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Directorate of Distance Education

M.A. [English]

II - Semester

320 22

SHAKESPEARE

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SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Shakespeare

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
BLOCK - I: STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE'S WORK	
UNIT 1: Life and Works of Shakespeare	Unit 1: Life and Works of Shakespeare (Pages 1-9);
UNIT 2: The Elizabethan Audience and Theatre	Unit 2: The Elizabethan Audience and Theatre (Pages 10-19);
UNIT 3: Shakespearean Comedy - Classical - Romantic	Unit 3: Shakespearean Comedy: Classical and Romantic (Pages 20-30);
UNIT 4: Shakespearean Tragedy	Unit 4: Shakespearean Tragedy (Pages 31-38);
UNIT 5: Shakespeare's Historical Plays	Unit 5: Shakespeare's Historical Plays (Pages 39-49)
BLOCK - II: PLAYS I	
UNIT 6: Twelfth Night	Unit 6: <i>Twelfth Night</i> (Pages 50-91);
UNIT 7: Much Ado about Nothing	Unit 7: <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> (Pages 92-109);
UNIT 8: Henry IV Part I	Unit 8: <i>Henry IV, Part I:</i> William Shakespeare (Pages 110-127)
BLOCK - III: SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS	
UNIT 9: Shakespeare's Character - Marcus Antony	Unit 9: Shakespeare's Character: Marcus Antony (Pages 128-143);
UNIT 10: Shakespeare's Character - Cleopatra	Unit 10: Shakespeare's Character: Cleopatra (Pages 144-157);
UNIT 11: Shakespeare's Character - Enobarbus	Unit 11: Shakespeare's Character: Enobarbus (Pages 158-162)
BLOCK - IV: PLAYS II	
UNIT 12: Hamlet	Unit 12: <i>Hamlet</i> (Pages 163-185);
UNIT 13: Othello	Unit 13: <i>Othello</i> (Pages 186-195);
UNIT 14: Tempest	Unit 14: William Shakespeare's <i>The Tempest</i> (Pages 196-216)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

BLOCK I: STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE'S WORK

UNIT 1 LIFE AND WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE 1-9

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 About the Author: William Shakespeare
- 1.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 1.4 Summary
- 1.5 Key Words
- 1.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 1.7 Further Readings

UNIT 2 THE ELIZABETHAN AUDIENCE AND THEATRE 10-19

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Elizabethan Audience and Theatre: Characteristics
- 2.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 Key Words
- 2.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.7 Further Readings

UNIT 3 SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY: CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC 20-30

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Shakespearean Comedy and its Features
- 3.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 Key Words
- 3.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.7 Further Readings

UNIT 4 SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY 31-38

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Shakespearean Tragedy and its Features
- 4.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 Key Words
- 4.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.7 Further Readings

UNIT 5 SHAKESPEARE’S HISTORICAL PLAYS **39-49**

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 The History Plays by Shakespeare
- 5.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.4 Summary
- 5.5 Key Words
- 5.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.7 Further Readings

BLOCK II: PLAYS I

UNIT 6 *TWELFTH NIGHT* **50-91**

- 6.0 Introduction
- 6.1 Objectives
- 6.2 Analysis of *Twelfth Night*
 - 6.2.1 Characters in *Twelfth Night*
- 6.3 About the Play
- 6.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 6.5 Summary
- 6.6 Key Words
- 6.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 6.8 Further Readings

UNIT 7 *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING* **92-109**

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Analysis of *Much Ado about Nothing*
 - 7.2.1 Treatment of the Theme of Love in *Much Ado About Nothing*
 - 7.2.2 Wit and Humour in *Much Ado About Nothing*
 - 7.2.3 Feminism in *Much Ado About Nothing*
- 7.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 Key Words
- 7.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.7 Further Readings

UNIT 8 *HENRY IV, PART I*: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE **110-127**

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 *Henry IV, Part I*: Summary
- 8.3 Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part I* and Early Responses
- 8.4 Honour in *Henry IV, Part I*
- 8.5 Prince Hal in *Henry IV, Part I*
- 8.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.7 Summary
- 8.8 Key Words
- 8.9 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.10 Further Readings

BLOCK III: SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS

UNIT 9 SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTER: MARCUS ANTONY **128-143**

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 William Shakespeare: About the Author
 - 9.2.1 Dramatic Works
 - 9.2.2 Elizabethan Age or the Renaissance
- 9.3 A Brief Background to the Play *Anthony and Cleopatra*
- 9.4 Character Sketch: Marcus Antony
- 9.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.6 Summary
- 9.7 Key Words
- 9.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.9 Further Readings

UNIT 10 SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTER: CLEOPATRA **144-157**

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 A Brief Background to the Play *Antony and Cleopatra*
 - 10.2.1 Status of Women during Elizabethan Times
- 10.3 The Character of Cleopatra
- 10.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.5 Summary
- 10.6 Key Words
- 10.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.8 Further Readings

UNIT 11 SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTER: ENOBARBUS **158-162**

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 Character Study of Enobarbus
- 11.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.4 Summary
- 11.5 Key Words
- 11.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.7 Further Readings

BLOCK IV: PLAYS II

UNIT 12 *HAMLET* **163-185**

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 *Hamlet* as a Tragedy
 - 12.2.1 *Hamlet* as a Revenge Tragedy
 - 12.2.2 Soliloquies in *Hamlet*

- 12.3 Theatre as a Theme in *Hamlet*
 - 12.3.1 Hamlet as a Tragic Hero
- 12.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 Key Words
- 12.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.8 Further Readings

UNIT 13 *OTHELLO*

186-195

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 A Brief Introduction to the Play *Othello*
 - 13.2.1 The Character of Othello
- 13.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.4 Summary
- 13.5 Key Words
- 13.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.7 Further Readings

UNIT 14 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

196-216

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 Element of Magic in *The Tempest*
- 14.3 Themes in *The Tempest*
- 14.4 *The Tempest* as a Tragi-Comedy
- 14.5 The Supernatural in *The Tempest*
- 14.6 Masque in *The Tempest*
- 14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.8 Summary
- 14.9 Key Words
- 14.10 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.11 Further Readings

INTRODUCTION

NOTES

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is known as the master of English Literature. He was an English playwright, poet, actor, inventor of words, and master of drama and certainly one of the most famous artists of all time. He wrote approximately 36 plays and 154 sonnets. Some of his famous plays include:

- *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- *The Merchant of Venice*
- *Julius Caesar*
- *As You Like It*
- *Hamlet*
- *Twelfth Night*
- *Othello*

Shakespeare changed the English language, inventing dozens of new words which we still use today. His plays have been translated into more than 90 languages and his plays have been performed in several countries of the world. In this book, *Shakespeare*, students will get to study in detail about Shakespeare's dramatic career, the time period in which he wrote, as well as some of his most famous plays and characters.

This book has been designed keeping in mind the self-instruction mode (SIM) format and follows a simple pattern, wherein each unit of the book begins with the Introduction followed by the Objectives for the topic. The content is then presented in a simple and easy-to-understand manner, and is interspersed with Check Your Progress questions to reinforce the student's understanding of the topic. A list of Self-Assessment Questions and Exercises is also provided at the end of each unit. The Summary and Key Words further act as useful tools for students and are meant for effective recapitulation of the text.

BLOCK - I

STUDIES IN SHAKESPEARE'S WORK

*Life and Works of
Shakespeare*

UNIT 1 LIFE AND WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

NOTES

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Objectives
- 1.2 About the Author: William Shakespeare
- 1.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 1.4 Summary
- 1.5 Key Words
- 1.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 1.7 Further Readings

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The biography of Shakespeare available to us, without a doubt reaffirms that, just like Chaucer, Shakespeare was a self-made man. He was extremely hard working and did not leave anything for fate. When he arrived in London he was without any friend and money. But by the time he left London he was both rich as well as respected. And the fortune that he had saved for himself was a result of his hard work as well as his talent. His writings are a treasure house of creative imagination, understanding of deep reality, familiarity with his surroundings, a general understanding of the world and a firm expression of common sense. Time and again, the world view of Shakespeare has been discussed by critics. The knowledge and worldview that Shakespeare focuses on in his writings is very different from the one that Bacon or Ben Johnson would talk about. They are not the visions or perceptions of a scholar. On the contrary, they belonged to the mind of a great scholar who was familiar with the human world around him and had gathered nuances of individuals through his extreme social interaction.

1.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the life and works of William Shakespeare
- Analyze the works of Shakespeare
- Explain the different stages of Shakespeare's works

1.2 ABOUT THE AUTHOR: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

NOTES

William Shakespeare is one of the greatest playwrights of the English language.

It is difficult to chronicle the initial period of his life and experience. There is not much information available. Scholars rely on existing records and documents to outline and sketch the life of William Shakespeare. It is now generally accepted that William Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564. The ceremony took place at Holy Trinity church (Stanford).

William Shakespeare was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. Mary Arden was the daughter of Robert Arden, who was a farmer by profession. Mary Arden had inherited a good amount of property in the form of land in Wilmcote (near Stanford) from her father. The Shakespeare family was blessed with four daughters and four sons. William Shakespeare was the eldest of the four boys. It is believed that out of the four girls only one survived.

Documents suggest that in 1556, John Shakespeare bought the house which is situated in Henley Street, that which we identify today as the birthplace of Shakespeare. The primary job of John Shakespeare was of producing gloves, but we know that he also worked as a merchant of wool and corn. By the year 1570, it is believed that John Shakespeare had started lending money to other people as well. John Shakespeare was considered to be an affluent businessman who was successful in a number of businesses that he undertook. He was a man who owned his own property in Stanford. Being a man of repute and influence he played a significant role in shaping the municipal life of the town he was part of. John Shakespeare attained a number of significant positions in the Government of Stanford and eventually occupied the position of Mayor in the year 1569.

But soon, financial struggle started haunting the Shakespeare family. And by the year 1576, John Shakespeare was steeped into financial difficulties to such a great extent that he had mortgaged Mary Arden's property to bail the family out of the situation.

We do not have access to any authentic document which highlights the early years of education that William Shakespeare undertook. But scholars agree that William Shakespeare must have attended the grammar school in Stanford where he undertook subjects such as the Classics, grammar as well as literature. It is usually assumed that William Shakespeare had to give up formal schooling by the age of 13 so that he could financially support his father.

William Shakespeare almost certainly went to one of Stratford's 'petty' or junior schools where he would have learnt his letters with the help of a hornbook. From the age of seven or thereabouts, he would have progressed to the King's New School where the emphasis would have been on Latin, it still being the international language of Europe in the 1500s. Shakespeare probably left school

at the age of 14 or 15. The plays written by William Shakespeare highlights his knowledge of Latin language. As we all know some of the classical writers like Ovid, Terence, Plautus et al influenced his writings - both poetry and plays. We also come across significant display of Roman history in his writings. All this might have reached him through his school curriculum, as teaching Latin in school was most common during those days.

Along with Latin he was also taught arithmetic in his classes. Even though his education did not earn him the reputation of a “learned man” yet it was sufficient enough to provide him with a sound education. It is well understood that due to financial difficulties he was asked to leave the school and take up a job so that his family could be supported through some income. But as far as the nature of his employment goes no one is sure about it. When he was 19, he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 then. Anne Hathaway was the daughter of a very rich yeoman who hailed from Shottery. It is believed that this marriage took place in extreme urgency and was not a successful one. The couple had three children- Susannah, Judith and Hamnet, the last two were twins. Stories suggest that by this point William Shakespeare had got himself embroiled in bad company. Soon he was part of a deer stealing episode which made him run away from his home town. One cannot be very sure about the authenticity of this episode. There are number of stories concerning the “lost years” of William Shakespeare. Over the years there has been hardly any information concerning his life during this phase. But needless, it is believed that a few years after his marriage, around 1587 he left his native place and moved to London to explore better avenues.

This was a period when drama was gaining popularity in London due to the influence of the University Wits. Shakespeare discovered his interest in the stage. He started the stage career as an actor and then he turned his attention towards play writing. But of course, running his attention towards writing did not stop him from continue his acting. By the year 1592, Shakespeare was already an established name in the field of literature. A pamphlet written by Graham Greene, in the same year, had an oblique reference to him in an inappropriate manner suggesting his elevation to a significant status.

During Shakespeare’s younger years, travelling groups of professional actors visited Stratford. It is possible that these performers were responsible for making Shakespeare interested in the stage. Some critics also suggest that Shakespeare’s entry into the world of theatre in London city could have been made possible by the contact he had built for himself through these travelling groups.

In the year 1593, when the plague broke in London city most of the theatres were shutdown. During this period Shakespeare turned his attention towards writing poetry. In the very same year, Shakespeare published *Venus and Adonis*, which was an erotic poem. The poem was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton. It is believed that Henry was young courtier and Queen Elizabeth held him in high affection. In the year 1594 William Shakespeare became the

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NOTES

founding member as well as shareholder for Lord Chamberlain's Men. He also contributed as actor and playwright in the company. Shakespeare essayed the role of Richard III, Othello, King Lear and Hamlet. Few years later the company was renamed to The King's Men. They performed mostly in the court then in other venues.

It is understood that Shakespeare remained in London for close to 20 years after this. He worked hard and produced a few plays every year which helped them grow both in popularity as well as in wealth. He soon became a shareholder into of the major theatre company of his time - the Globe and the Blackfairs. Apart from being the shareholder he also possessed property in Stanford as well as London. But the years as they passed by not only brought him success and fortune but also misfortune. In the year 1596, his only son departed for the heavenly abode. In the year 1601, his father too passed away. In the year 1607, his younger brother Edmund who was also an actor died unexpectedly. And as if this was not difficult enough, Shakespeare's mother passed away in the very next year, in 1608.

Sometimes between the year 1610 to 1612, William Shakespeare moved to Stratford. Here he had brought himself the biggest house in the area- new palace. By that time his elder daughter had married Dr. John Hall (the famous physician). And by 1616 Judith married Thomas Quincy. Thomas Quincy's father was a great friend of Shakespeare. By 1616, Shakespeare's health had completely dwindled and in that year itself on 23rd April his soul departed.

Shakespeare was buried at Holy Trinity Church at Stratford. Seven years after Shakespeare's death, in the year 1623, two actors from the King's company, John Heminge and Henry Condell, published the plays of Shakespeare. This was the first folio. It contains 36 plays and it was sold for 1 pound.

Anne Hathaway, the widow of Shakespeare, died in the year 1623. She was buried beside him in Holy Trinity Church. It is believed that the family line of William Shakespeare came to an end after the death of his granddaughter in the year 1670.

If we leave aside few miscellaneous and ambiguous texts, then Shakespeare can be credited with two narrative poems, these are '*Venus and Adonis*' and '*Lucrece*'. Both the pieces are comprised of 154 sonnets out of which 126 are addressed to a man and rest are probably addressed to a lady. These sonnets have given rise to innumerable discussions but none of them are concrete nor based on authentic evidences. They indicate about a broken friendship or love (none with any certainty). But one thing that is obviously clear is that the texts talk about extremely refined and beautiful poetry that has transcended beyond time.

In the modern times it is accepted that Shakespeare wrote around 37 plays. But scholars insists that some of these materials are probably collaborative by him and few others are actually him rewriting existing or older materials. But what is sure is that as a dramatist his most productive periods were within the years-

1588 to 1612. And that is why we can say without any hesitation that Shakespeare dominated the last phase of the 16th century and early phase of 17th century.

