**Act 5, scene 1- *Hamlet***

* To explore the opening of the graveyard scene, considering the use of dark humour and representations of death in the play
* To analyse Ophelia’s funeral and compare Hamlet and Laertes’s responses to her death

**Role of gravediggers… why are they included by Shakespeare? I thought this was supposed to be a tragedy? What’s their purpose?**

**5.1, lines 1-60**

* Quotes that highlight the absurdity of human existence
* Quotes that suggest even the ‘common’ people of Denmark have recognised the corruption and hypocrisy of Denmark
* Quotes that suggest a recognition of truth/reality
* Quotes that comment on society (Elizabethan)
* Quotes that suggest death is the only certainty

**How do we define this type of humour?**

* **Gallows humour/ dark humour** is any humour that treats serious matters, such as death, war, disease, crime, etc., in a light, silly or satirical fashion
* **Absurd (in literature)** focuses on the experiences of characters in situations where they cannot find any inherent purpose in life, most often represented by ultimately meaningless actions and events that call into question the certainty of existential concepts such as truth or value.Common elements in absurdist fiction include satire, dark humour, incongruity, the abasement of reason, and controversy regarding the philosophical condition of being "nothing”.

**Why is it included here?**

* Dramatic contrast with soberness of previous scene and Gertrude’s romanticised depiction of Ophelia’s death
* Central concerns/themes of the play are shown from a different perspective – the ordinary people of Denmark (the audience?)
* Setting of graveyard contrasts the elaborate court and Claudius’s rhetorical flourishes; which is more ‘real’?

**5.1 61-205**

* What evidence do we get that Hamlet has changed?
* What evidence do we get that he is still the same?
* How does the gravedigger’s view of death contrast with that of Hamlet’s?
* How does Hamlet express disgust for the physical corruption/ decay of the body that happens we die?
* What does Hamlet begin to realise about death (and life) at this point in the play?]

**Critical opinions- A05**

**G. Wilson Knight** notes: "Death is over the whole play. Polonius and Ophelia die during the action, and Ophelia is buried before our eyes. Hamlet arranges the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. The plot is set in motion by the murder of Hamlet's father, and the play opens with the apparition of the Ghost."

**A.C. Bradley** points out that, in his very first long speech of the play, "Oh that this too solid flesh…" Hamlet seems on the verge of total despair, kept from suicide by the simple fact of spiritual awe. He is in the strange position of both wishing for death and fearing it intensely, and this double pressure gives the play much of its drama.

**Hamlet and death**

* **Fascinated by physicality of the body**; we are flesh and bone in the end (so subject to/slave to physical desires as much, if note more, than spiritual ones)
* Hamlet values **intellect, thought, spirituality** but is arguably **disgusted with the physical realities** of life
* Recognises our **intellect** (however mighty) is connected to an unruly and **decomposing** machine
* Hamlet fascinated by Yorick because he wonders how Yorick’s skull can really be Yorick’s skull? Does a piece of **dead earth, a skull**, really have a connection to a **person/ a personality**?

**How do these five quotes contribute towards our understanding of Hamlet’s feelings about death?**

1. O, that this too solid flesh would melt/ Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd/ His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! (1.2)
2. ‘the funeral baked meats/ Did coldly furnish the marriage table. (1.2)
3. ‘the dread of something after death/ (the undiscovered country…) (3.1)
4. ‘Nothing but to show you how a king may go progress through a beggar.’ (4.3)
5. ‘I see the imminent death of twenty thousand men/ That for a fantasy and a trick of fame/ Go to their graves like beds.’ (4.4)

**5.1 206-end**

* How does the placement of Ophelia’s funeral after the graveyard sequence serve to highlight the absurdity/futility of ‘society’ in the play?
* Why does Hamlet say, ‘This is I,/Hamlet the Dane.’?
* How should the audience respond to the fight between Laertes and Hamlet?
* Whose feelings for Ophelia seem more genuine and why?

**The importance of this scene (Nicholas Marsh)**

This scene has two elements which are present in the rest of the play as a whole:

1. Society operates by compromising between public/moral laws and the brute facts of power, greed and lust. As a result, society is tainted and can only produce a mixture of good and evil, or the pretence of good covering evil. The play is full of moral compromises.
2. The complications of society (including people’s attitudes interpretations of each other’s motives, subterfuges etc) are shown to be futile and irrelevant to the eventual outcome.

QUESTION: Where do we see these ideas in this scene and elsewhere in the play?

**FINAL THOUGHT:**

* So, you are Hamlet – what are you going to do now? How are you going to resolve events, but also your own mind?
* Talk me through it…