Written for the AQA A/AS Level English Literature B specification for first teaching from 2015, this Student Book supports learning at every stage of the new linear A/AS Level courses. Building on the ethos behind the new qualifications, including the use of innovative research from higher education, this resource focuses on the exam specification and allows for wider breadth and depth of learning.

- Supports both AS and A Level teaching with AS content clearly signposted throughout the book.
- Includes a unique three-part structure with ‘Beginning’, ‘Developing’ and ‘Enriching’ sections, helping to bridge the gap between GCSE and A Level, develop knowledge and understanding of the specification and extend learning beyond the curriculum.
- Activities throughout the book focus on the set texts, wider reading and exam preparation.
- The Cambridge Elevate-enhanced Edition features additional rich digital content.

About the authors
Carol Atherton teaches English at Spalding Grammar School in Lincolnshire and has written widely on A Level English Literature. She is a Fellow of the English Association and a member of NATE's post-16/higher education committee.

Andrew Green has taught English at a range of 11-18 schools. He now teaches professional English at postgraduate level as well as a variety of undergraduate courses at Brunel University London. He has published a wide range of articles, books and resources for A Level texts.

Gary Snapper is a former Head of English who now teaches A Level and IB English Literature in Oxford. He is the editor of the NATE journal Teaching English and has written widely about teaching and learning literature in the sixth form.

Series Editor Marcello Giovanelli is an Assistant Professor in English Education at the University of Nottingham and has published widely in the fields of applied linguistics and stylistics. He has many years' experience of teaching English Language and Literature in schools and in higher education.

This book has been approved by AQA.
Interestingly, Changing Places itself is a novel that lacks a clear sense of an ending! Its final chapter is told in the form of a film script, and ends by freezing the action in mid-frame just as a character is reflecting on the artificial nature of endings – a form of metafiction.

**Key terms**

- foreshadowing (flashforward/prolepsis): a technique in which narrative refers to something that has not yet happened but will happen later
- flashback (analepsis): a technique in which narrative moves back in time to refer to something that has already happened
- narrative frame: a literary device used to enclose a story to give a sense of importance the events that will unfold
- metafiction: fiction that self-consciously draws attention to the act of writing, for example, by commenting on the process or difficulty of writing fiction

### ACTIVITY 8

**Exploring endings**

Think about the endings of some of the novels you have read. Do they end happily or unhappily? Do they tie the plot up neatly, or leave questions unanswered? Do they have a moral? Does the novel take you on some kind of journey? What kind of ending do you prefer, and why?

### 4.4 Bringing it all together

#### 4.4.1 How much do you know?

Questions 1-3 ask you to bring together the elements you have studied in this unit.

1. Summarise what you can remember about the historical development of the novel.

2. Explain the meanings of these terms:
   - first-person narrator
   - third-person narrator
   - omniscient narrator
   - free indirect discourse
   - focaliser
   - linear narrative
   - fragmented narrative
   - foreshadowing
   - flashback
   - direct speech
   - reported speech
   - narrative frame
   - metafiction

3. Identify two or three of the key narrative methods used to shape meanings at different points in two different novels you have read. In coherent prose, describe these methods, give examples, and explain their effects.

#### 4.4.2 Assessment objectives

In relation to the assessment objectives, this unit has explored:

- how you as a reader can make personal, informed and creative responses to the novel. It has also introduced you to a range of essential terminology and concepts that you might use in thinking and writing about the novel (AO1)
- the ways in which writers shape meanings in the novel through their use of a variety of conventions and techniques (AO2)
- some of the development of the novel as a literary form and the ways in which it has been adapted by different writers and received by different readers at different times (AO3)
- the key aspects of the novel form which can be found across a wide range of texts (AO4)
- the roles of interpretation and analysis in reading the novel (AO5).

### Summary

In this unit, you have learnt about:

- the novel as a literary form
- the historical development of the novel
- key aspects of narrative used in the novel
- how the authors of novels shape meanings in their works.

---

### DEVELOPING

## 5

### Tragedy

#### 5.1 Introduction to tragedy

What does the word ‘tragedy’ mean to you? Nowadays, this term is used in a wide range of different circumstances. Take a look at any newspaper, and you’ll see it being applied to a variety of situations, from unexpected deaths and historical developments to political and social upheavals.

Aspects of Tragedy is one of the options in the Literary Genres components for A Level and AS Level. The set texts for this option are listed here.

At AS Level, if you choose the Aspects of Tragedy option for Papers 1 and 2 you must study one Shakespeare text, one other drama text, one poetry text and one prose text. At A Level, if you choose the Aspects of Tragedy option (Paper 1 only) you must study one Shakespeare text, one other drama text and one other text from any genre. One of these last texts must have been written before 1900.