William Shakespeare's works can be divided into four different stages:

1. **1588 to 1593:** This was the beginning of Shakespearean experiments. As an apprentice he learnt the art of improvising and revising the existing pieces. He revised the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Titus Andronicus*. It was during this period that he composed his early comedies (under the influence of Lyly). Shakespeare composed *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Comedy of Errors* during this phase. Under the influence of Marlowe, he tried to experiment with the historical play *Richard III*. Showcasing his versatility, Shakespeare wrote the young tragedy- *Romeo and Juliet*. The works composed during this period lacks the typical Shakespearean finesse, the characterizations are definitely shallow and overall, they appear to be extremely immature. Moreover, one can definitely witness regular use of puns, a stiff use of blank verse, and rhyming dialogues in the works which were composed during this period.
2. **1594 to 1600:** This was a period of chronicle plays and great comedies. The chronicle plays that came around this time were: *Richard II*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry IV* (Part 1 & II), *King John*, and *Henry V*. The comedies of the period were: *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In these works, Shakespeare shows his craftsmanship as an original composer. None of these plays have any kind of influence from his predecessor. All these works highlight Shakespeare's command over the power of development in technique. There is an intense and detailed exploration of human motives and passions. The use of prose and blank verse increases gradually while discarding the use of rhymes in dialogues. In fact, the stiffness of blank verse paves way to more lucid and flexible use of the form.
3. **1601 to 1608:** This was a period when Shakespeare composed the best of his tragedies. This was also a phase which witnessed some of the serious comedies of Shakespeare. This was the most successful phase of Shakespeare as a playwright. His competency as a dramatist, his intellectual abilities as well as his power of expression has bestowed the literary world with some of the most memorable compositions. But more than creative talent, what is most amusing is to see the way the spirit of Shakespearean work changed. He now seemed to be more interested in the darker side of human experiences. He was solely focused on challenging the existing social moral order. By doing so he manages to show how destructive passion can ruin the lives of both the guilty as well as the innocent together. Most of the plots of Shakespeare's plays

NOTES

NOTES

composed during this period takes a deep insight into the power of good and evil where the powers of evil are finally questioned upon. He composed *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Coriolanus* and *Timon Of Athens* during this period.

4. **1608 to 1612:** This was the period of later comedies or as we call it dramatic romances. The shifting period is very obvious during this period. It is almost as if the terrible phase of his life has now given way to a more beautiful sunny phase of his life. Unlike the previous period where everything in his fictional world was dark and somber this was a phase which brought in happiness and hope. Even though there is the element of traffic aspect in each of these later plays, one cannot deny that in this place good always prevails the evil. Even the tone and manner are more tender and optimistic in comparison to the previous works. But needless to say, this is also the period which clearly marks the decline of the great playwright that Shakespeare was. The construction is definitely unsatisfactory, the character development is careless, and the style has no resemblance to the powerful impact that the preceding years of his creative talent ahead recorded. Critics now agree that, of the various plays that are credited to Shakespeare during this period, only three of them are solely authored by him: *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. And he has definitely co-authored more plays: *Pericles* and *Henry VIII*.

If we take into account all the works composed by Shakespeare, it will not be wrong to mention that he probably has contributed the most to the body of literature as a single author. And what makes the most amazing and time immemorial popular writer is his variety. Of course, there have been numerous other authors who have been better than him at some point or other but without a doubt no one has ever been close to him in terms of the vast body of work that he has composed and versatility that he has displayed. Even though slightly imbalanced, there is no denial that he was good with both tragedy as well as comedy. Ingenious spread not only to the stage plays but also in the area of poetry. He was comfortable in imagination as well as delicate fancy. Of course, he was never an original thinker. But he had the power to recreate magic from the material that was available to him in a manner which supported the original writing and managed to attach with it a time immemorial quality.

One of his major strong points was the ability to characterize. It can be safely mentioned that no other author has managed to create so many varieties of characters - both men and women- who never at any point of time felt like a figment of imagination from the authors mind but were probably true and alive. Many scholars admire the range of vocabulary that Shakespeare places in his works. It is believed that his vocabulary had more than 15000 words whereas even Milton fell short in his comparison.

As of now, all the manuscript plays of Shakespeare are lost. Since Shakespeare himself did not print any of the text we rely on the first print. Even though it must be mentioned here that 16 of his plays were published in quarto version during his lifetime itself. But we cannot take it as authentic version because they were all unauthorized editions. As already mentioned the first edition of 1623, (Pericles was omitted in this) is considered to be the first folio edition that came out in print. This one is kind of considered to be the standard and universally accepted version of Shakespearean works. But one of the biggest drawback of this Folio edition is that they are not arranged in chronological order nor the date of the original composition are mentioned in it.

NOTES

Check Your Progress

1. When and where was William Shakespeare baptized?
2. Who was Anne Hathaway?
3. To whom was Shakespeare's poem '*Venus and Adonis*' dedicated?
4. What is the significance of the period 1594 to 1600, in Shakespeare's literary life?

1.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. William Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564. the ceremony took place at Holy Trinity church (Stratford).
2. Anne Hathaway was Shakespeare's wife. She was the daughter of a very rich yeoman who hailed from Shottery.
3. The poem *Venus and Adonis* was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, Third Earl of Southampton.
4. 1594 to 1600 was a period of chronicle plays and great comedies written by Shakespeare.

1.4 SUMMARY

- William Shakespeare is one of the greatest playwrights of the English language. It is difficult to chronicle the initial period of his life and experience.
- Scholars rely on the existing records and documents to outline and sketch the life of William Shakespeare.
- It is now generally accepted that William Shakespeare was baptized on 26 April 1564. The ceremony took place at Holy Trinity church (Stratford).

NOTES

- William Shakespeare was born to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. Mary Arden was the daughter of Robert Arden, who was a farmer by profession.
- We do not have access to any authentic document which highlights the early years of education that William Shakespeare undertook.
- But scholars agree that William Shakespeare must have attended the Grammar School of Stratford where he undertook subjects such as the classics, grammar as well as the literature.
- The plays written by William Shakespeare highlights his knowledge of Latin language. As we all know some of the classical writers like Ovid, Terence, Plautus et al influenced his writings - both poetry and plays.
- When he was 19 he married Anne Hathaway, who was 26 then. Anne Hathaway was the daughter of a very rich yeoman who hailed from Shottery.
- The couple had three children- Susannah, Judith and Hamnet, the last two were twins.
- There are a number of stories concerning the “lost years” of William Shakespeare.
- But needless, it is believed that a few years after his marriage around 1587 he left his native place and moved to London to explore better avenues.
- This was a period when drama was gaining extreme popularity in London city due to the influence of the University Wits.
- Shakespeare discovered his interest in the stage. He started his stage career as an actor and then he turned his attention towards play writing.
- A pamphlet written by Graham Greene, in the same year, had an oblique reference to him in an inappropriate manner suggesting his elevation to a significant status.
- Shakespeare was buried at Holy Trinity Church at Stratford.
- Seven years after Shakespeare’s death, in the year 1623, two actors from the King’s Company, John Heminge and Henry Condell, published the plays of Shakespeare. This was the First Folio. It contains 36 plays and it was sold for 1 pound.
- If we leave aside few miscellaneous and ambiguous texts, then Shakespeare can be credited with two narrative poems. We have *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece*.
- In the modern times, it is accepted that Shakespeare wrote around 37 plays.

1.5 KEY WORDS

- **Latin:** It is the language of ancient Rome and its empire, widely used historically as a language of scholarship and administration.
- **Curriculum:** It refers to the subjects comprising a course of study in a school or college.
- **Playwright:** It refers to a person who writes plays.

NOTES

1.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the life and works of William Shakespeare in detail.
2. How did Shakespeare's childhood impact his writings? What was his source of inspiration?
3. List major works of Shakespeare.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Give a detailed explanation of the four stages of Shakespeare's works.
2. What do critics have to say about Shakespeare's works and their relevance in the society through decades?

1.7 FURTHER READINGS

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NOTES

UNIT 2 THE ELIZABETHAN AUDIENCE AND THEATRE

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Elizabethan Audience and Theatre: Characteristics
- 2.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 2.4 Summary
- 2.5 Key Words
- 2.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 2.7 Further Readings

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Elizabethan theatre audiences attracted people from all classes- the upper-class nobility and the lower-class commoners. The popularity of the theater reached people from all walks of life. The Elizabethan general public (the Commoners) referred to as groundlings would pay 1 penny to stand in the ‘Pit’ of the Globe Theater. The gentry would pay to sit in the galleries often using cushions for comfort. Rich nobles could watch the play from a chair set on the side of the Globe stage itself. Theatre performances were held in the afternoon, because there was limited artificial lighting. Men and women attended plays, but often the prosperous women would wear a mask to disguise their identity. The plays were extremely popular and attracted vast audiences to the Elizabethan Theatres.

This unit sheds light on the features and characteristics of the Elizabethan audience and theatre.

2.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the characteristics of Elizabethan era
- Explain the features of Elizabethan theatre
- Discuss the characteristics of the Elizabethan audience

2.2 ELIZABETHAN AUDIENCE AND THEATRE: CHARACTERISTICS

The audience for which Shakespeare wrote his plays during the Elizabethan era was of an interesting mix. They were usually identified as both vulgar and refined. The vulgar comprised of ‘uncultured people’ like those who belonged to the category of soldiers, thieves, sailors, robbers, petty criminals men and women involved in ‘immoral’ activities. On the other hand, refined audience referred to educated men and women, people holding respectable business and those in charge of public offices. People who were critics, scholars and of course the nobilities from the royal families were also part of this category. It was necessary to cater to the tastes of both the classes. Hence Shakespeare as well as other playwrights wrote in a manner that was acceptable to both the sections.

Some critics of Elizabethan period have pointed out that Shakespeare ‘...wrote for the ‘great vulgar and the small’ in his time, not for posterity. If Queen Elizabeth and the maids of honor laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied, and slept the next night well. He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things, and if his plays pleased others, not to quarrel with them himself.’¹

During the Elizabethan era theatre functioned as a medium of public amusement. That is why it instantly became popular. The first theater of London was created when Shakespeare was around a twelve years old boy. As scholars would agree, the theatrical world of Elizabethan period actually bloomed during Shakespeare’s lifetime. The popularity of plays led to the establishment of both public as well as private playhouses. More than a hundred of companies came into existence during the time comprising of both amateur as well as lay men. This also resulted in complications associated with authorship as well as licensing of plays.

It will be of interest to know that the companies of actors resided in luxurious estates of Lord Oxford or Lord Buckingham etc. This was the time when most of the strolling troupes moved around the country performing anything that would create interest. Mostly these groups consisted of three or maximum four male members. The younger boys would play the role of women. They performed in gatherings and in open squares of the town. They also performed in the private halls of those who were noblemen or gentry. The licensing of plays caused a lot of troubles. Some not so effective performers who identified themselves as associates of some influential people actually came from dubious social backgrounds.

Under Elizabethan England the players were not allowed to perform political and religious subjects. There are documents suggesting that influential people from the country complaining about the growing number of actors and stage shows that were being performed. They were of the opinion that this place where more often

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than not indecent and even looked at religion in a disrespectful manner. The other problem was that, most of the people about whom there were complaints were people from the neighborhood and the performances gathered crowd. And with the crowd came numerous disease, and this became a matter of concern especially during the period of great plague. What needs to be mentioned here that, the theatre being a place for public to come together number of crime increased in and around the theatres. There are evidences suggesting that petty thieves and beggars flooded in these areas where the performances took place.

Queen right to curb all the social menace yet at the same time did not allow the disruption of the performances of the players. In 1576 she issued an ordinance with suggested that no performances will take place inside the city. But this was not followed seriously. The corporation of London was never in favour of the performances. But because the performance and drama enjoyed favour from the nobility as well as the queen and that of the masses the corporation could not do much about it. Even though the players were restricted from performing within the city they could not be stopped from establishing themselves just across the river. This segment was outside the ambit of the corporation. This was a clear indication that the popularities of the plays would not die down any time soon.

Because of the immense popularity of the theatre, search restrictions only led to the growth of theatre companies and a healthy rivalry immersed between all the companies and actors. Soon enough the professional actor gained public respect and eventually were identified as significant members of the society. Theatrical companies gradually became association of men who were dependent on the favour extended by the Lords and Rich men. This helped them in bringing a stability to the business while the company and the actors became part of established success which was very different from the life of the wanderers that they were once.

It is believed that sometimes the young noble man who came to watch the performance sat on the stage itself. After the first Globe Theatre was burnt down in the year 1613 it was rebuilt by King James with help of money from a nobleman. It was this rebuilt theatre which was used by Shakespeare in a latter part of his life. It is believed that during the winter period black friars were used in the City. According to historical documents, by the time the reign of Queen Elizabeth came to an end there were as many as 11 theatres in London both public and private. It is believed that a good number of people from the royal family got interested in the theatre and its performance leading to an unprecedented growth of theatre. The boys who performed at choirs and church were also trained in acting. Thus, handing over the knowledge of performance to the next generation.

The authorship and ownership underwent a complex ritual during the Elizabethan period. A drama could be composed by someone and handed over to the manager of a company of actors. The company code performed the play with or without acknowledging the author. Sometimes an author never intended to

consider the after effects of this decision. If changes were required to the existing play, then some of the popular playwrights would be asked to change it before the next production. Henslowe, who had extreme interest in the performances invariably asked both established as well as a mature playwright to keep making changes and creating new content for his next production. Most of the dramatist of that period worked as apprentices. That is why they did not hesitate to do any kind of task that they were asked to. Many a times, an apprentice composes something and later on an experienced playwright fine tunes it to make it more stage appropriate. Many a times works written in Spanish, French or Italian were created to make it more compatible to the London audience. Pirate publishers very common. There was no way authors or managers could protect themselves from the pirate Publishers.

Usually if a drama becomes popular, manager from the rival company would send his clerk who in turn will copy the lines in shorthand. There were many times when a Saturn play was reproduced with mutilated lines and scenes. Moreover, if one became extremely successful its length as well as scenes would be cut down so that they could be made more approachable and easy for the strolling players to perform. Despite its popularity and enjoying the patronage of nobility there still remain the Jungle stigma associated with the actors the playwright and anyone who was associated with theatre.

The Elizabethan theatre usually comprised of a large wooden platform which was used as a stage. It is believed that this platform was not permanent and could be moved from one place to another. The building usually had no roof. It was surrounded by galleries. This is mostly where the spectators for the performance from. There was a yard build around the platform so that the “groundlings” could watch it. This year was created by mixing Ash with Canon or hale nut shells. The back of the platform consisted of a tiring house, but the actors would go and change their costume or put on their makeup. This segment of the theatre was covered by a roof. Theatre usually had a space behind the auditorium to accommodate the machinery that were required for performance on stage. Also, the raised platforms contender trapdoor which help the actors ascend or descend the stage.

“The Elizabethan audience was accustomed to lavish, magnificent costumes, though historical and national accuracy were almost completely ignored. Shakespeare likely had very little control over the actual selection of the costumes apart from the specifics he wrote into his plays, such as Shylock’s “Jewish gabardine” or Hamlet’s “inky cloak”.²

It is believed that costumes in particular created some controversy. It was a society where clothing was regulated by law. In the idea of putting up a cloth and pretending to belong to a different class, society or even gender, created a lot of controversy. Even through the majority of the audience was fairly accommodating to accept this kind of pretence for a short period of time there was a small part Focus Group which thought this would lead to social unrest. But for the Elizabethan

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audience the costumes of the characters mattered more than the background for setting of the theatre.

It is believed that the audience of the Elizabethan era were more prone to believing every message that came through the ear. They did not show much interest towards visual discrepancy. Even the Elizabethan plays and drama played a major role in shaping the intellect of the period that it cannot be assumed that the audiences were of higher intellect. There are documents to suggest the nobility who came to watch the performances usually relaxed themselves without showing much engagement in the performance.

