

Black Swan

Analysis Tasks
Level 3 English

Plot

“the most powerful elements of emotional interest in Tragedy — Peripeteia or Reversal of the Situation, and Recognition scenes — are parts of the plot.”

1. Reflect on the overall structure of the plot. Look back at a plot diagram. Consider the overall arc of the film. Does it follow the usual path of a tragedy? Does Nina experience peripeteia and anagnorisis as our other tragic heroes do? Provide a discussion on this- what is effective about the manipulation of these plot elements?
2. Comment on the role of the subplot in this text. It is possibly more symbolic in *Black Swan* than any other text we have studied. What function does the subplot have in this film? Is it effective? For a better understanding of the ballet, [check out this site.](#)

Character

“Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids.”

1. Explore Nina’s tragic flaw (hamartia). What is it and by what means is it developed in the film?
2. Comment on the role of hubris in relation to Nina’s character. Compare it to the male heroes we have evaluated this year. What key differences are present and why?
3. How are we positioned by Aronofsky to consider Nina’s fate? We are supposed to be left feeling pity and fear for our tragic hero- does this happen in ‘Black Swan’? It has been mentioned that the cathartic experience has been inverted by this text. Discuss your view on this proposition.
4. Aristotle believed that a tragedy should imitate life and that the audience should see themselves in the tragic hero. Discuss Nina’s ‘transferability’- does she fulfill this brief? What is it that makes her ‘universal’?
5. Consider the role of society in shaping the character of Nina. Do you think that Aronofsky has made an accurate portrayal of the way society shapes the individual. Explain your answer.

Diction

“Every word is either current, or strange, or metaphorical, or ornamental, or newly-coined, or lengthened, or contracted, or altered.”

1. Look back over your viewing notes and select 5 key quotations from the film. For each, evaluate their significance in relation to aspect of the tragedy genre.

Thought

“For the essence of a riddle is to express true facts under impossible combinations.”

“...poetry utters universal truths...”

1. What ‘universal truth’ is revealed in *Black Swan*? How is it presented as a warning to the audience? Discuss the significance of the key idea.
2. Consider the influence of the social context of the film- why this idea at this time?

Melody

Aristotle believed that the melody should contribute to the unity of the plot. Black Swan steps this up several notches.

1. Discuss the way that sound is used to distinguish between reality and Nina's delusional episodes. Be specific with your examples.
2. Comment on the overwhelming nature of the soundscape of the film. Reflect on the moments that the sound dominates the scene and consider the purpose of this.
3. Reflect on the way that the music from Swan Lake is used to convey the parallel plot in the film. Again, be specific with your examples.

Spectacle

“A sign of this is what happens in our actions, for we delight in contemplating the most accurately made images of the very things that are painful for us to see, such as the forms of the most contemptible insects and of dead bodies.”

“the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances.”

1. Spectacle is the visual elements of the play. In a medium such as film, the visual elements really do take on a life of their own and work together to drive some of the key ideas of the text forward. Comment on the following visual elements in *Black Swan* and explore the way that the director uses them to develop key ideas, some often found in a tragedy.
 - The use of the swan metaphor via Nina’s transformation.
 - The use of costuming
 - The transposing of Nina’s face onto other characters’ bodies.
 - The way that mirrors are used to highlight the duality of Nina’s character and the connection to the ‘sight’ motif.
 - The over-use of close up camera work

2. Aronofsky has made mention of the fact that this film draws some of its visual technique from David Cronenberg. Find out what Cronenberg is famous for and comment on the way that his influence develops aspects of the tragic heroine in *Black Swan*.