**A Level and AS Level**

- Othello by William Shakespeare
- King Lear by William Shakespeare
- The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald
- Tess of the D’Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy
- ‘Lamia’ by John Keats
- ‘Isabella, or, The Pot of Basil’, ‘La Belle Dame Sans Merci’, and ‘The Eve of Agnes’ by John Keats
- Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller
- Richard III by William Shakespeare

**AQA English Literature B Poetry Anthology**

(Tragedy): Extracts from the Prologue of ‘The Monk’s Tale’ and ‘The Monk’s Tale’ by Geoffrey Chaucer; ‘Jessie Cameron’ by Christina Rossetti; Extract from Paradise Lost by John Milton; ‘Tithonus’ by Alfred, Lord Tennyson; ‘The Convergence of the Twain’ by Thomas Hardy; ‘The Death of Cuchulain’ by W.B. Yeats; ‘Out, out…’ by Robert Frost; ‘Death in Learning’ by John Betjeman; ‘Miss Gee’ by W.H. Auden.

**AS Level only**

- A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams
- The Remains of the Day by Kazuo Ishiguro

environmental disasters to a missed goal at a penalty shootout and a politician’s taste in clothes. As a student of literature, however, you need to learn that ‘tragedy’ has a much more specific set of meanings. These will give a shape to your study of tragedy and provide you with a lens through which to view the texts you study as part of this unit. However, they will not necessarily be present to the same degree in every text. Writers subvert literary genres as well as follow them, and you might find that the texts you are studying challenge, overturn or even omit different aspects of tragedy. Part of your study of these texts will involve considering why their authors treat the genre in the way they do, and what effects they achieve.

Tragedy has its roots in the ritualised dramas of Ancient Greece. It developed as a way of exploring the relationship between humans and the gods, the limits of human power and the workings of fate. The satyr play gave rise to another literary genre, termed this process catharsis. The emotional impact of tragedy is what gives the drama its power. In Shakespearean Tragedy (1904), the literary critic A.C. Bradley said that when watching tragedy ‘we realise the full power and reach of the soul, and the conflict in which it engages acquires that magnitude which stirs not only sympathy and pity, but admiration, terror, and awe’.

Later dramatists have used the genre to ask questions about their own societies and concerns, and have been accompanied by poets and novelists, who have used other literary forms to explore ideas related to tragedy: error, guilt, suffering and death. Today, tragedy is just as powerful, and just as relevant, as it is to tragedy: error, guilt, suffering and death. Today, writers subvert literary genres as well as follow them, and you might find that the texts you are studying challenge, overturn or even omit different aspects of tragedy. Part of your study of these texts will involve considering why their authors treat the genre in the way they do, and what effects they achieve.

Exploring ritual madness and shedding identity

5.1.1 The earliest forms of tragedy

The original meaning of ‘tragedy’ was the rather bizarre-sounding ‘goat song’. This term’s precise meaning is unclear, but what is known is that it has its origins in the dramas that were performed at a number of annual festivals in Ancient Greece, particularly the festival of Dionysus, which took place in the spring. These dramas were very different to theatrical performance today. They were performed in open-air amphitheatres, in front of vast audiences (the amphitheatre at Epidaurus, now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, can seat up to 14,000 people). Attendance was part of the duty of a citizen: the theatre was not mere entertainment, but a place where important issues could be raised and discussed.

‘Goat song’, then, might refer to the goatskin trousers worn by the actors playing the satyrs - creatures that were human from the waist up and goat from the waist down, often depicted as lustful and unruly.

Exploring the Fates in mythology

In Greek mythology, the Fates were three goddesses who were able to decide what people’s destiny would be. Each had a different role in this process. Clotho, the spinner, created the thread of destiny would be. Lachesis, the measurer, decided how long the thread would be; and Atropos cut the thread off with her shears at the end.

Later dramatists have used the genre to ask questions about their own societies and concerns, and have been accompanied by poets and novelists, who have used other literary forms to explore ideas related to tragedy: error, guilt, suffering and death. Today, tragedy is just as powerful, and just as relevant, as it is to tragedy: error, guilt, suffering and death. Today, writers subvert literary genres as well as follow them, and you might find that the texts you are studying challenge, overturn or even omit different aspects of tragedy. Part of your study of these texts will involve considering why their authors treat the genre in the way they do, and what effects they achieve.

Exploring satire

The satyr play gave rise to another literary genre, the satire. Satire is a subversive genre that aims to challenge and overturn established values.

5.1.2 Classical aspects of tragedy

The most important name in the history of tragedy is that of the Greek writer Aristotle, who lived in the 4th century BCE. Aristotle was a philosopher, not a dramatist, but his work Poetics, written in about 335 BCE, is one of the most important texts ever written about the genre of tragedy. In it, Aristotle described the characteristics of the tragic dramas he had seen performed. The aspects he described have become a staple of the way that later dramatists and critics have thought about tragedy.

• Central to Aristotle’s description of tragedy was the role of the tragic protagonist. This was a man of high status (such as a king) who also possessed what Aristotle termed megalopsychia or ‘greatness of soul’.

• The action of the tragedy focuses on the tragic protagonist’s downfall from this high status. Aristotle’s term for this reversal of fortune was peripeteia.

• This downfall was not the result of accident or chance: it was brought about by an error of judgement committed by the protagonist. This error of judgement, which Aristotle termed hamartia, was often the result of hubris or excessive pride. It set in motion a chain of events that led to the protagonist’s inevitable death.