From today's perspective, we might feel that the Elizabethan audience was probably consisted of mostly well off people. But that was not the case. Majority of the Elizabethan audience were common people even though a healthy number of rich people were found in the spectator group. One could also find a good number of intellectual dramatists who would join the performance for its ability to convince them at an intellectual level. Even though it is not possible to construct the exact type of theatre cleared then, but it can be safely concluded that there were not many theatrical props available at that time to help create beautiful scenery for the settings. The Dramas were not very expensive during the Elizabethan period and hence audience from various class could participate in viewing it.

The price was not regulated by who or what one was doing in terms of profession or how one was pleased in terms of social hierarchy. It was mostly based on the sitting arrangement. If the sitting arrangement was very comfortable the prices would be expensive, it was if it was not, then it would be cheap. The most inexpensive at meant one had to stand. This standing room was identified as the theatre pit. Majority of the theatre lovers without any hesitation kept standing there for hours together especially while watching a lengthy performance. During the period audience of all class watched Shakespeare's performances without any hesitation. It has been recorded that Queen herself attended the theatre of Shakespeare a number of times.

'The populace in Elizabeth's grade (e.g. gentry, knights, elected representatives) mostly likely paid the three-penny (or more) admission to get the best seat in the house, which meant the most comfort and finest location in the galleries. Two penny admissions were most likely paid by citizens in the upper middle class like artisans or other actors. They were seated just like the wealthy, but the best places were not reserved for them. Also, both of these admissions prices provided a canopy from different weather conditions'³.

The Elizabethan audience wanted to watch theatre because of number of reasons. For them the public playhouses were centers of learning. Still the audience was primarily composed of people who lacked sophistication the only place they could go for if they are looking for entertainment as well as imagination was heading to a playhouse. It was an era where people did not have access to newspaper or magazine. There was hardly any culture of novels or cheat book. Theatre was the place where people could feel in their imagination and sensation with stories. This

was a place where people could expose themselves to education as well as other cultural opportunities.

At times, the performances continued from dawn to dusk. It could be warm or cold weather, but people stayed and watched the performance. Since it was an Era when the artificial lightning and its culture was not very common people had to take recourse to the natural light to convey their stories. Even though many well the people went to amphitheater to see the performances, royalty like Queen Elizabeth 1 would never visit amphitheater to watch the performance. For the Queen, normal private performances were arranged. It is believed that along with the Queen close family members or extended family members would be invited to participate in this performance. These performances would take place in some special MP theatre which were not usually used by the local public. Many people in the amphitheater usually liked to wear mask. Usually women would visit his FB theatre and hide their identity behind a mask. It is usually believed that Shakespeare's theatre was most successful because of the kind of life as well as education history provided by the plays.

The widespread rise of nationalism that took place because of English winning over the Spanish Armada provided the dramatist a chance to use historical material. And for the next close to two decades from that time of victory over the Armada till the death of Queen Elizabeth stage plays revolved around historical element. Soon this familiarity with history became a cultural hallmark for all the theatres surviving in London. The dramatists did not hesitate to refine and cultivate the powers of the audience whenever they were offered an opportunity to do so. The ignorant spectators never hesitated in taking an interest in any new information that was provided to them through the theatre. That is how they managed to gather information from the theatrical performances about law history and perspectives of the playwright. The audience in general was used to hearing the word and understanding the performances. They even did not hesitate to appreciate the monologues and debate that the characters carried out on stage. To a great extent or Elizabethan audience was used to the earlier morality plays. But it did not take them long to get used to the new acting pattern where words and performances were equally important. The new poetry sensitized the audience and the great actors fed to their imagination. It is believed that Shakespeare and his contemporaries were very lucky to have an audience which was attentive alert as well as equal to understand and believe in the new format of storytelling. They were definitely eager to know more about the secular variety of storytelling and it filled them with excitement while keeping them all through inclined towards stage performances. The number of people who came to watch the performance was extremely high. It is believed that at times more than 5 or 6 theatres would perform every day for an entire week and sometimes for weeks together. This is remarkable because we are also aware that a large population did not approve of this kind of playhouses and performance theatres. Also, this was an era where women would not be publicly allowed to go and participate in spectator ship.

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Usually the theatres would consist of only one door through which the audience could come in after paying the admission fees. Announcements were made to inform the audience about the beginning of the performance. The gathered audience would be busy playing cards smoking, eating, or drinking while they kept waiting for the performance to begin. Pickpocket were extremely frequent. In fact, disturbances were such a problem that one would experience rioting as well. It is believed that behind Shakespeare's ability to be a great writer was the contribution of his audience. Then She had to cater to a large segment of the audience forced him to diversify talent imagination and creative ability. Elizabethan drama plays a significant role in shaping the taste of the audience while contributing to the growth of drama in general in English. Drama thus occupied a significant role in the lives of the audience and help them shape as listeners and readers.

It would not be wrong to say that theatre enjoyed extreme popularity during the era of Elizabethan rule. There are no official statistics that would confirm the level of popularity though. The closing down of the theatres in the year 1642 after the Puritan revolution, clearly indicates that drama as a form was extremely popular in the period and it did threaten the authorities with its popularity. It probably indicated that there was the chance of drama influencing people resulting in them questioning the existing moral order and hence create a social disturbance.

Check Your Progress

1. State one outcome of the popularity of plays.
2. Where did the companies of actors resided?
3. Why did clothing in plays become controversial?
4. How was ticket price decided for these plays?

2.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The popularity of plays led to the establishment of both public as well as private playhouses.
2. The companies of actors resided in luxurious estates of Lord Oxford or Lord Buckingham.
3. It was a society where clothing regulated by law. The idea of putting up a cloth and pretending to belong to a different class, society, or even gender created a lot of controversy.
4. The price was not regulated by who or what one was doing in terms of profession or how one was pleased in terms of social hierarchy. It was mostly based on the sitting arrangement.

2.4 SUMMARY

- The Elizabethan theatre audiences attracted people from all classes- the upper-class nobility and the lower-class commoners.
- The Elizabethan general public (the Commoners) referred to as groundlings would pay 1 penny to stand in the ‘Pit’ of the Globe Theater.
- The audience for which Shakespeare wrote his plays during the Elizabethan era was of an interesting mix. They were usually identified as both vulgar and refined.
- The vulgar comprised of “uncultured people” like those who belonged to the category of soldiers, thieves, sailors, robbers, petty criminals, men and women involved in “immoral” activities.
- On the other hand, refined audience referred to educated men and women, people holding respectable business and those in charge of public offices.
- During the Elizabethan era, theatre functioned as medium of public amusement.
- The first theater of London was created when Shakespeare was around twelve years old boy. As scholars would agree, the theatrical world of Elizabethan period actually bloomed during Shakespeare’s lifetime.
- It will be of interest to know that the companies of actors resided in luxurious estates of Lord Oxford or Lord Buckingham etc.
- This was the time when most of the strolling troupes moved around the country performing anything that would create interest. Mostly these groups consisted of three or maximum four male members.
- Under the Elizabethan England the players were not allowed to perform on political and religious subjects.
- There are documents suggesting that influential people from the country complained about the growing number of actors and stage shows that were being performed.
- Because of the immense popularity of the theatre, search restrictions only led to the growth of movie theatre companies and a healthy rivalry immersed between all the companies and actors.
- Usually if a drama became popular, manager from the rival company would send his clerk who in turn will copy the lines in shorthand.
- The Elizabethan theatre usually comprised of a large wooden platform which was used as a stage. It is believed that this platform was not permanent and could be moved from one place to another.
- It is believed that costumes in particular created some controversy. It was a society where clothing regulated by law.

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NOTES

- The dramas were not very expensive during the Elizabethan period and hence audience from various class could participate in viewing it.
- The price was not regulated by who or what one was doing in terms of profession or how one was pleased in terms of social hierarchy. It was mostly based on the sitting arrangement.
- The populace in Elizabeth's grade (e.g. gentry, knights, elected representatives) mostly likely paid the three-penny (or more) admission to get the best seat in the house, which meant the most comfort and finest location in the galleries.
- The widespread rise of nationalism that took place because of English winning over the Spanish Armada provided the dramatist a chance to use historical material.
- And for the next close to two decades from that time of victory over Armada till the death of Queen Elizabeth stage plays revolved around historical element.
- It would not be wrong to say that theatre enjoyed and extreme popularity during the era of Elizabethan rule.

2.5 KEY WORDS

- **Puritan:** It refers to a member of a group of English Protestants of the late 16th and 17th centuries who regarded the Reformation of the Church under Elizabeth I as incomplete and sought to simplify and regulate forms of worship.
- **Friar:** It refers to a member of any of certain religious orders of men, especially the four mendicant orders (Augustinians, Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans).
- **Amphitheatre:** It is (especially in Greek and Roman architecture) an open circular or oval building with a central space surrounded by tiers of seats for spectators, for the presentation of dramatic or sporting events.

2.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short-note on the features of Elizabethan theatre.
2. How were historical and political elements incorporated in the play? What were their significance?
3. What led to the close of theatre? What threatened its popularity during the Elizabethan era?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Describe the characteristics of Elizabethan era in detail. Use examples to substantiate your answer.
2. Discuss the characteristics of Elizabethan audience. What was the class division in the audience and how did it affect the price they paid and where they sat during the play?

*The Elizabethan
Audience and Theatre*

NOTES

2.7 FURTHER READINGS

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Footnotes

1. William Hazlitt, 'Characters of Shakespeare's Play'
2. <http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/120766/5/chapter-4.pdf>
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UNIT 3 SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY: CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC

Structure

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objectives
- 3.2 Shakespearean Comedy and its Features
- 3.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 3.4 Summary
- 3.5 Key Words
- 3.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 3.7 Further Readings

3.0 INTRODUCTION

Comedy has always been disregarded as a form of literature. On the other hand, tragedy has many times been unnecessarily appreciated. For example, Aristotle says: “As for Comedy, it is (as has been observed) an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault, but only as regards one particular kind, the ridiculous, which is a species of the ugly. The ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.” (Poetics)

In this unit, you will study the features of Shakespearean comedy in detail.

3.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe tragedy and comedy in detail
- Explain the features of Shakespearean comedy
- Discuss classical and romantic comedy in plays

3.2 SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY AND ITS FEATURES

Aristotle’s understanding of comedy as discussed above is undoubtedly short and appears to be only something mentioned in passing. Most of the major critics from

the antiquity have spent their energy in trying to study tragedy. The reason was very simple. Tragedy after all dealt with problems which were deeper in nature while comedy dealt with things which were superficial in life. Of course, this is only a limited understanding of the genre of comedy. Over the ages, comedy has always attained its meaning in context to the place and time in which it is produced. At times comedies are produced to provide entertainment while at other times through comedies wisdom is celebrated. If we consider the writings of Aristophanes, we realize that most of his compositions were meant to satirize the contemporary society. Even Plautus and Terence too composed comedies to highlight the follies and vices of the people around them. On the other hand, we have George Bernard Shaw whose comedies were all about ideas and reading them make one feel wiser and better.

In context to literary creation, Polonius had once mentioned: ‘neither a lender nor a borrower be’. But Shakespeare did not believe in this world view. Shakespeare generally borrowed as well as allowed others to lend from his creativity. About the comic ideas of his contemporaries as well as producers depended on how one wanted his ideas to get shared with the contemporary audience. His uniqueness of style made Dr. Johnson mention in his work that Shakespeare’s “tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy instinct.”

Shakespeare never portrayed ugly or ridiculous as the major plot of his comedy. He denounced the classical parameters of comedy and introduced unheard of new elements. Both Moliere and Ben Johnson incorporated folly into their comedy. They were interested in reforming the society while pointing out the mistakes. For them comedy was a platform to convey the world that bad things must not be valued much. George Meredith, who is the popular believer in the power of comedy as social sanitizer finds it amusing that Shakespeare’s comedies cannot be easily brought down to a single formula.

According to him, ‘Shakespeare is a well-spring of characters which are saturated with the comic spirit; with more of what we call lifeblood than is to be found anywhere out of Shakespeare: and they are of this world, but they are of this world enlarged to our embrace by imagination, and by great poetic imagination.’ As we read Shakespeare, we understand that Shakespeare’s comedies are limitless in nature: they are poetic, they are lyrical, they are in conflict with the existing parameters of comedy and they are rare. It must be mentioned that, Shakespeare was not being extremely original. He was to a great extent influenced by his contemporaries like – Lyly, Greene, Lodge, Peele. Many critics have pointed out how the world of Shakespeare has a striking resemblance to the comedy settings of Lyly. Of course, Shakespeare would have been a path breaker or a trend setter, had Lyly not been his predecessor. Apart from being generally influenced by Lyly, scholars have pointed out more than 50 instances where Shakespeare has borrowed from Lyly. Again, even though Lyly’s influence on Shakespeare was obvious, there is no denial that Greene had a greater influence on him as a writer.

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The adorable women who appear in Greene's writings also find a way in the idealized women that Shakespeare mentioned of in his plays.

Going through his earlier comedies, one can identify the distinct classical influence. Even though he was briefly acquainted with Latin and Greek, yet he was definitely familiar with the works of Plautus and Terence. These two authors very extremely popular during the Elizabethan England.

One of the most distinct feature of Shakespeare's comedies especially of the earlier phase was the distinct influence of the classical writing. By now we all know that the *Comedy of Errors* was influenced by Amphitruo. Shakespeare managed to change the Latin works into something more exciting through his power of imagination. Without a doubt ' *The Taming of the Shrew* is much better than its original influence. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is one of the best examples of Shakespeare's craftsmanship as a playwright. This is the first time that Shakespeare steps into the world of romance and make believe. H. B. Charlton believes that *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is not a comedy but a romance. And that is precisely why the characters in the play do not resemble the people from the real world. Again, if we consider a play like *Love's Labour's Lost* we realise that it is Import of wit and has nothing to do with romance at all. The character who appear in the play are extremely sophisticated and witty something that the readers can come across in the plays of Sheraton and Congrave.

One of the salient aspects of Shakespearean comedies is that William Shakespeare's comedies more often than not end in marriages. In a general scenario, marriages symbolize the assimilation of happiness, prospect of a beautiful future and the consolidation of the blood line. For Shakespeare the symbol of marriage is so integral and significant that at times we witness more than one marriage taking place by the end of the play. A quick recap of *Twelfth Night* will show that there were three marriages by the end of the play. And the same happens in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the final segments (Act V) of *As You Like It* we come across 'High wedlock' celebrating four marriages. In each of the play, the couples find happiness after going through a series of misunderstandings. Of course, critics cite examples from *Much Ado about Nothing*¹ and *Measure for Measure*² to suggest that some marriages are designed to suit the purpose and doesn't appear to be a natural extension of love.

As already mentioned, misconceptions play a pivotal role in Shakespearean comedies. Numerous confusing and complicated situations appear in the lives of the lovers paving way for numerous funny and humorous situations. The friends of Benedick³ who seemed to play the devil between Beatrice and Benedick are finally the ones who bring the lovers together. Their trick helps the audience as well as Benedick to realize that Beatrice's rudeness was actually her concealed affection. In a similar fashion, Beatrice's friends also make fun of her feelings, but this only brings both the characters closer and helps them grow in path of love. But these interplay of confusion feels amusing because we (audience) are aware of the fact that the ending will be a happy one.

Shakespeare's comedies usually rely on simple misunderstandings as well as harmless deceptions. The dramatic irony that penetrates into the text because of these confusions gives an extra edge to the audience to identify the real nature of the characters. One of the most striking examples is *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The endless magic that the love potion creates is not just humorous through the series of problems it creates but is also crucial in finding true love. The forest which turned into the encomium of chaos and transgression eventually turns into the refuge where the lovers reunite, and their love is solemnized through marriage.

