate his

cunning and ruthless ambition.

Example: Claudius's opening speech to the court demonstrates his political acumen as he addresses the nation's concerns and seeks to legitimize his rule, even as he conceals his treachery.

2. Legitimacy and Authority:

Hamlet's Claim: Hamlet, the rightful heir, is deeply affected by the political machinations surrounding the throne. His delay in avenging his father's murder can be seen as a political as well as a personal dilemma, as he grapples with the legitimacy of Claudius's rule and the moral implications of regicide.

Example: Hamlet's feigned madness serves as a strategy to observe and undermine Claudius's authority while he contemplates his course of action.

Issues of Corruption

1. Moral Decay:

Corruption of Leadership: Claudius's ascension to power is marked by moral corruption and deceit. His willingness to murder his own brother to gain the throne sets the tone for the play's exploration of corruption at the highest levels of power.

Example: Claudius's soliloquy in Act III, Scene iii, where he confesses his guilt but acknowledges his inability to repent, reveals his inner moral decay and the extent of his corruption.

2. Corruption Spreading through the Court:

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern: The characters of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, former friends of Hamlet, become tools of Claudius's corrupt regime. Their willingness to spy on Hamlet for Claudius illustrates how corruption permeates the court.

Example: The betrayal of Hamlet by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern exemplifies the loss of personal integrity and the pervasive nature of political corruption.

Political Intrigue

1. Espionage and Surveillance:

Spying and Manipulation: The play is rife with instances of espionage and surveillance, highlighting the atmosphere of distrust and political maneuvering. Claudius and Polonius use Ophelia, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet, demonstrating the extent of political intrigue in

the court.

Example: Polonius's elaborate schemes to uncover Hamlet's motives, including hiding behind the arras to eavesdrop, underscore the theme of political manipulation and intrigue.

2. Manipulation of Public Perception:

Claudius's Public Image: Claudius is adept at manipulating public perception to maintain his power. He presents a façade of concern for the kingdom and employs rhetoric to justify his actions and consolidate his rule.

Example: Claudius's handling of Laertes's rebellion in Act IV showcases his ability to manipulate others. He skillfully turns Laertes's anger over Polonius's death into a plot against Hamlet, thereby diverting potential threats to his own power.

The Political Backdrop of Denmark

1. The State of Denmark:

Corruption and Decay: The political instability following King Hamlet's death reflects the broader theme of corruption and moral decay within the state of Denmark. The frequent references to disease and rot symbolize the corrupt nature of the new regime and the moral disintegration of the court.

Example: Marcellus's line, "Something is rotten in the state of Denmark," in Act I, Scene iv, encapsulates the pervasive sense of decay and corruption that afflicts the kingdom.

2. Fortinbras and External Threats:

Fortinbras's Invasion: The subplot involving Prince Fortinbras of Norway serves as a political counterpoint to the Danish court's internal struggles. Fortinbras's determination to reclaim lands lost by his father mirrors Hamlet's quest for justice and underscores the theme of political ambition.

Example: Fortinbras's arrival at the end of the play signifies the restoration of political order. His succession to the throne represents a return to stability and a new chapter for Denmark, contrasting with the chaotic and corrupt rule of Claudius.

Consequences of King Hamlet's Death

1. Political Chaos and Instability:

Disruption of Order: The murder of King Hamlet creates a power vacuum and disrupts the natural order, leading to political instability and a struggle for control. The resulting chaos reflects the broader consequences of regicide and the usurpation of legitimate authority.

Example: The ghost of King Hamlet calls for revenge, setting in motion a series of events that lead to further bloodshed and turmoil, ultimately culminating in the tragic deaths of most of the main characters.

2. Moral and Ethical Implications:

Hamlet's Moral Struggle: The death of King Hamlet and the revelation of Claudius's treachery force Hamlet to confront profound moral and ethical questions. His hesitation and introspection reflect the complex interplay between personal revenge and political justice.

Example: Hamlet's soliloquies, particularly "To be or not to be," explore his existential and ethical dilemmas, highlighting the theme of moral uncertainty and the consequences of political corruption.

Conclusion

The political elements in Hamlet are integral to its exploration of power, corruption, and intrigue. The issues of legitimacy, moral decay, and political manipulation shape the events of the play and reflect the broader consequences of King Hamlet's death. Through its depiction of a corrupt and unstable Denmark, Shakespeare's play offers a timeless commentary on the nature of political power and its impact on individuals and society. The political backdrop enhances the tragedy's complexity, providing a rich context for the characters' struggles and the play's enduring themes.

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