• Crucially, at some point before his death, the protagonist experiences a period of anagnorisis in which he or she recognises what he has done wrong. This results in an increase of self-knowledge and a new understanding of the truths of existence, especially of the relationship between humans and the gods.

• The effect on the audience is a purging of the emotions, drawing out feelings of fear and pity and bringing about a new sense of clarity. Aristotle termed this process catharsis.

The emotional impact of tragedy is what gives the drama its power. In Shakespearean Tragedy (1904), the literary critic A.C. Bradley said that when watching tragedy ‘we realise the full power and reach of the soul, and the conflict in which it engages acquires that magnitude which stirs not only sympathy and pity, but admiration, terror, and awe’.

Text SA

‘I am in blood
Stepp’d in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o’er.’

William Shakespeare, Macbeth,
Act 3, Scene 4, lines 135-7
Text 5B

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, 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.

Macbeth, Act 5, Scene 5, lines 19–28

Aspects of classical tragedy can also be detected in more recent plays. In Arthur Miller’s play All My Sons (1947) the actions of the tragic protagonist, the businessman Joe Keller, bring about the deaths of 21 young pilots whose planes have been fitted with faulty engine parts supplied by Keller’s company. Keller could have prevented the parts from being sold, but was more concerned with safeguarding the business. One key feature of the chorus is its represented groups of citizens, and offered a voice of concern for the people of Athens, which had citizenship, duty and freedom. These were important concerns for the people of Athens, which had become a democracy in the 5th century BCE. The critic Simon Goldhill sees the theatre as playing an important role in the proceedings of democracy: ‘The Greeks … had a word for it: es meson, which means ‘put into the public domain to be contested’. Democracy prides itself on its openness to questioning. Tragedy is the institution which stages this openness in the most startling fashion.’

Figure 5A

5.2 Development of tragedy

5.2.1 Classical drama

Tragedy has its roots in the ritualised dramas of Ancient Greece. Very few of these ancient tragedies are still in existence, but there are three great dramatists whose work has survived: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. Their plays date from the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, and focus on a number of common themes as shown in Figure 5A.

Many of these early plays draw on a much older set of myths, often relating to the Trojan and Theban wars. These myths are, however, used to dramatise contemporary concerns about the nature of citizenship, duty and freedom. These were important concerns for the people of Athens, which had become a democracy in the 5th century BCE. The critic Simon Goldhill sees the theatre as playing an important role in the proceedings of democracy: ‘The Greeks … had a word for it: es meson, which means ‘put into the public domain to be contested’. Democracy prides itself on its openness to questioning. Tragedy is the institution which stages this openness in the most startling fashion.’

As an example, let’s look at one famous classical Greek tragedy, Antigone.

ACTIVITY 2

Antigone

Antigone was written in about 441 BCE by the dramatist Sophocles. It is set against the backdrop of the Theban wars. Read the summary of Antigone in Text 5C.

The tragedies of Ancient Rome were heavily influenced by their Greek predecessors.
The tragedy of Antigone raises a number of issues.
1. Who is the tragic protagonist of this play? Is it Antigone, or could it be Creon?
2. From the summary in Text SC, can you identify what the tragic protagonists’ hamartia might be?
3. In what ways does Antigone explore the relationship between the gods, the state and the individual?

The tragedies of Ancient Rome were heavily influenced by their Greek predecessors. Nevertheless, theatre did not hold the same importance for the Ancient Romans as it did for the Greeks: to a Roman, the theatre did not hold the same importance for the Romans that it had occupied in Ancient Greece. The main tragic dramatist of Ancient Rome was Seneca, who worked in the 1st century CE. His tragedies were just as influential as their Greek counterparts, but for very different reasons.

Senecan tragedy is characterised by its focus on bloodshed and horror. It is set in a nightmarish world in which evil has the power to destroy good, and contains graphic descriptions of horrific scenes. In his tragedy ‘The Phoenissae’, for example, Thetys’ young sons are murdered by their uncle, Aethus, who roasts their bodies and feeds them to their father. Often, Seneca’s tragedies present humans as trapped in a world in which they cannot escape their fates: all they can do is wait for events to unfold.

Seneca’s tragedies had an enormous influence on tragedy in the Renaissance period. Aspects of Senecan drama can be seen in the revenge tragedies of dramatists such as John Webster, Thomas Kyd and Thomas Middleton. It can also be seen in a number of Shakespeare’s plays. Shakespeare’s most gruesome tragedy, Titus Andronicus, owes an obvious debt to the violence of Seneca, with its shocking scenes of murder, mutilation and cannibalism. (During the 2014 Globe Theatre production of Titus Andronicus, the audience were warned to leave if they were disturbed by the violence.)

5.2.2 Tragedy in medieval literature

After its initial flourishing in classical Greece and Rome, tragic drama received little attention during the medieval period. The rise of Christianity meant that plays featuring non-Christian belief systems (such as the Greek and Roman gods of classical tragedy) were frowned upon. In England, the dramas of the medieval period tended to be small in scale, often performed in the streets rather than in the great theatres of Ancient Greece and Rome. Many of these plays were comic in nature and heavily influenced by Christian mythology. One extremely popular form of drama during this period was the mystery play. These plays dramatised Bible stories such as the Creation, the Flood, the Nativity and the Crucifixion.