Another unique source of comedy for Shakespeare was introducing cross dressed characters into the narrative. *Twelfth Night* had Viola disguised as Cesario, had Olivia falling for her which creates ripples of confusion. But with each mistake committed the characters come on their own and learn something new about life and living. In *As You Like It* we have Orlando's staged wooing of Rosalind. But what made all these cross-dressing episodes even believable and interesting was that during Shakespeare's time women characters were played by young men, thus switching of sexualities was both acceptable for the actors as well as audience.

The vague settings too help in building the momentum for a harmless commotion and then making people fall in love. When the story unfolds in an uncertain date in Illyria people are puzzled. What makes this vagueness even more pronounced is the Italian looking Orsino's court being juxtaposed to English appearance of Olivia's household. Many of the Shakespearean comedies display his fondness for imaginary settings. One can witness the magical woods of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* while enjoying the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* without any distraction is set in England itself but we all not this one was created only to exploit the unprecedented success of Falstaff. Shakespeare somehow managed to include an indefinite space for comedies. During his time, it was common place to see the Comedy taking place in London while the tragedy is taking place in Italy or France or Spain. Comedies were always closer to the English-speaking nations. We all know how Ben Johnson, had originally set *Every Man in His humour* (1598) in Italy. But it soon changes the settings to London to incorporate the demands of the contemporary times. Later on, he made London, the centre of his works as reflected in *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew fair*. This obsession with setting London as the city of the many adventures created an entire genre of literature called "city comedy".

Historical comedy has always been considered to be of lesser significance than tragedy or history. That is why many of Shakespeare's contemporaries tried to incorporate satire in their plays. Satire has always enjoyed a better command in terms of literary acceptance than comedies. Even classical authors approved of satires than that of comedies. The whole genre paucity comedies had a purpose to them. They were meant to highlight the follies and vices that the contemporary world was involved in. Shakespeare was not interested in the typical form of satire. But given that even comedy did not have too restricted an approach in his time he had the liberty of experimenting with his comedies. For example, let us

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consider the quarto edition of *Love's Labour's Lost*. The play is identified as 'A Pleasant Conceited Comedy'. Again, the quarto edition of the *Taming of the Shrew* calls it a witty and pleasant comedy'. While if we take a note of the title page of *The Merchant of Venice* we get to see that it is called as 'The most excellent Histories of the Merchant of Venice'. It is believed that this title pages were actually composed by the bookseller and not by the playwrights themselves. This was probably intended more as a marketing trick to help audience identify or make the book seller sell the book to a specific audience by playing around with the words. In today's time we consider *The Taming of the Shrew* as a text about sexual politics. On the other hand the title page of the first quarto clearly seems to acknowledge that the play was wittier and probably had nothing to do with sexual politics.

The segment of tragicomedy owes its existence to Shakespeare. Shakespeare can be easily identified with four such plays that he composes during the later phase of his prolific journey: *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*. Even though each of these plays ends with a marriage yet we all know that they are not the best examples where one gets the opportunity to laugh. Each of these plays highlight other forms of emotions like anger, bitterness, jealousy and violence. We also come across some deaths, atropes which is not expected to get reflected in a comedy. Critics insist on identifying them "romances" and not as comedies per se. But again, if we take a closer look at some of the earlier comedies by Shakespeare like *Troilus and Cressida*, *Measure for Measure*, *All is Well that Ends Well* etc. we can see a distinct sense of dark material looming and this in turn challenges our general notion of comedy.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is the ultimate romantic text. It is littered with the spirit of dream, it is a story about love, and it is a play where realism and supernaturalism are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to identify one from the other. The various pairs of lovers that we come across fall in love because of mistaken identity while Puck plays the mischief monger.

During the period of earlier comedies Shakespeare was working as an apprentice. This was a time when he was still struggling to find his own voice and create an identity for himself. He was experimenting with the idea of love as we see in the *Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The heroes and heroines of the romantic comedies that were written by Shakespeare invariably met in a place that was definitely away from the real-life struggles and disturbance. It probably was a make-believe world that was "a mixture of old England and Utopia". Probably the *Comedy of Errors* and *The Merchant of Venice* are the only exceptions where the audience is exposed to the harsh realities of life.

Romanticism in Shakespeare is significantly about remoteness and unfamiliarity. It is a created world that is illuminated by the imaginative powers of the author. By introducing an unfamiliar time and space Shakespeare successfully incorporated the idea of make believe where logic can be tweaked based on the

requirement of the plot without causing any disturbance to the audience. This also helped Shakespeare to remove the audience from the realities of life. His romantic comedies without a doubt managed to blend realism and imagination.

Both the characters as well as the scenes in the play can be viewed as magic which has the ability to transform reality. The setting is definitely imaginative and has no historical element to it. Each one of them seems to be carved out of a beautiful fancy. Yet at the same time they are relatable despite their remoteness. One can identify the contemporary figures and uses of contemporary fashion sense in a play like *Love's Labour's Lost*. thus, despite its fairy tale element the audience finds enough reason to feel associated with the performance that s/he is watching.

In the comedies of Shakespeare, it is usually the women who take the initiative. We find the hero strutting over the idea and following a tragic line of thought. In the comedies the hero usually turns out to be subordinate to the heroine. Ruskin believes that Shakespearean plays are devoid of any heroes. It is all about the female protagonists. *The Merchant of Venice* would be of no fun without Portia and *As You Like It* would have felt incomplete without Rosalind.

Many scholars insist that Shakespeare has emerged successfully from the school of life. He had a passion for observation and he laughed chronicling life as it was. According to him, women probably felt a little out of place especially in tragedies. But without a doubt he also understood that in everyday life a woman was the epicenter of the daily affairs. Joys and happiness always revolved around the women and she was someone whose right cannot be challenged.

The woman about whom Shakespeare writes, irrespective of whether they are the Queen of the kitchen maid, possess an intense womanliness about them. They all have achieved success in their lives and they worked hard to conquer their beloved for the sake of love. In the comedies the heroines are the balance characters. They are blessed with the power of imagination, intelligence, emotion and enterprise. They are inspiring figure and they are willing to make sacrifices for the sake of love. Some scholars believe that in a female character Shakespeare love story unite heart and brain in such a manner that they provide an unexpected equilibrium in the world of disturbance that we are part of.

If we compare the heroine from the tragedies with the heroines of the comedies, we can get to know that the female protagonist of the comedies is more powerful, enterprising and mature. Any representative heroine of the romantic comedy commands our respect and admiration because she loves to read the other characters from the fore front. These women are attractive and witty and rely on their actions to change the course of fate. Every time a situation of crisis emerges the heroes are found to be struggling with the situation the woman slowly and steadily creates a positive situation which is built around hope and happiness.

Romantic comedy is a happy mixture of romance and comedy. This is a world where problems and issues are not very intense, and the male and female

NOTES

NOTES

protagonist usually lead a happy life. But in contrast to this romantic world, the world of tragedy is about the harshness of life. It is a pastiche of high world of romance and low world of comedy. It is difficult to reduce or define a comedy by Shakespeare into some formula. As it has been pointed out by many critics that the plots of Shakespearean comedies are defined by a number of things. His comedies are created from tragedy, comedy, and satire. But his satires are not bitter. He does not criticize the society or the individual. He does not laugh at the characters instead he laughs along with them. Unlike Ben Jonson, his contemporary, Shakespeare's satires were not intolerant. It was devoid of any kind of irony or bitterness or even cynicism. Shakespeare was filled with sympathy and humanity.

He uses the clowns and fools of his plays to achieve his purpose. The female protagonist and the fools work together to provide happiness in his make-believe world. We come across the professional fools like Touchstone, Feste and Moth. They are witty and sophisticated. They are aware of how to make fun of the world around them. Again, on the other hand, we have fools who are not so cultured like Dull, Gobbo, Bottom et al. They are absolutely ignorant, and this becomes the epicenter of amusement for the audience. The audience is left to wonder as to what extent can someone be stupid enough. Touchstone is wise while Feste is vulgar. On the other hand, Dogberry is full of life.

Much Ado About Nothing borders on tragedy. The lady, for no fault of her, turn into a victim. On the other hand, the presence of Dogberry and his witticism manages to marry comedy with realism. In *Merchant of Venice*, the main plot revolves around signing of a bond. While we come across a number of subplots including 3 love stories. *Merchant of Venice* many a times has been identified as a text which talks about tolerance. During the Elizabethan period Jews were extremely hated and were persecuted without reason. In the play Shylock is represented as a character who is dignified and represents suffering and injustice meted out at the Jewish community. In *Merchant of Venice* we see Venice and Belmont represent two different ideas. Venice becomes the symbol of reality and commerce, while Belmont is all about love and romance. The play is a perfect mixture of seriousness and happiness while keeping a balance between reality and romance. In *As You Like It* romance is incarnate. It is a play of adventure romance and restoration of moral order. Love is the leitmotif in the play. The play starts off on a note of bitterness hatred and discord. But the play come to an end with good overpowering evil and beauty nobility and love being brought back to life.

The Twelfth Night is a combination of romance and comedy. Shakespeare has played around with all kinds of love through all the characters that appear in the play. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a satire on romantic comedy. The only element of romance that one can find in the play is through Anne page.

On the other hand, we have the dark comedies on the problem like *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* etc. where the world of happy comedies is questioned. These are not identified by love tolerance

or sympathy which is the general characteristics of Shakespearean comedy. The plays identify that Shakespeare was no longer in love with the idea of love. *Troilus and Cressida* is about love and war. *All's Well That Ends Well* does not engage in a heroine who is saint like and *Measure for Measure* suggests that love can turn into lust especially in dark comedies.

*Shakespearean Comedy:
Classical and Romantic*

NOTES

Check Your Progress

1. State the features of Shakespearean comedy.
2. Name some of Shakespeare's influencers from whom he drew inspiration.
3. How are the men and women portrayed in Shakespeare's comedy?
4. What is the plot of *The Twelfth Night*?

3.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Shakespeare's comedies are limitless in nature: they are poetic, they are lyrical, they are in conflict with the existing parameters of comedy and they are rare.
2. Shakespeare was greatly influenced by his contemporaries like – Lyly, Greene, Lodge and Peele.
3. In the comedies of Shakespeare, it is usually the women who takes the initiative. We find the hero strutting over the idea and following a tragic line of thought.
4. *The Twelfth Night* is a combination of romance and comedy. Shakespeare has played around with all kinds of love through all the characters that appear in the Play.

3.4 SUMMARY

- Comedy has always been disregarded as a form of literature. On the other hand, tragedy has many times been unnecessarily appreciated.
- The ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.
- Tragedy after all dealt with problems which were deeper in nature while comedy is dealt with things which were superficial in life.
- At times comedies are produced to provide entertainment while at other times through comedies wisdom is celebrated. If we consider the writings

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- of Aristophanes, we realize that most of his compositions were meant to satirize the contemporary society.
- In context to literary creation, Polonius had once mentioned: neither a lender nor a borrower be”. But Shakespeare did not believe in this world view.
 - As we read Shakespeare we understand that Shakespeare’s comedies are limitless in nature: they are poetic, they are lyrical, they are in conflict with the existing parameters of comedy and they are rare.
 - One of the most distinct feature of Shakespeare’s comedies especially of the earlier phase was the distinct influence of the classical writing.
 - The *Comedy of Errors* was influenced by Amphitruo. Shakespeare managed to change the Latin works into something more exciting through his power of imagination.
 - One of the salient aspects of Shakespearean comedies is that William Shakespeare’s comedies more often than not end in marriages.
 - In a general scenario, marriages symbolises the assimilation of happiness, prospect of a beautiful future and the consolidation of the blood line.
 - For Shakespeare the symbol of marriage is so integral and significant that at times we witness more than one marriage taking place by the end of the play.
 - As already mentioned, misconceptions play a pivotal role in Shakespearean comedies. Numerous confusing and complicated situations appear in the lives of the lovers paving way for numerous funny and humorous situations.
 - The dramatic irony that penetrates into the text because of these confusions gives an extra edge to the audience to identify the real nature of the characters. One of the most striking examples is *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.
 - Another unique source of comedy for Shakespeare was introducing cross dressed characters into the narrative.
 - The vague settings too help in building the momentum for a harmless commotion and then making people fall in love.
 - Historical comedy has always been considered to be of lesser significance than tragedy or history. That is why many of Shakespeare’s contemporaries tried to incorporate satire in their plays.
 - The segment of tragicomedy owes its existence to Shakespeare. Shakespeare can be easily identified with four such plays that he composes during the later phase of his prolific journey: *The Winter’s Tale*, *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*.
 - *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is the ultimate romantic text. It is littered with the spirit of dream, it is a story about love, and it is a play where realism and supernaturalism are intertwined in such a way that it is difficult to identify one from the other.

- Romanticism in Shakespeare is significantly about remoteness and unfamiliarity. It is a created world that is illuminated by the imaginative powers of the author.
- By introducing an unfamiliar time and space Shakespeare successfully incorporated the idea of make believe where logic can be tweaked based on the requirement of the plot without causing any disturbance today internet of the audience.
- Romantic comedy is a happy mixture of romance and comedy. This is a world where problems and issues are not very intense, and the male and female protagonist usually lead a happy life. But in contrast to this romantic world the world of comedy is about the harshness of life.
- *Much Ado About Nothing* borders on tragedy. The lady, for no fault of her, turn into a victim.
- *The Twelfth Night* is a combination of romance and comedy.
- *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is a satire on romantic comedy. The only element of romance that one can find in the play is through Anne page.

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3.5 KEY WORDS

- **Supernaturalism:** It is the belief in an otherworldly realm or reality that, in one way or another, is commonly associated with all forms of religion.
- **Realism:** It is the attitude or practice of accepting a situation as it is and being prepared to deal with it accordingly.
- **Romanticism:** It is a movement in the arts and literature that originated in the late 18th century, emphasizing inspiration, subjectivity, and the primacy of the individual.

3.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a short note on Aristotle's understanding of comedy.
2. Discuss the features of classical and romantic comedy.
3. What kind of criticism do comedies receive?
4. What are historical comedies?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Give a descriptive analysis of Shakespearean comedy. What were the major plots of Shakespeare's comedies? Give examples for your answer.

2. Differentiate between Shakespearean tragedy and comedy. What is a tragicomedy?

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3.7 FURTHER READINGS

Wells, Stanley W. 2003. *Shakespeare: For All Time*. UK: Oxford University Press.

Traub, Valerie. 2016. *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*. UK: Oxford University Press

DK. 2015. *The Shakespeare Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*. UK: Dorling Kindersley Ltd.

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Footnotes

1. Claudio and Hero
2. Duke and Isabella
3. Much Ado about Nothing

UNIT 4 SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

NOTES

Structure

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Objectives
- 4.2 Shakespearean Tragedy and its Features
- 4.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 4.4 Summary
- 4.5 Key Words
- 4.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 4.7 Further Readings

4.0 INTRODUCTION

A play penned by Shakespeare himself, or a play written in the style of Shakespeare by a different author is known as a Shakespearean tragedy. Shakespearean tragedy has got its own specific features, which distinguish it from other kinds of tragedies. It must be kept in mind that Shakespeare is mostly influenced by Aristotle's theory of tragedy in his works. The elements of a Shakespearean tragedy are discussed in detail in this Unit. The word tragedy was derived from the Greek word *tragoidia*, which means 'the song of the goat.' It is called 'the song of the goat' because in ancient Greece the theatre performers used to wear goatskin costumes to represent satyrs. A Shakespearean tragedy is a specific type of tragedy (a written work with a sad ending where the hero either dies or ends up mentally, emotionally, or spiritually devastated beyond recovery) that also includes all of the additional elements which distinguishes it from usual tragedies.