The cautionary tale implies that humans are at least partly to blame for their own downfall. One key medieval image, however, suggests otherwise. This is the image of the wheel of fortune. In medieval philosophy, all humans – from beggars to kings – are subject to the turning of the wheel of fortune. Sometimes, you are at the top of the wheel, sometimes, you are at the bottom. Crucially, there is nothing you can do to speed up or slow down the wheel of fortune. Its movement is inevitable.

The cautionary tale implies that humans are at least partly to blame for their own downfall. One key medieval image, however, suggests otherwise. This is the image of the wheel of fortune. In medieval philosophy, all humans – from beggars to kings – are subject to the turning of the wheel of fortune. Sometimes, you are at the top of the wheel, sometimes, you are at the bottom. Crucially, there is nothing you can do to speed up or slow down the wheel of fortune. Its movement is inevitable.

The cautionary tale implies that humans are at least partly to blame for their own downfall. One key medieval image, however, suggests otherwise. This is the image of the wheel of fortune. In medieval philosophy, all humans – from beggars to kings – are subject to the turning of the wheel of fortune. Sometimes, you are at the top of the wheel, sometimes, you are at the bottom. Crucially, there is nothing you can do to speed up or slow down the wheel of fortune. Its movement is inevitable.

The cautionary tale implies that humans are at least partly to blame for their own downfall. One key medieval image, however, suggests otherwise. This is the image of the wheel of fortune. In medieval philosophy, all humans – from beggars to kings – are subject to the turning of the wheel of fortune. Sometimes, you are at the top of the wheel, sometimes, you are at the bottom. Crucially, there is nothing you can do to speed up or slow down the wheel of fortune. Its movement is inevitable.

The cautionary tale implies that humans are at least partly to blame for their own downfall. One key medieval image, however, suggests otherwise. This is the image of the wheel of fortune. In medieval philosophy, all humans – from beggars to kings – are subject to the turning of the wheel of fortune. Sometimes, you are at the top of the wheel, sometimes, you are at the bottom. Crucially, there is nothing you can do to speed up or slow down the wheel of fortune. Its movement is inevitable.

The cautionary tale implies that humans are at least partly to blame for their own downfall. One key medieval image, however, suggests otherwise. This is the image of the wheel of fortune. In medieval philosophy, all humans – from beggars to kings – are subject to the turning of the wheel of fortune. Sometimes, you are at the top of the wheel, sometimes, you are at the bottom. Crucially, there is nothing you can do to speed up or slow down the wheel of fortune. Its movement is inevitable.

The cautionary tale implies that humans are at least partly to blame for their own downfall. One key medieval image, however, suggests otherwise. This is the image of the wheel of fortune. In medieval philosophy, all humans – from beggars to kings – are subject to the turning of the wheel of fortune. Sometimes, you are at the top of the wheel, sometimes, you are at the bottom. Crucially, there is nothing you can do to speed up or slow down the wheel of fortune. Its movement is inevitable.

The cautionary tale implies that humans are at least partly to blame for their own downfall. One key medieval image, however, suggests otherwise. This is the image of the wheel of fortune. In medieval philosophy, all humans – from beggars to kings – are subject to the turning of the wheel of fortune. Sometimes, you are at the top of the wheel, sometimes, you are at the bottom. Crucially, there is nothing you can do to speed up or slow down the wheel of fortune. Its movement is inevitable.
The wheel of fortune
Research the medieval wheel of fortune, or rota fortuna. Shakespeare’s plays contain many references to the wheel of fortune.

- Which characters welcome and accept fortune?
- Which characters reject or challenge her?
- What observations can you make about the depiction of fortune as a woman? (Think, in particular, about the way she is described as a lover, a goddess, a ‘false housewife’ and a whore.)
- Is the idea of the wheel of fortune – whose inevitable turning will both favour everyone and bring everyone low – incompatible with the idea that tragedy stems from individual actions?

Exploring Shakespeare’s use of fortune

Hamlet: In his famous soliloquy, Hamlet refers to ‘the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune’. He also calls fortune a ‘strenump’. The First Player asks the gods to ‘break all the spokes and fellies from her wheel’. 

King Lear: Kent, imprisoned in the stocks, bids fortune ‘good night’, and asks her to ‘smile once more, turn thy wheel!’ King Lear describes himself as being ‘bound upon a wheel of fire’, while Gloucester’s scheming son Edmund, just before the battle that will cost him his life, states that ‘The wheel is come full circle’.

Macbeth: The Sergeant who describes Macbeth’s victory over the Thane of Cawdor describes fortune as ‘like a rebel’s whore’. Later, the lord who describes the turmoil that follows the death of Duncan refers to ‘the malevolence of Fortune’. 

Coriolanus: The general Lartius calls upon ‘the fair goddess, Fortune’ to ‘fall deep in love’ with his fellow solider Caius Marius.

Antony and Cleopatra: As her lover Mark Antony lies dying, Cleopatra begs Mark Antony to let her speak so loud that it will break Fortune’s wheel (see Text SD).