4.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe tragedies
- Discuss the features of Shakespearean tragedy
- Define a tragic hero

4.2 SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY AND ITS FEATURES

Aristotle defines tragedy as, "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories,

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each kind brought in separately; in the parts of the work; in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion.” Scholars insist that this definition had influenced the neo classical dramatists of Europe to a great extent. Shakespearean tragedies are usually divided into four different segments: early tragedies, historical tragedies, major tragedies and Roman tragedies.

The early tragedies would comprise of *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. After the publication of Seneca’s *Ten Tragedies* in the year 1581, it greatly influenced playwrights of the Elizabethan period. Critics argue that if there were no Seneca the Elizabethan tragedies would have never have shaped up. The theme of blood and revenge, supernaturalism and madness became so popular that almost every other dramatist tried incorporating these themes into their writings. *Titus Andronicus* one of the earliest tragedies written by Shakespeare looks almost like a replica of a work composed by Seneca. Titus was the Roman general who lost most of his children in the battle that he fought against the goths. He decides to avenge everything that has gone wrong with him. Even though in the first glance Titus looks like someone inspired by Seneca because of the celebration of blood and death yet at the same time there is no denial that Titus is one of those earlier characters of Shakespeare who distinctly displays an element of intense tragedy that is reflected in the later tragedies of Shakespeare. If we consider *Romeo and Juliet*, there is a very little strain of Seneca. In fact, one of the most distinguishable features of *Romeo and Juliet* is that they do not possess any tragic flaw. They are the victims of the faith they are not victims of their own doing. The famous author Chaucer in his Monk’s tale suggest that a tragedy is a story where we talk about someone of great instrument and he has fallen into misery and wretchedness. Analysed from this perspective Richard definitely fits into the bill of a tragic king. He was somebody from an extremely influential position and later he was imprisoned and killed. He is one of those heroes from the major tragedies who are responsible for their own downfall. Richard is someone who is made to handle hostile circumstances. He is someone who is tragic flaw revolved around him being sentimental. Yet at the same time there is no tragic conflict.

If we consider *Richard III*, we realise that Shakespeare was definitely under the influence of his contemporaries and predecessors like Marlowe and Machiavelli. This is probably the only text which has been off and on compared with *Macbeth*. But of course, *Macbeth* stands in a more superior position because he is a poet and he is caught by his ambition which is regulated by morality. Even when he is ready to occupy the throne after causing such unrest and feeling glad we cannot but admire him through the conflicting imagination that he was struggling with. Richard, on the other hand, is not a tragic hero like that of Macbeth. But at the same time, in the battle of Bosworth, his sufferings come out clearly through the tricks of conference that we come across. We see how the ghosts of the victims come to curse him. Interestingly, Richard is an antagonist who shows the distinct side of humanity.

Shakespearean tragedies albeit are not regulated by rules. In fact, Shakespeare has never won any inclination towards adherence of rules. His tragedies identify the evolution of a new form of tragedy. The tragedies produced by the Greeks were highly rhetorical as well as political. While for Shakespeare tragedy is mostly a mental conflict. It is more layered more complicated and along with the divine intervention it also talks about the human aspect. Greek tragedy also had a strong streak of religious undertone to it. But Shakespearean tragedies are more flesh and blood and secular. In *Romeo and Juliet* as well as in *Antony and Cleopatra* we find both the male and female protagonist are of equal significance. The protagonists in *Antony and Cleopatra* are equally more active and on the other hand the hero and heroine of *Romeo and Juliet* are equally powerless. Even if we consider *Macbeth* we realise that the heroine who has surfaced as a powerful figure who has managed to suppress her womanhood is finally pushed into insanity and eventually death. It more often than not highlights the plight of the main character and the woman protagonist is invariably side-lined.

We cannot deny that in certain aspects, Shakespeare's tragedies resemble Greek tragedies. Aristotle in his *Poetics* talks about certain characteristics that a good tragic hero should possess. According to him, hero should be of greater magnitude than an ordinary man, but he should not be a man of complete virtues; yet he must possess elements of greatness. The hero must be someone of higher stature and his fate would somewhere impact the welfare of the entire nation. It is essential that the hero must enjoy a reputation and prosperity of such greatness that when fortune strikes him the world around him definitely gets affected. A situation like this will be responsible for evoking our pity and sympathy for this person. Even though at the broader level he has to resemble an ordinary man yet he is noble attitude and patient should make him larger than life only then would the audience idealize him.

If we consider Shakespeare's heroes from this light, we realise that most of his tragic heroes are of noble stature. After all Romeo is an aristocrat, Antony is an emperor, Coriolanus is a general, Brutus is a man of high position, Richard II is the king, Titus is a general etc. The heroes of Shakespearean tragedies are of such significance that they hold special place in the public domain. *Macbeth* is initially a general and Elevators himself to the position of the king. Hamlet is a prince who has been deprived of his Throne. King Lear is a king who wrong decision collapses the functioning of the kingdom. They are all great people who suffer from fatal flaws.

All the heroes of the major tragedies are people who have lost any hope in life or are in the brink of leaving this world existence. Macbeth is someone who degenerated himself over the years, King Lear is someone who is extremely elderly, and Ortho has seen decline in his existence. Even though Hamlet is still in his 20s he is someone who is completely sick of life. It is this profound melancholy as well as bloom that surrounds these four heroes which makes them the best tragic

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example. The inherent weakness that is ingrained in every Shakespearean tragic Hero makes them even a great character while making them appear as quintessential human.

In Shakespeare, the protagonists are responsible for their own downfall. They participate in their own doom. Each of the tragedies is actually a sequence of errors which finally culminates into something extremely tragic. The Shakespearean tragic hero is without fail responsible for his own actions, but fate plays a major role, even though insignificant. That is why we can really say that Oedipus is different than Hamlet, Macbeth or Othello and Lear because his life was regulated by fate. Of course, there are critics who believe that Oedipus who was consumed by pride and that was his fatal flaw. Being someone who was part of the renaissance, Shakespeare undoubtedly believed that a man is a free agent and he has the right to make independent choices. But possessing the mind which is of utmost power and significance that at times he becomes blind to certain things which are crystal clear to the readers or audience. Othello falls into the trap played by Iago because he is unable to judge the situation properly. Lear's problem was also a problem of judgement. He was unable to identify the sincere Cordelia from the scheming and plotting daughters that he trusted. Shakespeare's idea of tragedy has evolved over the years and is not confined just to his characters. The actions revolve around the powers of mankind which are more often than not difficult to be dealt with and they fall prey to it.

Shakespeare was someone who knew how to keep the balance between destiny and free will. Shakespeare weighs faith and responsibility in equal measure and realises that both are equally important aspects of creating a great tragedy maintaining a certain balance between them and projecting faith and responsibility as complementary to one another. Of course, there are other critics who believed that most of Shakespearean plays are based on chance and accident and less on fate. For example, if we consider Othello, we come across numerous instances that is invented by Iago to trap him and he willingly falls into it. Many critics believe that 'villains' in Shakespeare's plots do not hold much significance because the heroes eventually become victims of their own flaws and meet their end. After all Edmund and Iago (*King Lear* and *Othello*) only attack the beauty and good and rest is being because of misjudgement.

A Shakespearean hero is always torn between conflict. This conflict is both internal as well as external. Like George Bernard Shaw says- no conflict no drama- we witness something similar shaping up in Shakespeare. The soul of the tragic hero is constantly struggling with its own self. If we take Macbeth, we see that the external conflict is between Macbeth himself and while the internal conflict is in his conscience. In a similar fashion, the conflict that takes place in Hamlet in the external space is with his relation to his uncle - Polonius, and also with Laertes. At the same time, the inner conflict takes place inside his own mind where is trying to handle desire for revenge, passion, ambition everything at the same time. In *Julius Caesar*, Brutus is subjected to conflict between his democratic ideals as well as

his personal loyalty that he owes to his friend. Taking a look at *Antony and Cleopatra*, we will see that Antony is torn apart between Egypt and Rome which symbolises love and duty.

The tragic heroes of Shakespeare are invariably solitary and lonely figures. They are usually devoid of friends; their near and dear ones cannot help them. No one usually has access to the conflict that goes on inside their minds. They suffer without being able to express and die, but at the same time. Despite their deaths, one never feels dejected or rejected in life because with that comes a bold affirmation that all the positive values will be restored again. In Shakespearean tragedy, the hero is not the only person who always dies. There are other people who die along with him. Romeo and Juliet, they both die. Othello and Desdemona leave this world. Hamlet and Ophelia, Brutus and Portia, Antony and Cleopatra, they all die. Death is inevitable in a Shakespearean tragedy. But the moral order is also being stored in a Shakespearean tragedy. The antagonist pay the penalty. Edmund, Goneril, Regan perish away, Iago dies. Cordelia's death is Lear's punishment. In Shakespearean tragedy the evil triumph's over the good for a short duration. In the end one can see the restoration of the moral order. That is why Shakespearean tragedy is never pessimistic.

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Check Your Progress

1. Define tragedy.
2. Name any two early tragedies of Shakespeare.
3. How does Chaucer define tragedy?
4. State one feature of a Shakespearean tragedy.

4.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Aristotle defines tragedy as, "the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately; in the parts of the work; in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion."
2. The early tragedies comprise of *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*.
3. Chaucer in his monk's tale suggest that a tragedy is a story where we talk about someone of great instrument and he has fallen into misery and wretchedness.
4. In Shakespearean tragedy, the protagonists are responsible for their own downfall.

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4.4 SUMMARY

- A play penned by Shakespeare himself, or a play written in the style of Shakespeare by a different author is known as a Shakespearean tragedy.
- Aristotle defines tragedy as, “the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately; in the parts of the work; in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotion.”
- Scholars insist that this definition had influenced the neo classical dramatists of Europe to a great extent.
- Shakespearean tragedies are usually divided into four different segments: early tragedies, historical tragedies, major tragedies and Roman tragedies.
- The early tragedies would comprise of *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*.
- After the publication of Seneca’s *Ten Tragedies* in the year 1581, it greatly playwrights of the Elizabethan period.
- The themes of blood and revenge, supernaturalism and madness became so popular that almost every other dramatist tried incorporating these themes into their writings.
- *Titus Andronicus* one of the earliest tragedies written by Shakespeare looks almost like a replica of a work composed by Seneca.
- Even though in the first glance Titus looks like someone inspired by Seneca because of the celebration of blood and death, yet at the same time, there is no denial that Titus is one of those earlier characters of Shakespeare who distinctly displays an element of intense tragedy that is reflected in the later tragedies of Shakespeare.
- If we consider *Romeo and Juliet*, there is a very little strain of Seneca. In fact, one of the most distinguishable feature of Romeo and Juliet is that they do not possess any tragic flaw.
- The famous author, Chaucer, in his Monk’s tale suggest that a tragedy is a story where we talk about someone of great instrument and he has fallen into misery and wretchedness.
- If we consider *Richard III* we realise that Shakespeare was definitely under the influence of his contemporaries and predecessors like Marlowe and Machiavelli. This is probably the only text which has been off and on compared with *Macbeth*.
- Shakespearean tragedies albeit are not regulated by rules. In fact, Shakespeare has never shown any inclination towards adherence of rules. His tragedies identify the evolution of a new form of tragedy.

- The tragedies produced by the Greeks were highly rhetorical as well as political.
- In *Romeo and Juliet* as well as in *Antony and Cleopatra* we find both the male and female protagonist are of equal significance.
- The protagonists in *Antony and Cleopatra* are equally more active and on the other hand the hero and heroine of *Romeo and Juliet* are equally powerless.
- Even if we consider *Macbeth* we realise that the heroine after surfacing as a powerful figure who has managed to suppress her womanhood is finally pushed into insanity and eventually death.
- All the heroes of the major tragedies are people who have lost any hope in life or are at the brink of leaving this world existence.
- In Shakespearean tragedies, the protagonists are responsible for their own downfall. They participate in their own doom.
- The Shakespearean tragic hero is without fail responsible for his own actions, but fate plays a major role, even though insignificant. That is why we can really say that Oedipus is different than Hamlet, Macbeth or Othello and Lear because his life was regulated by fate.
- Of course, there are critics who believe that Oedipus who was consumed by pride and that was his fatal flaw.
- Shakespeare was someone who knew how to keep the balance between destiny and free will.
- Shakespeare weighs faith and responsibility in equal measure and realises that both are equally important aspects of creating a great tragedy maintaining a certain balance between them and projecting faith and responsibility as complementary to one another.
- A Shakespearean hero is always torn between conflict. This conflict is both internal as well as external. Like George Bernard Shaw says- no conflict no drama- we witness something similar shaping up in Shakespeare.
- The tragic heroes of Shakespeare are invariably solitary and lonely figures. They are usually devoid of friends; their near and dear ones cannot help them.
- Death is inevitable in a Shakespearean tragedy. But the moral order is also being stored in a Shakespearean tragedy.

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4.5 KEY WORDS

- **Pessimistic:** Someone tending to see the worst aspect of things or believe that the worst will happen.

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- **Restoration:** It was the event in 1660 when Charles the Second became King of England, Scotland, and Ireland after a period when there had been no King or Queen.
- **Melancholy:** It is sadness that lasts for a long period of time, often without any obvious reason.

4.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the characteristics of a tragic hero.
2. What is a tragedy? What were Aristotle's thoughts on the same?
3. How do the characters in Shakespearean tragedies justify their roles? Discuss.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Discuss the features of a Shakespearean tragedy in detail. How is it different from other tragedies? Give examples for your answer.
2. Draw a comparative study between various tragedies by Shakespeare.

4.7 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 5 SHAKESPEARE'S HISTORICAL PLAYS

NOTES

Structure

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Objectives
- 5.2 The History Plays by Shakespeare
- 5.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 5.4 Summary
- 5.5 Key Words
- 5.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 5.7 Further Readings

5.0 INTRODUCTION

In general, the term history play is identified with those plays (can be either tragedy or comedy) in which the action that takes the plot forward and the major themes that are included in the play are primarily political in nature. They might speak about an individual or the society, but politics takes the precedence. Even though Shakespeare himself did not classify his works as comedies or tragedies, in the *First Folio* (1623), the editors categorized the plays into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies. Of course, we come across some historical plays where the characteristics of tragedy or comedy are visible yet, they are not similar to the regular tragedies or comedies that we are used to seeing being performed. Many plays composed by Shakespeare are historical in nature. But only a handful are designated the title of “historical plays”. For example, plays like *Macbeth*, *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* or *Hamlet* or *Coriolanus* are set in a certain period in history, but they are not categorized as histories because they do not have an overt political tone to them.

5.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the trajectory of Shakespeare's historical plays
- Explain the characteristics of historical plays

5.2 THE HISTORY PLAYS BY SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare composed ten plays which revolved around English history. And he had written four plays which focused on Roman history. The Roman plays can

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loosely be identified under history plays, but for scholarly purposes we only consider those plays which narrate the political history of England as history plays. Needless to say, the history plays are derived from the morality plays which were popular during the early 16th centuries. Overall, the patriotic spirit which engulfed England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (especially after the defeat of Spanish Armada) that brought down the threat of foreign invasion, gave rise to such form of drama. To add to the mood the University Wits too started composing history plays thus making them more popular. It is believed that Shakespeare's professional rivalry with the University Wits like Marlowe, Greene, Lyly et al made him tread this field. These plays were popularly known as chronicle plays because they were based upon the English Chronicles produced by Raphael Holinshed et al. Most of the history plays written by Shakespeare are actually adaptations of Holinshed's *Chronicles*. Shakespeare was known for borrowing heavily from his contemporaries as well as predecessors. It is argued that Holinshed's works¹ were inspiration for both Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe. We all know that *Macbeth* and *King Lear* owe their origins to Holinshed and his *Chronicles*. But what might amuse the present-day audience is that Holinshed's works were not known to be historically accurate. In fact, the contemporary readers consumed it as fictional works. Critics love to identify both Holinshed and Shakespeare's writings as incidents based on historical events which were dramatized for recreational purposes.