Another way in which tragedy was explored in medieval literature was through the morality play.

As the name suggests, the morality play presented its audience with religious and ethical problems, dramatising the choices made by humans in their journey through life. Significantly, the morality play belonged to a world that was firmly Christian. It had a number of key features:

- It focused on a struggle between good and evil.
- It was allegorical rather than naturalistic: characters were not individuals, but representations of ideas or values (such as Virtue, Slander and Perseverance).
- The main character represented humanity. In The Castle of Perseverance (c.1405), this character is called Mankind; in Everyman (c.1510), it is called Everyman.
- It often had a character or characters who fulfilled the role of chorus.
- The main character had to negotiate his or her way through life, facing various trials and being tempted by sin.
- Eventually, the main character renounces temptation, is pardoned by God and assured of salvation in heaven.

After the complexity of classical drama, morality plays can seem highly simplistic. It can also be difficult to see how they can be linked to the genre of tragedy. Nevertheless, one of their most important functions was to remind audiences that their actions could end in eternal damnation. Mankind, in The Castle of Perseverance, is accompanied by good and bad angels who stand on either side of him. Look at his comments in Text SE.

Text SD

let me speak, and let me rail so high, That the false housewife Fortune break her wheel, Provoked by my offence.

Antony and Cleopatra, Act 4, Scene 15, lines 52–4

Text SE

Two such has every man alive To rule him and his wits five. When man does evil, one would him shrive, The other draws him to ill.

Aion, The Castle of Perseverance

While they invariably ended happily, with the main character rejecting sin and achieving redemption, the possibility of hell has to be present in order for the drama to have its force.

Exploring the development of tragedy

Look back at sections 5.1 and 5.2.1. What scope do the tragedies of Ancient Greece and Rome offer to explore the human mind? Can you think of ways in which Renaissance dramatists might have built on the work of their classical predecessors?

5.2.4 Tragedy in Renaissance drama

The word Renaissance means ‘rebirth’. It denotes a period of intellectual and cultural transformation that began in Italy in the 14th century and spread to the rest of Europe. The Renaissance saw a renewal of interest in the classics of Greek and Roman literature. It is also associated with the development of humanism – an interest in the abilities of the human mind and a new sense of what it was to be a thinking, learning, individual.

The newly developed mariner’s astrolabe allowed sailors to navigate the oceans more easily.

Leonardo da Vinci produced designs for a number of inventions, including dams, bridges, parachutes, steam cannons, hydraulic pumps and musical instruments. Nevertheless, humans were constantly encountering barriers, being brought up short by the restrictions of technology, the weather, social and political factors, their own minds – and, of course, by the
Exploring the life and work of Christopher Marlowe

Christopher Marlowe, the author of Dr Faustus, was born in 1564, the same year as William Shakespeare. He was a playwright, poet and translator, and was suspected of being a spy and a heretic (a supporter of beliefs that challenged orthodox religion). He was killed in a fight in a tavern in Deptford, London, in May 1593.

One famous study of Marlowe and his works is Harry Levin's book The Overreacher, whose title refers to the towering ambitions of Marlowe's tragic protagonists. Some critics argue that this title could equally apply to Marlowe himself.

Faustus was described by the literary critic William Hazlitt as 'a personification of the pride of will and eagerness of curiosity'. It is easy to identify his hamartia – his decision to make his pact with Mephistopheles - and, from then on, his peripeteia is clear, a simple matter of the passage of the 24 years until his death. While Faustus claims not to believe in hell, and refuses the chance to repent, he faces his death in a state of torment that can be seen as his moment of anagnorisis. And while he often appears comic - his antics are undoubtedly foolish - his language as he confronts his death has a grandeur that draws out the pity and fear necessary for the process of catharsis (see the quote in Text SF).

ACTIVITY 6

Human struggles

Think about the tragedies you are studying. What kinds of aspirations do their protagonists embody? What limitations do they come up against? To what extent are they destroyed by the confrontation that Watson describes?

You could keep a record of quotations, like Watson's, that make statements about aspects of tragedy. A complete survey of Renaissance tragedy is beyond the scope of this book. Nevertheless, a detailed summary of three particular tragedies - Dr Faustus by Christopher Marlowe (1588), King Lear by William Shakespeare (1605) and The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster (1614) - will help to highlight some of the major themes and debates that shaped tragic drama at this key period of its history.

Dr Faustus

In many ways, Dr Faustus can be seen as an embodiment of the intellectual daring of the Renaissance. Faustus, whose story is based on a German legend, is a scholar whose thirst for knowledge is so strong that it ultimately condemns him to hell. He conjures up a devil, Mephistopheles, and makes a pact with him. Mephistopheles will do Faustus' bidding for 24 years and, at the end of this time, he will receive Faustus' soul. Rather than using this time to accomplish something of worth, Faustus fritters it away. He plays tricks on people (including the Pope and a horse dealer), and has sex with a demon that he believes to be Helen of Troy. Eventually, Mephistopheles arrives to claim Faustus' soul.

Glossary

O lente, lente currit, noxitis equi: Run slowly, slowly, horses of the night!

Nevertheless, some critics have argued that Faustus' damnation is predestined, rather than the result of his own choice. The doctrine of predestination was the subject of widespread debate at the time. Dr Faustus was written. It was based on the teachings of John Calvin, who believed that God had chosen some people to be saved and others to be condemned to hell. The individual, therefore, has no control over his or her spiritual fate. Debates about predestination are closely linked to the topic of free will.

see Text 5.3.4 and 5.3.5 for more on free will

King Lear

King Lear is one of Shakespeare's four major tragedies. It is often seen as being unbearably bleak. The eighteenth-century critic Samuel Johnson was so appalled by its ending that he could hardly bring himself to read it a second time, and for over a century the play was performed only in a heavily rewritten form.

Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, in their introduction to the Folger Shakespeare Library edition of King Lear, highlight the play's bleakness: 'It is a play that relentlessly challenges its readers and … audiences with the magnitude, intensity, and sheer duration of the pain that it represents.'

Watching King Lear is certainly an uncomfortable experience. Lear curses and disowns his daughters, children plot against their parents and the elderly Duke of Gloucester has his eyes torn out in a scene of horrific violence. However, it also exemplifies the ways in which Renaissance tragedy combined aspects of classical drama with detailed psychological exploration.

King Lear is the oldest and the most distinguished of Shakespeare's tragic heroes: unlike Macbeth, who attains power during the play, Lear is coming to the end of his powers. At the beginning of the play, Lear has decided to abdicate and divide his kingdom between his three daughters, who must offer him a public declaration of their love in order to determine which portion of the kingdom they will receive.

Goneril and Regan make eloquent speeches telling Lear of their apparent love for him, but their younger sister, Cordelia, refuses to take part. The enraged Lear banishes her from his kingdom.

Lear plans to divide his time alternately between Goneril and Regan's homes, but his increasingly irascible temper leads them to lose patience with him. They refuse to give him and his entourage a place to stay, and he curses them for their lack of respect. Meanwhile, the country descends into chaos.

The third act of the play sees the homeless Lear wandering on a heath as a violent storm breaks. He rages at the elements and at the gods above, but in his madness he gains a new insight into the injustices that took place during his reign - and into his own shortcomings.

Towards the end of the play, Lear is reunited briefly with Cordelia, but she is then killed. The play's emotional climax occurs when Lear carries the dead Cordelia on stage, desperately searching for signs of life - and then dies himself (see Text 5G).

TEXT 5G

LEAR: No, no, no life? Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life, And thou no breath at all?

Cambridge School Shakespeare

It is easy to find in King Lear the aspects of tragedy described by Aristotle. The hamartia, or error of judgement, takes place in the very first scene, with Lear's division of his kingdom, the staging of the 'love-trial', and his subsequent exiling of Cordelia. This whole process is driven by hubris - Lear's conviction that his daughters will not fail to express their love for him. From this point onwards, Lear's downfall, or peripeteia, is too all apparent, as he alienates Goneril and Regan and descends into madness. The most powerful aspect of King Lear, however, is the detailed depiction of Lear's anagnorisis - his recognition of the truth of his own situation, including the pain he has caused and his place within the universe. Such is the intensity of Lear's experience on the heath that the audience is utterly absorbed: the play cannot fail to bring about catharsis.
Writing critical commentaries

ACTIVITY 10

Writing critical commentaries

a Look closely at the re-creative writing and commentary in Text 11Y. Think carefully about the following questions.

• How does the student refer to their own re-creative writing?
• How does the student connect their re-creative writing to the base text?
• How do they use wider textual and contextual information in the commentary?
• How have they commented on their use of form and language?
• What insights into the base text do you think the student has gained from the re-creative process?

b Think about a text you know well, either from your A Level studies or from your personal reading. Develop your own re-creative writing task and critical commentary on it, remembering to establish a clear critical focus.

11.4 Bringing it all together

11.4.1 Assessment objectives

In relation to the assessment objectives, you have:

• thought in detail about how to develop increasingly sophisticated ways of articulating your ideas, about the importance of using your reading to develop informed, personal responses, about writing literary texts of your own and re-creative writing as ways of developing responses to literary texts, and about the importance of developing coherent ways of talking and writing about literary texts (AO1)

• considered how you can use both critical and imaginative writing to analyse a variety of ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts (AO2)

• considered issues surrounding the contexts in which texts - not just literary texts - are produced and received; you have also considered the different conditions under which you are expected to write as an A Level student: you have thought about how writing your own literary texts and re-creative writing can engage you with both textual production and reception (AO3)

• considered how to write in connected ways about literary texts making use of materials from the Critical Anthology (AO4)

• considered why it is important to look at alternative ways of understanding literary texts; you have considered how and in what ways you can use such alternative perspectives in your own writing (AO5).

Summary

In this unit, you have learnt about:

• the variety of ways in which you might write during your AS or A Level studies, their differing functions and the relationship between them

• the close relationship between reading and writing and how you can learn to ‘read like a writer and write like a reader’

• the close relationship between critical responses and creative responses to literary texts

• how writing your own literary texts and re-creative writing can enhance your engagement with literature

• different techniques you can use as a basis for writing and for developing your skills and confidence as a writer

• how to use secondary sources and wider reading as a way of developing and communicating your understanding and ideas.