The following 10 plays by Shakespeare are generally classified as histories:

- *Henry IV, Part I*
- *Henry IV, Part II*
- *Henry V*
- *Henry VI, Part I*
- *Henry VI, Part II*
- *Henry VI, Part III*
- *Henry VIII*
- *King John*
- *Richard II*
- *Richard III*

The plays usually categorized as 'history' plays speak about English history roughly extends from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. But a significant amount of focus is placed on the years between 1399-1485. Not surprisingly, each of the history play is named after the monarch who reigned during the period.

In chronological order we have King John appearing as the first play and Henry VIII as last one. But it must be mentioned here that Shakespeare did not compose the plays in that order. As we know, the plays create dramatic

representation of five generations. Each of the generation of the Medieval era seems to struggle with its own power structures. The plays depict the Hundred Years War with France and involve from Henry V to Joan of Arc while highlighting the Wars of the Roses².

Before we discuss further, it must be reiterated that each of these plays are works of imagination. They are only loosely based on historical figures. William Shakespeare was a keen observer of the world around him and took interest in history. The historical plays gave him the scope to explore the mind of the royal characters that he was dealing with. Such is the impact that in present times, we consider the historical figures in the way Shakespeare had portrayed them. Let us for example consider, Richard III. To us, he is someone who is evil. He is kind of a psychopath in possession of a deformed body who holds a grudge against humanity. Of course, historians have done their bit to make us realize that this was not the case. But unfortunately, in the popular understanding Richard III is what Shakespeare created. Henry V, or Prince Hal, is, the perfect model of kingship that we can look up to. After all he seems to have turned into a perfect human being after the misspent youth. But this whole perspective is created by Shakespeare. Shakespeare's vision takes over reality to such an extent that we at times forget the whole history was re-narrated keeping in mind the way Shakespeare would like to unfold his future stories.

The history plays are insightful and entertaining. They highlight the political processes of medieval and renaissance politics. Yet, at the same time, they provide a deep knowledge of the glimpse of life that the society shared. Through the plays one gets an access to the royal court, tavern life, the nobility, beggars, brothels and everything in between. We come across one of the greatest English heroes, Henry V meeting face to face with Falstaff. It is just not the meeting alone, these scenes in themselves are entertaining while being profound at the same time.

We all know that Shakespeare was living during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. She was the last monarch who represented the house of Tudor. Many scholars believe that Shakespeare's history plays are used as means to heighten Tudor propaganda. This was necessary because with the change of times, the monarchy was feeling the heat of the dangers from civil war. And plays were a great way to revive and celebrate the founders of the Tudor dynasty. Especially if we consider, Richard III, we see the last member of the York³ is depicted as an evil monster⁴. A depiction of this nature has not been taken in a positive light by many modern historians because the usurper, Henry VII, is sketched in absolutely glowing terms. Again, one can clearly witness the political bias present in Henry VIII. This play ends with an effusive celebration marking the birth of Queen Elizabeth. But despite his leniency towards the Tudors, the plays are more about the decline of the medieval world and not exclusively about the royal family. In *Richard III* we get a glimpse of how medieval world met its end with opportunism as well as Machiavellianism paving its way into the political life. Through a calculated evocation

NOTES

NOTES

of the life of late Middle Ages, the plays underlined the benefits of the political and social evolution which had exposed the people to a better world.

Being the great composer that he was, Shakespeare incorporated the Lancaster and the York myths into his plays. These myths were passed onto him from the chronicles he followed and the Tudor myths which were part of local legends. According to the 'Lancaster myth,' Richard II being overthrown from power and Henry IV's occupying the reign was something which was sanctioned by providence. Moreover, Henry V's achievements were identified as divine favour. On the other hand, the 'York myth' considered Edward IV's dethroning of Henry VI⁵ as a restoration which was designed by the providence. This was necessary to handover the throne to the lawful heirs of Richard II. Again, the 'Tudor myth' propagated by the historians as well as the poets alike who wrote after the accession of Henry VII identified Henry VI as a lawful king. In fact, they condemned the York brothers for taking his life. They also stressed how the Yorkist fall was all divine ordained. This finally led to the rise of Henry Tudor. He played a major role in uniting the houses of Lancaster and York. It was believed that the 'saintly' Henry VI had forecasted a union of this nature. It was wholeheartedly accepted that Henry Tudor's was justified in deposing of Richard III⁶.

Interestingly, the chroniclers like Edward Hall, Polydore Vergil, Holinshed et al did not show why the Tudor regime was great. Instead they tried to bring focus on what is to be learnt from the mistakes. Through these narratives they tried to draw a similar analogy with their contemporary times so that they are not turning morally ambiguous. We see that Hall in *Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and Yorke (1548)* highlights how the almighty had exercised curse upon England for deposing as well as murdering Richard II, we also see God finally giving way and sending peace through the dynasty carried forward by Henry Tudor.

In his *Divine Providence in the England of Shakespeare's Histories*⁷, H. A. Kelly discusses political biases that appear in contemporary chronicles, Elizabethan poetry as well as histories written by Tudors especially the 2 tetralogies composed by Shakespeare : *Henry VI* to *Richard III* and *Richard II* to *Henry V*. Shakespeare's greatest contribution as a dramatist with focus on history was eliminating the supposedly divine intervention narratives and sharing them as just opinions. the Lancaster myth is shattered by Lancaster. And the opposing myth is perpetuated by the Yorkists while the Tudor myth is symbolized by Henry Tudor.

We know that the chronicles decided to understand the events from the divine justice perspective. But Shakespeare does not accept this explanation. for example, the chronicles suggest that in his speech in Parliament Richard, Duke of York, emphasized on providential justice. But Shakespeare does not include this episode in the parliament scene that takes place in the beginning of Henry VI. This conscious elimination talks about absolute rejection of the idea. We get to know that in the first tetralogy, Henry VI, at no point of time considers his troubles as an

example of divine retribution. And by the time we reach the second tetralogy, there is hardly any evidence that longs for providential punishment of Henry IV. There are numerous allusions in the plays that talk about providential punishment which is hereditary in nature - Richard II's prediction, Henry IV's fear that his wayward son will punish him, Henry V's fear that he will be punished for the sins done by his father etc. As we move on, we realize that *The Chronicles* insist that God was not happy with the marriage of Henry VI to Margaret. It was coupled by the unfulfilled promises that he had extended to the Armagnac girl. But William Shakespeare introduces Duke Humphrey so that he can turn into obstacle and not let the marriage to Margaret take place because in that case Anjou and Maine will be in trouble. Instead of divine explanations, Shakespeare invariably explains situation and scenario through poetic justice. We come across curses, prophecies, dreams envelope the prophecies of Henry VI about Henry VII.

The history plays of Shakespeare create a new dramatic history that does not require any historical precedence. The plays consciously move away from the facts and introduce a new level of dramatic styles. In that way the play intentionally teases audiences' sense of knowledge and keeps them guessing as to what will happen next. The history that the Elizabethan audience came across in theatre through Shakespeare's work both new and unpredictable which was probably echoing the spirits of uncertainty that was prevalent in the contemporary time.

The histories written by William Shakespeare can be categorized into two major segments. The first tetralogy consists of three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. While the second tetralogy comprises of required to and the two parts of *Henry IV* as well as *Henry V*. Though on the surface level, this appears to be a harmless arrangement, but a deeper analysis will only highlight the problem aspect of this arrangement. The second tetralogy which was written years after the first tetralogy actually narrates events that took place much before. So commonsensically that would imply, Shakespeare started work on first sequence of history plays and ended it with *Richard III*. After that he decided to start oppressed sequence of history beginning with *Richard II*. This kind of an arrangement also brings him to mind the thought that probably Shakespeare never intended to have the series completed. But the sequence of these plays also makes things problematic because they do not fit into the pattern. *Edward III*, *King John* and *Henry VIII* have hardly any connection with the tetralogies. Scholars have often insisted on treating each of the history plays as independent pieces. For example, let us consider, Richard of Gloucester, who is later identified as Richard III appears to be completely different in *Richard III*. Again, it is completely impossible to relate the unimpressive *Henry V* with the smart Hal who seems to be very witty. Even the two parts of *Henry IV*, that appears to have been written together are actually so different from each other.

Jan Kott suggests that "every chapter opens and closes at the same point. In every one of these plays history turns full circle, returning to the point of departure.

NOTES

NOTES

These recurring and unchanging circles described by history are the successive kings' reigns"⁸. On the other hand, some critics insist that Kott's interpretation raises some pertinent questions. Somehow Kott's interpretation of history provides a very narrow perspective on the mechanism of history. Even though he speaks about the political struggle expressed in the drama, he does not manage to highlight the multiple aspects of history that gets reflected in the plays. Instead of that he turns each of the play into one single history ignoring the layered nuance that it provides. Knowles points out that Kott's understanding is largely the history. Phyllis Rackin suggests that the plays are an attempt 'in the context of Tudor historiography, in his theatre and in his world.' She insists that Shakespearean texts are designed as play scripts meant for performance which would have letter to a heterogeneous audience. It also made an attempt to restore the existing historical narrative while giving your voice to those voiceless who had not been heard in the official narrative.

The history plays of Shakespeare forms a complex intertextuality. It makes the audience recall the incidents then they are away from their history and legends and compare it with the existing historical place while understanding what is being offered to them through the Shakespearean performance. The histories that were composed by Shakespeare extremely dramatized form of the chronicles.

Shakespeare's histories are a dramatic interpretation of various forms of histories and the way it was created. After all a combination of all these plays give the audience a different perspective that was probably not accessible to them in the past. It is a combination of lies. The fact and fiction are two internal blood that not just the characters lie to themselves about what happened in the past, but we also come across figures from the history who are now dead (Margaret, Henry IV et al) who represent themselves in a different manner on stage. Their presence on stage (however ghostly it might be) unsettle the audiences' expectations. And it questions the audiences' understanding about the events that took place in the past and their inability to change while simultaneously blurring that time frame of the incidents.

In *Henry IV* (1), we see that the creation of history is an active process. It expects the audience to think like a historian. The play continuously compares and contrasts various aspects of the dramatic past and poses the question as to which one of them could be correct. It also makes the audience wonder if the previously dramatized Richard II was actually a proper interpretation. Many critics insist that *Henry IV* (1) is probably the first historical play for Shakespeare where he is making the audience take part in the creation of history. History has been majorly rewritten in *Henry IV part 1*. We come across all the major characters who are cast in different ways to find their own place in history and redeem themselves from their past.

Interestingly *Henry IV part 2* engages itself in talking about history that has been created on the basis of rumours and distorted understanding. The presence of humour in the induction part can be seen as Shakespeare's role as a dramatic

narrator. In the induction we get to see how history is created from lies and unconfirmed reports which indirectly hints at the way the drama is going to unfold before the audience. Probably being unable to create a history in his own way, Henry decides to create an anti narrative as the audience decides to understand his account of the situation. Shakespearean dramas make an effort to highlight the evolving nature of history the way it is created.

Needless to say, history itself becomes a problem for the historical plays. After all the actual nature of history, the existing facts always create an intense tension while creating a fictional account of the history. Oscillating somewhere between neither fact nor fiction, the historical plays seems to be in the lookout for a new history. The historical plays try to look at history as play itself while dramatizing the history and giving us a glimpse of how the people would have been engaged in creating that “history”.

In general, drama and history share complex relationship. Drama is meant to narrate a story. It is a different form of art because it is supposed to be performed. Meanings are encoded not just in the speech but also in the movements of the actors who performs on stage. A dramatized history brings into light a form of ‘history’ that was probably never experienced by anyone before. We come across people from the past with different understanding and knowledge who might have performed in a similar manner in their ‘real’ lives.

Like most of his other popular works Shakespeare’s historical plays are also based on works created by his predecessor. Some of the major works that has influence his place are: *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), Polydore Vergil’s *Anglica Historia* (published in four distinct variations in 1512-13, 1534, 1546 and 1555), Hall’s *The Union of the two noble and illustre Families of Lancaster and York* (1542, 1548 and 1550), Holinshed’s *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* (1577, 1587), Daniel’s *The First Four Books of the Civil Wars* (1595) and Sir Thomas More’s *History of King Richard III* (1543). Shakespeare generously adapts the not so authentic stories from The Chronicles and intertwined characters and understanding which are his own, thus inventing a new reality. Even though Shakespeare sources provides us with valuable ways to understand a text, without a doubt there always remains a comparison between the chronicle and drama. The new kind of history that he created give an opportunity to the audience to bring the non-existing historical figures closer to them while questioning about the understanding the head about the glorious history.

Check Your Progress

1. Where are history plays derived from?
2. Name any three plays by Shakespeare considered as history plays.
3. What is the role of history plays?
4. How are Shakespeare’s histories segregated?

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5.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The history plays are derived from the Morality plays which were popular during the early 16th centuries.
2. Three plays by Shakespeare considered as history plays are *Henry IV, Part I*, *King John* and *Richard II*.
3. The history plays are insightful and entertaining. They highlight about the political processes of Medieval and Renaissance politics.
4. The histories by Shakespeare can be categorized into two major segments. The first tetralogy consists of three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. While the second tetralogy comprises of required to and the two parts of *Henry IV* as well as *Henry V*.

5.4 SUMMARY

- In general, the term history play is identified with those plays (can be either tragedy or comedy) in which the action that takes the plot forward and the major themes that are included in the play are primarily political in nature.
- Even though Shakespeare himself did not classify his works as comedies or tragedies, in the *First Folio* (1623), the editors categorized the plays into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies.
- Shakespeare composed ten plays which revolved around English history. And he had written four plays which focused on Roman history.
- Needless to say, the history plays are derived from the Morality plays which were popular during the early 16th centuries.
- Overall, the patriotic spirit which engulfed England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (especially after the defeat of Spanish Armada) that brought down the threat of foreign invasion, gave rise to such form of drama.
- These plays were popularly known as chronicle plays because they were based upon the *English Chronicles* produced by Raphael Holinshed et al.
- Most of the history plays written by Shakespeare are actually adaptations of Holinshed's "*Chronicles*".
- The plays usually categorized as 'history' plays speak about English history roughly extends from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. But a significant amount of focus is placed on the years between 1399-1485.
- The history plays are insightful and entertaining. They highlight about the political processes of medieval and renaissance politics. Yet at the same time, they provide a deep knowledge of the glimpse of life that the society shared.