12 Tragedy

12.1 Enrichment activities

12.1.1 Exploring tragic protagonists

In Unit 5, sections 5.1.2 and 5.3.1, you considered the nature of the tragic protagonist, from the genre’s origins in ancient Greece. You learned that tragic protagonists are flawed in some way, and that their errors lead to great suffering, for themselves and others. You also learned that aspects of the tragic genre have been used by different authors in different ways, often reflecting the contexts in which they write.

ACTIVITY 1

Tragic protagonists in literature and popular culture

a Make a list of characters in literature and popular culture - television, film and computer games - who could be seen as tragic protagonists. (You could think, for instance, of Sinus Black and Severus Snape in the Harry Potter series, Anakin Skywalker in the Star Wars films, Harvey Dent in The Dark Knight, Tony Soprano in The Sopranos, Walter White in Breaking Bad and Dexter Morgan in Dexter). Using what you know about aspects of tragedy, make brief notes on why each of these characters could be considered as a tragic protagonist.

b The critic Raphael Falco has said that tragic protagonists possess a ‘charismatic authority’. Is this true of the tragic protagonists you have identified? Explain your answer.

c Why do you think audiences are drawn to tragic protagonists?

d Can you think of any real people - politicians, sportspersons, musicians, celebrities - whose lives embody aspects of tragedy?

12.1.2 Tragedy on stage and screen

Tragedy began as a dramatic genre, and two of your set texts are plays. In Unit 3, you learned that different productions of plays are, in effect, different interpretations of the plays, emphasizing particular themes and depicting characters in a variety of ways. Watching performances of your set plays is an excellent way of exploring the variety of ways in which they can be interpreted.

ACTIVITY 2

Tragedy in performance

If possible, go to a stage production of one of your set plays. Alternatively, find clips from stage productions and film adaptations of your set plays on YouTube. Drawing on what you know about aspects of tragedy, think about questions a-c.

a How are the tragic protagonist and other key characters portrayed?

b In what ways do staging, lighting and sound contribute to the effect of the tragedy?

c Focus on two or three key points within the action of the tragedy (for example, hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis) and consider the different ways in which these are depicted.

ENRICHING
12.1.3 Two different views of Shakespeare’s tragedies
One of the most famous books about Shakespeare’s tragedies is Shakespearean Tragedy, written by A.C. Bradley in 1904. Bradley described tragedy as a struggle between eternal forces, a ‘painful mystery’. He wrote about Shakespeare’s tragedies as if they were psychological studies of real people. A very different view of Shakespeare’s tragedies is advanced by the critic Fintan O’Toole in his book Shakespeare is Hard, but so is Life (2002). O’Toole argues that Bradley’s interpretation of Shakespeare - with its focus on character and morality - said more about the context in which Bradley was writing than it did about the Elizabethan theatre.

ACTIVITY 4
Creative rewriting: the witnesses of tragedy
Choose a ‘bystander’ character from one of the texts you are studying. For instance, you could think about:
- a Kent in King Lear
- Lodovico in Othello
- Jordan Baker in The Great Gatsby
- Wagner in Dr Faustus
- Charley in Death of a Salesman
- Liza-Lu in Tess of the d’Urbervilles.

Write a monologue from the point of view of this character, to be spoken after the action has concluded. What would your chosen character say about what has happened?

12.1.5 Nietzsche on tragedy
The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche saw tragedy as the product of a struggle between two opposing forces, which he termed the Apollonian and the Dionysian. The Apollonian was characterised by balance, order and reason, while the Dionysian was characterised by disorder, revelry and an abandonment of oneself to instinct and desire. Nietzsche saw Ancient Greek tragedy as breaking through the calmness of the Apollonian and giving access to the turmoil of the Dionysian. He claimed that tragedy offered its audiences an intense emotional experience that contrasted with the mundane routines of everyday life.

ACTIVITY 5
Exploring Nietzsche
Listen to the Philosophy Bites podcast by Aaron Ridley on ‘Nietzsche on Art and Truth’.

What connections can you make between Nietzsche’s view of tragedy and the texts you have studied?

12.2 Wider reading

12.2.1 Key texts on tragedy
There are many texts about tragedy that you could use to develop your understanding further. These include:
- Bradley, A. C. (1904) Shakespearean Tragedy (reissued by Penguin Classics): Perhaps the most famous study of Shakespeare’s major tragedies, although one that has been criticised for writing about characters as psychological case studies rather than dramatic constructs.

12.2.2 Further useful resources
In addition to the books listed in 12.2.1, there are a number of web-based resources that will enrich and extend your study of tragedy. Four of the most useful are as follows.
- BBC Radio 4: In Our Time
  Each episode of Melyn Bragg’s wide-ranging discussion series features a particular topic discussed by three experts. All past episodes (over 600 of them) are available online via the programme’s homepage. There are episodes on Elizabethan Revenge, King Lear and Marlowe, as well as on the genre of tragedy.
- Oxford Podcasts: Approaching Shakespeare, with Emma Smith
  Emma Smith’s contributions to the Oxford Podcasts series are both accessible and informative. The Approaching Shakespeare series, which draws on Smith’s own research, includes lectures on King Lear, Othello and Richard II, as well as other Shakespearean tragedies.
- Royal Shakespeare Company: Online Resources
  The RSC’s Online Resources include images from past productions that enable you to compare aspects of characterisation and staging. Education packs are also available for many plays.
- Shakespeare’s Globe: Adopt an Actor
  The Globe Theatre website’s Adopt an Actor resource contains blog entries and reflections from many of the Globe’s actors on the process of bringing Shakespeare’s characters to life.

12.3 Sean McEvoy on modern approaches to tragedy
Sean McEvoy teaches literature in Brighton and Cambridge, and writes books and articles on the theatre. He currently is writing Tragedy: The Basics, to be published in 2016. Here he introduces some theories of tragedy from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Aristotle’s idea about tragedy don’t take into account the fact that the world changes and that we live in changing societies. Shakespeare’s England, for example, was in transition between the mediaeval and the modern world. Othello is an outsider in Venice who talks and behaves like a feudal warrior, or a hero out of knightly romance – as he says, these are the qualities that make Desdemona love him. But Venice is a very modern place, and its individualism, self-interest and ruthlessness are nowhere better embodied than in the figure of Iago. The German philosopher Hegel (1770–1831) locates tragedy where people are caught between two historical forces pulling in different directions. No matter how heroic or pitiable an individual might be, there is no escape because their world-view is out of joint with historical change – a force which Hegel thought was ultimately progressive. For him there is something positive in tragedy.

It’s also possible to think of the heroine of Tess of the D’Urbervilles (1891) in a similar way. The dominant moral values of an ‘unnatural’ Victorian Christianity in the novel cannot be reconciled with Tess, who appears to be the embodiment of a ancient pagan morality rooted in nature. She is arrested in the ‘pre-Christian’ temple of Stonehenge, where she feels ‘at home’ as a ‘heathen’. Tess’s tragedy is that she is a ‘pure woman’ in tune with
the ancient demands of nature who lives in a time where to have a child out of marriage, even after rape, entails total social rejection. Yet Hardy’s novel not only looks forward to, but actually helped to bring about a time when women would be relatively free from the tyranny of Victorian sexual morality. Tess might be seen as an early tragic victim in the larger movement for female emancipation in the coming twentieth century.

Tragedy can also expose the contradictions and injustices of ideas which are otherwise utterly dominant. In Miller’s Death of a Salesman (1949), the salesman Willy Loman has inevitably ended up selling himself, as Raymond Williams wrote in 1979, and has become an economic commodity to be discarded like any other: ‘he brings down tragedy on himself, not by opposing the lie, but by living it’. In living the false dream of American wealth and power depends on the suffering they cause, tragedy as a kind of smokescreen put up by those whose injustices of ideas which are otherwise utterly dominant.

12.4 Video interview

Watch Dan Rebellato, Professor of Drama and Theatre at Royal Holloway, University of London, talk about tragedy on Cambridge Elevate.

13.1 Enrichment activities

13.1.1 Exploring comic characters

In Unit 6, you explored a variety of different comic characters – heroes and heroines; villains, rivals and adversaries; clowns, fools and buffoons. You learned that a comic protagonist might display the characteristics both of a fool or clown and of a hero or heroine. You also learned that aspects of the comic genre have been used by different authors in different ways, often reflecting the contexts in which they write.
Written for the AQA A/AS Level English Literature B specification for first teaching from 2015, this Student Book supports learning at every stage of the new linear A/AS Level courses. Building on the ethos behind the new qualifications, including the use of innovative research from higher education, this resource focuses on the exam specification and allows for wider breadth and depth of learning.

- Supports both AS and A Level teaching with AS content clearly signposted throughout the book.
- Includes a unique three-part structure with 'Beginning', 'Developing' and 'Enriching' sections, helping to bridge the gap between GCSE and A Level, develop knowledge and understanding of the specification and extend learning beyond the curriculum.
- Activities throughout the book focus on the set texts, wider reading and exam preparation.
- The Cambridge Elevate-enhanced Edition features additional rich digital content.

About the authors
Carol Atherton teaches English at Spalding Grammar School in Lincolnshire and has written widely on A Level English Literature. She is a Fellow of the English Association and a member of NATE’s post-16/higher education committee.

Andrew Green has taught English at a range of 11-18 schools. He now teaches professional English at post-graduate level as well as a variety of undergraduate courses at Brunel University London. He has published a wide range of articles, books and resources for A Level texts.

Gary Snapper is a former Head of English who now teaches A Level and IB English Literature in Oxford. He is the editor of the NATE journal Teaching English and has written widely about teaching and learning literature in the sixth form.

Series Editor Marcello Giovanelli is an Assistant Professor in English Education at the University of Nottingham and has published widely in the fields of applied linguistics and stylistics. He has many years’ experience of teaching English Language and Literature in schools and in higher education.

Visit www.cambridge.org/ukschoolss for full details of all our A/AS Level English resources, and for information on the Cambridge Elevate digital subscription service.

This book has been approved by AQA.