- Many scholars believe that Shakespeare's history plays are used as means to heighten Tudor propaganda. This was necessary because with the change of times, the monarchy was feeling the heat of the dangers from civil war.
- In *Richard III* we get a glimpse of how medieval world met its end with opportunism as well as Machiavellianism paving its way into the political life.
- Interestingly, the chroniclers like Edward Hall, Polydore Vergil, Holinshed et al did not show why Tudor regime was great. Instead they tried to bring focus on what is to be learnt from the mistakes.
- The history plays of Shakespeare create a new dramatic history that does not require any historical precedence. The plays consciously move away from the facts and introduce a new level of dramatic styles.
- The history that the Elizabethan audience came across in theatre through Shakespeare's work both new and unpredictable which was probably echoing the spirits of uncertainty that was prevalent in the contemporary time.
- The histories written by William Shakespeare can be categorized into two major segments. The first tetralogy consists of three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*. While the second tetralogy comprises of required to and the two parts of *Henry IV* as well as *Henry V*.
- The second tetralogy which was written years after the first tetralogy actually narrates about events that took place much before.
- Jan Kott suggests that "every chapter opens and closes at the same point. In every one of these plays history turns full circle, returning to the point of departure. These recurring and unchanging circles described by history are the successive kings' reigns".
- The history plays of Shakespeare forms a complex intertextuality.
- It makes the audience recall the incidents then they are away from their history and legends and compare it with the existing historical place while understanding what is being offered to them through the Shakespearean performance.
- Needless to say, history itself becomes a problem for the historical plays.
- After all the actual nature of history, the existing facts always create an intense tension while creating a fictional account of the history.
- Oscillating somewhere between neither fact nor fiction, the historical plays seems to be in the lookout for a new history.
- The historical plays try to look at history as play itself while dramatizing the history and giving us a glimpse of how the people would have been engaged in creating that "history".

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NOTES

5.5 KEY WORDS

- **Chronicle:** It is a factual written account of important or historical events in the order of their occurrence.
- **Tetralogy:** It is a group of four related literary or operatic works.
- **Adaptation:** It refers to a film, television drama, or stage play that has been adapted from a written work.

5.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What is the relationship between drama and history?
2. Give a brief description of the characteristics of Shakespeare's historical plays.
3. How is myth used by Shakespeare in his plays?

Long-Answer Questions

1. What were Shakespeare's major sources of inspiration? In what sense did he draw upon the works of his influencers?
2. Shakespeare's histories are a dramatic interpretation of various forms of histories and the way it was created. Critically analyse the statement and substantiate your answer with examples.
3. How are Shakespeare's histories categorized? Explain some of these plays in detail.

5.7 FURTHER READINGS

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DK. 2015. *The Shakespeare Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*. UK: Dorling Kindersley Ltd.

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Footnotes

*Shakespeare's
Historical Plays*

- 1. Published in 1577 and 1587
- 2. Took place between York and Lancaster
- 3. Rival house of Tudors
- 4. “that bottled spider, that foul bunchback’d toad”
- 5. Who was ill reputed as the ineffective
- 6. Was justified on the principles of contemporary political theory, for Henry was not merely rebelling against a tyrant but putting down a tyrannous usurper, which *The Mirror for Magistrates* allowed
- 7. 1970
- 8. Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, p. 6.

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BLOCK - II
PLAYS I

NOTES

UNIT 6 *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Structure

- 6.0 Introduction
 - 6.1 Objectives
 - 6.2 Analysis of *Twelfth Night*
 - 6.2.1 Characters in *Twelfth Night*
 - 6.3 About the Play
 - 6.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
 - 6.5 Summary
 - 6.6 Key Words
 - 6.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
 - 6.8 Further Readings
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6.0 INTRODUCTION

The English poet and playwright William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) plays are considered to be the greatest in the English language and in Western literature. Traditionally, the plays are divided into the genres of tragedy, history and comedy; they have been translated into every major living language, in addition to being continually performed all around the world.

Most of his plays appeared in print as a series of quartos, but approximately half of them remained unpublished until 1623, when the posthumous *First Folio* was published. The traditional division of his plays into tragedies, comedies and histories follows the categories used in the *First Folio*. However, modern criticism has labelled some of these plays 'problem plays' that avoid easy categorization or perhaps deliberately break generic conventions; it has introduced the term 'romances' for what scholars believe to be his later comedies.

Shakespeare first arrived in London in the late 1580s or early 1590s. During this time, dramatists writing for London's new commercial playhouses (for e.g., *The Curtain*) were combining two different strands of dramatic tradition into a new and distinctively Elizabethan synthesis. Initially, the most common forms of popular English theatre were the Tudor morality plays. These plays, celebrating piety generally, use personified moral attributes to urge or instruct the protagonist to choose the virtuous life over Evil. The characters and plot situations are largely symbolic rather than realistic. As a child, Shakespeare would likely have seen this type of play (along with, perhaps, mystery plays, and miracle plays).

The other strand of dramatic tradition was classical aesthetic theory. This theory was derived finally from Aristotle; however, in Renaissance England, the theory was better known through its Roman interpreters and practitioners. At the universities, plays were staged in a more academic form as Roman closet dramas. These plays were usually performed in Latin; they adhered to classical ideas of unity and decorum, but they were also more static, valuing lengthy speeches over physical action.

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6.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Summarize Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*
- Analyse Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*
- Discuss the themes in *Twelfth Night*

6.2 ANALYSIS OF *TWELFTH NIGHT*

In this section, we will discuss in detail, the important concepts of *Twelfth Night*.

Act I Scene I: A room in the Duke's Palace

The play opens with Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, announcing his love for Olivia. Olivia, on the other hand, has taken a vow to be under the veil for seven years to mourn her brother's death. This vow of hers has impressed Orsino a lot.

The play opens with the lines 'If music be the food ... so die' highlighting Orsino's undying love for Olivia. 'Dying fall' implies decreasing rhythm of the song. Curio, a gentleman, asks Orsino if he would like to hunt and Orsino describes his first encounter with Olivia. When he first saw her, he thought the air was 'purg'd' '(removed, cleaned) of its 'pestilence' (fatal epidemic disease). From that instance he turned into a 'hart' (a male deer) and his desires like cruel 'hounds' (hunting dogs) have troubled him since then. Orsino's messenger, Valentine arrives with Olivia's news. He informs that 'the elements herself' (Lady Olivia) will not unveil her face for next seven years to show honour to her brother's death and will live 'like a cloistress' i.e. like a nun. This news both shatters and impresses Orsino and his respect for Olivia increases because she possesses 'a heart of that fine frame' (a virtuous lady) and decides to keep pursuing her till she changes her mind.

Annotations

- 'Quick and fresh' – young and energetic
- 'validity' – morals
- 'pitch' – height
- 'abatement' – reduce, diminish

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- ‘price’ – worth
- ‘Shapes’ – day dreams
- ‘fancy’ – whimsical
- ‘high fantastical’ – extremely imaginative
- ‘That instant I turned into a hart’ – Here Orsino is comparing himself to Actaeon. It refers to the story of Actaeon, who, while hunting, saw the virtuous goddess Diana naked. In her rage she transformed him into a stag that was killed by Actaeon’s own hunting dogs.
- ‘fell’ – fierce
- ‘eye offending brine’ – salty tears
- ‘season’ – to pressure
- ‘brother’s dead love’ – dead brother’s love
- ‘Golden shaft’ – Cupid’s golden arrow
- ‘affections else’ – other affections
- ‘sovereign thrones’ – refers to the medieval belief that the liver, brain and heart are all vital centres. The liver is the throne of passion, the brain is the seat of wisdom and intellect and the heart is the throne of emotion. He is implying that when Olivia finally falls in love with him, she will be his completely.
- ‘One self living’ – one and only king.

Act I Scene II: The sea-coast.

Viola is introduced; she is one of the survivors of the shipwreck. In line 1 Viola asks the ship captain where they are. The captain replies they are in Illyria. Next Viola inquires about her brother’s well-being. The captain informs that her brother was ‘most provident in peril’ (brave in times of danger) and when ship broke he tied himself to a strong mast ‘that live’d upon the sea’ (was floating in the sea amidst the wreckage). Thus, Sebastian, Viola’s brother, managed to stay afloat in that turbulent sea. On hearing the news of her brother’s safety, she gifts the captain some gold coins and gets to know from the captain that that place is his birthplace. Viola learns that the ruler of the place Duke Orsino is ‘A noble duke in nature as in name’. The name rings a bell in Viola’s memory, as she had heard Orsino’s name from her father.

The captain informs that he still is bachelor though the rumour has it that he is in love with ‘fair Olivia’. To quench Viola’s curiosity about Olivia, the captain says that Olivia was a ‘virtuous maid’, who had lost her father a year ago and lost her brother in quick succession. He adds that ‘she hath abjured the company/And sight of men’ (she has resolved to stay away from the company of men). Viola identifies her situation with Olivia’s and decides to serve her. But the captain says that Olivia ‘will admit no kind of suit’ (she will not pay heed to any request). Then

Viola decides to serve Orsino, the duke, and decides to dress himself as boy and asks the captain to take her to Duke's court for which she will reward him.

Annotations

- 'Illyria' – a region on the east coast of the Adriatic Sea
- 'Elysium' – the place where dead live
- 'Perchance' – perhaps, by luck
- 'poor number' – handful, few
- 'lived' – swam
- 'Arion' – He was a poet of ancient times. He had mesmerised dolphins with his music and songs.
- 'there's gold' – gold coins, money
- 'authority' – proof, confirmations
- 'murmur' – rumour
- 'great ones' – rich, aristocratic
- 'the less' – lay man
- 'fair behaviour' – good appearance
- 'prithee' – pray thee, pray you
- 'happy' – perhaps
- 'form of my intent' – my intentions
- 'shape thou thy silence to my wit – fit your silence to my plan i.e. do not reveal my plan.
- 'mute' – silent

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Act I Scene III: A room in Olivia's house

We are introduced to Lady Olivia's uncle, Sir Toby Belch. Sir Toby is shown to be a man of improper manners; he has a drinking habit; arrives home at late hours and is of a noisy and loud nature. Olivia's woman-in-waiting, her maid, Maria tries unsuccessfully to quiet Sir Toby. Maria also explains to us Lady Olivia's annoyance over Sir Andrew Aguecheek's romantic pursuits, which has been inflamed by Sir Toby. Sir Andrew Aguecheek is also introduced in this scene. He is wealthy but dim-witted. Sir Toby wants to enjoy Sir Aguecheek's wealth, so he manipulates his (Aguecheek's) thoughts and urges him to win Olivia's love. Sir Aguecheek realises it is futile to seek Olivia's love, but Sir Toby convinces him to stay on for some more time.

Annotations

- 'let her except, before excepted' – Sir Toby is playing with the legal phrase 'exceptic, exiipiendis' meaning 'with the exceptions before named'. He implies he is already aware of Olivia's exceptions i.e. her objections to his drinking, and other kinds of uncivilised behaviour.

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- ‘modest’ – moderate
- ‘order’ – mannerly conduct
- ‘tall’ – man of stature, of repute
- ‘that’ – height of Aguecheek, Maria is playing with the word ‘tall’ and being sarcastic.
- ‘he’ll have but a year ... ducats’ – he’ll exhaust all his money within an year
- ‘viol-de-gamboys’ – viola da gamba (literally, ‘leg-viol’)
- ‘without book’ - from memory
- ‘good gifts of nature’ – natural talents
- ‘allay the guest’ – decrease the zest
- ‘subtractors’ – probably Sir Toby intends to say ‘detractors’.
- ‘they that add’ – who are intelligent. Probably Maria intends to play with Toby’s ‘subtractors’ with sarcasm.
- ‘Agneface’ – Toby’s slip of tongue for ‘Aguecheek’
- ‘Chambermaid’ – lady in waiting, companion
- ‘An thou let part so – if you let her go
- ‘thou mightst never draw sword again’ – you might never use a sword again i.e. you can’t claim yourself to be twice a man.

Act I Scene IV – A room in Duke Orsino’s palace

Viola has put on a man’s disguise. She now calls herself Cesario. Cesario/Viola has gained the appreciation of Orsino, who considers her to be a young man of fine conduct. Orsino is so impressed with Cesario (Viola) that he wants him to go and convey to Olivia that he (Orsino) loves her. By then Viola has fallen for Orsino. Despite that she agrees to go and convey the Duke’s proposal to Olivia.

Annotations

- ‘Humour’— Caprice, or constitution / temperament. Both senses are common in Shakespeare
- ‘Nuncio’— Messenger
- ‘Rubios’— Ruby-colored.
- ‘Sound’— Not broken or cracked
- ‘Semblative’— Resembling. This word is not found elsewhere.
- ‘Thy constellation’— The constellation under which you were born and which determined your temperament; so, here, your qualities in general
- ‘Barful’— Full of hindrances
- ‘Strife’— Attempt

Act I Scene V – A room in Olivia's house

We meet Feste, Olivia's fool. Feste tries to lift Olivia's spirits by telling her not to pine for her brother because he is now in heaven, which is a much better place than this earth. Olivia is impressed with Feste's philosophical words. But, Malvolio, Olivia's steward, is not pleased with the old clown and considers him unworthy. Olivia informs the audience that Malvolio is suffering from 'self-love'. He is too full of himself and hence ignorant in many ways. Cesario (Viola) manages to draw Olivia's attention towards himself and conveys Orsino's message to her.

Olivia is strongly affected by Cesario's (Viola) words but she adheres to her vow and politely rejects Orsino's request. But Olivia begins to fancy Cesario instead and wants to meet him again. So, she tells Cesario (Viola) to come and tell her how Orsino accepted the news. As Cesario (Viola) is about to leave, Olivia offers him money, which he refuses. After Cesario (Viola) leaves, Olivia sends Malvolio after him and asks him to come back the next day so that she can explain to him why she cannot love Orsino.

NOTES**Annotations**

- 'Fear no colours'— Fear nothing, the flag of no foe. May be a pun on 'collars' with reference to hanging
- 'Lenten'— Lean, spare, like meals in Lent
- 'For turning away... out'— As for being dismissed, let summer (when food and lodging are easily had) make it supportable.
- 'Points'— Maria goes on to pun on 'points' in the sense of the laces with metal points that were used on dresses instead of buttons—in the current context, to fasten the hose of the doublet.
- 'Gaskin'—Close-fitting trousers or breeches
- You were best. Originally 'you', in this phrase was a dative, the full phrase being 'it were best for you.'
- 'Quinapalus'— An imaginary authority, quoted in ridicule of the pedantic fashion of the time.
- 'Witty'— Wise
- 'Dry'— Stupid
- 'Dishonest'— Badly behaved
- 'Madonna'— My lady
- 'As there is... flower'—this is a nonsensical parody of a proverb, the clown is unnecessarily talking to delay the scolding he is expecting.
- 'Misprision'— Mistake, or criminal accused with the crime of another. It is unlikely that Shakespeare meant the clown to use it accurately.
- 'Cucullus'— The cowl does not make the monk

NOTES

- ‘Dexterously’— This may not be intended for a wrong form, as both ‘dexterous’ and ‘dexterously’
- ‘Good my’— My good
- ‘Mouse of virtue’— Virtuous mouse. ‘Mouse’ was a term of affection, and its use here highlights the extent of the license permitted to professional fools
- ‘These set kind of fools’— The plural demonstrative here may be explained like ‘those’
- ‘Fools’ zanies’—A fool’s zany is a buffoon who imitates the real fool in a bizarre manner.
- ‘Distempered’— Disordered, unhealthy.
- ‘Bird-bolts’— Blunt arrows shot from a cross-bow
- ‘Allowed’—Licensed professional
- ‘Speaks nothing but madman’— Speaks only madman’s blabbering.
- ‘Here he comes’— Sir Toby comes
- ‘Pia mater’— The inner membrane of the brain; implies brain here
- ‘Heat’— The point where wine makes him warm
- ‘Crowner’— Coroner
- ‘Sheriff’s post’— Carved and painted posts were set up before the houses of mayors and sheriffs
- ‘But’— Unless
- ‘Squash’— An unripe peas cod
- ‘Codling’—Usually, a hard kind of apple; here. an unripe one
- ‘In standing water’— ‘In the condition of standing water’
- ‘Shewishly’— Sharply
- ‘Con’— Learn by heart, mug up.
- ‘Compatible... usage’— Sensitive to the any kind of ill treatment.
- ‘My profound heart’— Used with playful reference to Olivia’s cleverness in detecting the theatrical allusions in Viola’s use of ‘speech,’ ‘con,’ ‘part,’ ‘studied,’ etc.
- ‘By the very fangs’— The most mischievous inquiry could find out nothing worse about me than that I am not, etc.
- ‘That time of moon’— There reference is to the sup- posed effect of the moon in causing or increasing lunacy.
- ‘Swabber’— From swab, to clean the decks, etc., of a ship
- ‘Hul’— Float without hoisting sail

- ‘Overture’—Declaration.
- ‘Taxation’—Demand.
- ‘Olive’—The symbol of peace
- ‘Entertainment’—Reception
- ‘Maidenhead’—Maidenhood, Spinsterhood
- ‘Comfortable’—Comforting—a Scriptural usage, in keeping with the figure introduced by Viola’s use of ‘divinity.’
- ‘Well done’—Here she still keeps up the language of portraiture. The idea of an artificial complexion is not introduced before Viola’s next speech.
- ‘Tis in grain’—i.e., it will not wash out.
- ‘Labelled’—‘Label’ had a special sense of a paper appended to a will, a codicil. *Item*. Likewise, used to introduce each new article in an enumeration.
- ‘Praise’—estimate, value. The preceding enumeration suggests the valuator’s term.
- ‘Dimension’—Bodily shape.
- ‘Gracious’—Physically attractive.
- ‘In my master’s flame’—With as fierce a passion as my master.
- ‘Willow’—The symbol of rejected love
- ‘State’—Estate, condition
- ‘Biazon’—Description of armorial bearings. Her gentility is proclaimed by her whole manner and appearance as clearly as it would be by the coat of arms of her family.
- ‘Peevis’—Foolish.
- ‘County’—Count.

Act II Scene I: On a sea-coast.

We are introduced to Sebastian, the twin brother of Viola, whose whereabouts were a mystery after the shipwreck. Sebastian is seen mourning for Viola, thinking she is dead. We are introduced to Antonio who has saved Sebastian. Sebastian is the son of Sebastian of Messalina and he says ‘whom I know you have heard of’; indicating that his father was famous among the people of Illyria. (This means that if Duke Orsino marries Viola it will be a marriage of equals, as will be his marriage to Olivia). On hearing his sorrowful story, Antonio decides to accompany Sebastian to the Duke’s place though he had enemies there.

Annotations

- ‘Distemper’—Influence harmfully
- ‘Extravagancy’—Aimless wandering
- ‘It charges me in manners’—Courtesy compels me

NOTES

NOTES

- ‘Express’—Reveal.
- ‘Breach of the sea’—Breakers
- ‘Such estimable wonder’—Wonder that estimates her so highly.
- ‘Murder me’—by breaking my heart over losing you.

Scene II: A street in Illyria

Malvolio gets hold of Cesario. He returns the ring that Olivia had asked him to return to Cesario. Cesario (Viola) tries to place forth his case saying he had left no ring. But Malvolio refuses to believe him and throws the ring at him and conveys his mistress’ message. Once Malvolio leaves, Cesario realises the mess he is now part of. Viola (Cesario) figures out that Olivia is charmed by Cesario as he recapitulates, ‘she made good view of me ...’ For she did speak in starts distractedly’. Viola realises that disguising herself as a man has turned into a curse for her.

Annotations

- ‘Gentleness’—Favour
- ‘Desperate’—Hopeless
- ‘So hardy to come’—So bold as to come
- ‘Forbid... not’—This is a sort of double negative
- ‘Pregnant’—Ready, clever
- ‘Proper-false’—Handsome but false
- ‘Fadge’—Suit the situation
- ‘Thriftless’—Profitless

Scene III: A room in Olivia’s house

Sir Toby and Sir Andrew are enjoying a late-night drinking session and the Fool, Feste joins them. Both Sir Toby and Sir Andrew have a liking for the fool. Sir Toby considers Feste possessing an ‘excellent breast’ and asks him to sing. On hearing noises, Maria enters and finds these people around. She unsuccessfully tries to calm these men. Malvolio too tries to quiet the three men but in vain. Malvolio threatens Maria that if she doesn’t quiten the men, he will complain about her to Olivia. As a result of this arrogant behaviour Maria plans to humiliate Malvolio by writing a letter to him, faking Olivia’s handwriting, which will contain Olivia’s love for Malvolio. All the three men who detest Malvolio willingly become part of the plan.

Annotations

- ‘Deluculo surgere saluberrimum est’—To rise early is very healthy
- ‘The four elements’—Earth, air, fire, and water, of which our bodies were supposed to be constituted.

- ‘Stoup’—Drinking cup
- ‘Catch’—Part-song
- ‘Breast’—Voice
- ‘Leman’—Sweetheart
- ‘Sweet and twenty’—This has been variously interpreted: (1) as referring to the kisses; (2) *sweet* as a vocative, *and twenty*, referring to the kisses. This requires a comma after *sweet*. (3) The whole phrase as a vocative
- ‘Contagious breath’—Sir Toby seems to use the word *contagious* on the chance that Sir Andrew will take it up without understanding it, as he immediately does. *Breath* is ambiguous, meaning: (1) voice, as in line 22, above; (2) breath, in the modern sense, as is implied in the use of *nose* in line 61
- ‘Three souls’—Simply a humorous exaggeration of the power of music.
- ‘Dog at’—Good at; a slang phrase
- ‘Cataian’—A native of Cataia or Cathay, i.e., China.
- ‘Peg-a-Ramsey’—A name caught at random from an old song
- ‘Three merry men be we’—A fragment of an old song
- ‘Tillyvally’—A common expression of contempt
- ‘Sneck up!’—Shut up!
- ‘Round’—Direct, outspoken
- ‘Cakes and ale’—The reference is to the riotous eating and drinking at church festivals
- ‘Rub your, chain’—Mind your own business. The chain was the badge office of a steward
- ‘Uncivil rule’—Disorderly behavior
- ‘Posses us’—Put us into possession, tell us
- ‘Affectioned’—Affected
- ‘Cons state’—Learns dignity by heart
- ‘Utters’—Gives out, not necessarily in words
- ‘Best persuaded of himself’—Most convinced of his own merits, most conceited
- ‘Expressure’—Expression
- ‘Feelingly personated’—Exactly described
- ‘Penthesilea’—Queen of the Amazons
- ‘Out’—Out of pocket
- ‘Cut’—A term of contempt

NOTES

NOTES

- ‘Burn some sack’— Sack was a Spanish wine. ‘The derivation of the word is no doubt from *see*, dry; not because sack was a *dry* wine in the modern sense of the word, but because it was made of grapes which in a very hot summer were dried almost to raisins by the sun, and so contained a large quantity of sugar.’ To ‘burn’ or to ‘mull’ sack was to warm and spice it.

Scene IV: A room in Duke Orsino’s palace

Orsino figures out Cesario (Viola) has fallen in love. When the Duke inquires about his beloved, Cesario (Viola) describes Orsino, but the Duke cannot understand the indication. Later on, after Feste’s song, Cesario tries to explain to Orsino that there might be a possibility that Olivia might never accept his proposal. But the Duke dismisses such a supposition and says that no woman can love like a man. To which Cesario tells indirectly his (Viola’s) story of love (with Orsino) and how the lady, her sister, kept the love to herself and kept ‘smiling at grief’. Orsino sends Cesario to Olivia’s place again and sends a jewel as a souvenir.

Annotations

- ‘Antique’—Quaint. ‘Antic’ and ‘antique’ were not as clearly differentiated as now. The Folio spelling is ‘anticke.’
- ‘Recollected terms’—Carefully elaborated, or, conventional phrases, as opposed to the ‘old and plain’
- ‘Motions’—Mental and emotional activities
- ‘Favour’—Countenance
- ‘Wears she to’—Comes to fit
- ‘Sways she level’—Rules steadily
- ‘Spinster’—In the original sense of ‘a woman who spins.’
- ‘Free’—Carefree
- ‘Bones’—Bobbins used in lace-making were made of bone
- ‘Silly sooth’—Simple truth
- ‘The old age’—The good old times
- ‘Cypress’—there is difference in opinion whether this means (1) a shroud of cypress, i.e., crape; (2) a coffin of cypress wood; or (3) a bier strewn with sprigs of cypress. The fifth line of the song seems to favor (2)
- ‘Taffeta’—Silk
- ‘Retention’—Power of retaining
- ‘Motion’—Emotion. The liver was supposed to be the seat of the passions
- ‘Cloyment’—Cloying
- ‘Thought’—Sorrow, melancholy, brooding
- ‘Denay’—Denial

Scene V: A garden in Olivia's house

Fabian is introduced. He is one of Olivia's servants. He too hates Malvolio because Malvolio had tarnished his reputation in Olivia's eyes over a trivial issue. He becomes Sir Toby's aid in bringing down Malvolio. Malvolio reads the letter that Maria has written faking Olivia's handwriting. Apart from Olivia's confession of love in the letter, Maria had added a few instructions, like Malvolio should always be happy in Olivia's presence, should be rude to others and wear yellow stockings which should be cross-gartered. The reason for giving these instructions was to make Malvolio fall out of Olivia's grace. Olivia will never like someone to be happy when she is mourning; she hates the colour yellow and cross-gartered fashion. This letter contains the popular lines, '.... Some are born great, some achieve greatness, some have greatness thrust upon them...' Malvolio believes the letter is indeed written for him when he reads the phrase 'No man must know' (indicating to keep this letter private). The scene ends with Malvolio being convinced that Olivia is in love with him and Sir Andrew and Sir Toby complimenting Maria for her foolproof plan.

NOTES**Annotations**

- 'Sheep-biter'—A dog that has acquired the habit of biting sheep becomes worthless. So the phrase is used as a general term of reproach, like 'cur.'
- 'Bear-baiting'—was one of the sports most reprobated by the Puritans
- 'Metal of India'—Gold
- 'Behaviour'—Deportment
- 'Close'—Hide yourselves
- 'Affect'—Love
- 'Fancy'—Love
- 'Follows'—as a servant
- 'Jets'—Struts
- 'Advanced'—Up-reared
- 'The Lady the Starchy'—Evidently an allusion to a lost story of the marriage of a lady of rank to a servant
- 'Jezebel'—Sir Andrew calls Malvolio by a woman's name
- 'Blows'—Puffs up
- 'State'—Chair of state
- 'Branched'—With a pattern of flowers and leaves
- 'Day-bed'—Couch
- 'Humour of state'—The caprices allowed to a man of rank
- 'What employment...'—Merely a grandiloquent phrase for 'What's this!'
- 'Woodcock'—Proverbial for its stupidity

NOTES

- ‘Intimate’—Suggest
- ‘Lucrese’—The type of the chaste woman
- ‘Brock’—Badger, used as a term of contempt
- ‘*M, O, A, I*’—The letters are probably chosen merely to puzzle Malvolio—as they do
- ‘Fustian’—Pretentious and worthless
- ‘Staniel’—A kind of hawk
- ‘Checks’—Turns aside from its proper prey
- ‘Any formal capacity’—Any mind in good form or order
- ‘Sowter’—Apparently the name of a hound
- ‘Cry upon’t’—as a dog does when he gets the scent. The passage is puzzling, and would certainly be simpler if we read a negative after ‘be,’ as hammer suggested. For, if the scents is as rank as a fox, it is inconsistency to refer to it as cold (l. 133) or as at fault (l. 139).
- ‘Faults’—Breaks in the line of scents
- ‘This simulation...’—This concealed meaning is not so intelligible as ‘I may command,’ etc.
- ‘Crush’—Force
- ‘Blood’—Courage
- ‘Slough’—The cast skin of a snake
- ‘Opposite’—Contradictory
- ‘Tang argument of state’—Pronounce emphatically on state affairs
- ‘Trick of singularity’—Individual eccentricities of manner
- ‘Alter services’—Exchange places
- ‘Politic’—Dealing with state affairs
- ‘Baffle’—Treat contemptuously
- ‘Gross’—Vulgar
- ‘Point-devise’—Precisely. If followed by a comma, it would mean ‘superfine.’
- ‘Jade’—to fool, to trick
- ‘Manifests’—Offers
- ‘Strange’—Odd, or distant
- ‘Sophy’—The Shah of Persia. An Englishman, Sir Thomas Shirley, had printed in 1600 an account of his adventures at the Persian court.
- ‘Tray-trip’—A game played with dice

- ‘Aqua-vitae’— Strong liquor
- ‘Tartar’—Tartarus, Hell

Act III Scene I: Garden in Olivia’s house

Cesario meets Lady Olivia. In this private meeting of their Cesario (Viola) tries to convince Olivia to give a positive reply to Orsino. But smitten by Cesario, Olivia asks him not to speak of Orsino. (‘I bade you never speak of him ... I had rather hear you to solicit that than music from spheres’). Sir Toby and Sir Andrew learn from Cesario that he will come and meet Olivia again.

NOTES

Annotations

- ‘Tabor’— A sort of small drum
- ‘Churchman’—Clergyman
- ‘Since bonds...’— Since a man’s bond is needed to strengthen his word. Feste puns on word in the sense of ‘promise.’
- ‘Pilchards’— Fish very like herrings
- ‘Pass upon’— Impose, play tricks on
- ‘Commodity’—Supply
- ‘Pair of these’— Pieces of money like what Viola has just given him
- ‘Use’— Interest
- ‘Pandarus...’— In Chaucer’s *Troilus* and Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida*, Pandarus is the uncle of Cressida, who serves as a go-between
- ‘Cressida was a beggar’—The reference is to Robert Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseida*, in which the heroine is struck with leprosy and becomes a beggar.
- ‘Welkin... ‘element.’—Element was used in the sense of ‘sky’ as well as in the sense still familiar in such phrases as ‘out of my element.’ Feste’s wit consists in substituting welkin, a synonym for element in the wrong sense.
- ‘Haggard’— An untrained hawk
- ‘Folly-fallen’— Fallen into folly
- ‘Dieu vous garde’—God keep you
- ‘Et vous...’— And you also, your servant
- ‘Encounter’— The delight in playing with words seems to have been shared by almost all classes in Shakespeare’s time.
- ‘Trade’—Business
- ‘Prevented’— Anticipated, the original sense
- ‘Abuse’— Deceive, impose upon
- ‘To force’— For forcing

NOTES

- ‘Stake... a baited.... unmuzzled’— The figure is from the sport of baiting with dogs a bear tied to a stake.
- ‘Receiving’— Capacity, intelligence
- ‘Cypress’—A light transparent material resembling cobweb lawn or crape,’ probably named from the island of Cyprus, from which such stuffs were brought.
- ‘Grize’—Step
- ‘Vulgar proof’— Common experience
- ‘Maugre’—in spite of
- ‘For that’—Because

Scene II: A room in Olivia’s house

Sir Andrew is upset. He knew that with Orsino’s interest for Olivia he held no ground, but now Olivia’s interest in a mere pageboy disheartens him. He decides to leave. But Fabian and Sir Toby again change his mind with their arguments. They provoke Sir Andrew to challenge Cesario (his latest competitor) for a duel. But both Fabian and Sir Toby know that since Sir Andrew is a coward and presumed that Cesario is also one (going by his effeminate looks), a real duel would never take place. In the meantime, Maria says that Malvolio has appeared with his cross-gartered yellow stockings.

Annotations

- ‘Dormouse’— Sleepy, like the dormouse, that sleeps all winter
- ‘Into the north’—Out of the sunshine and warmth
- ‘Brownist’— The sect of Brownists was begun in 1592 by Robert Brown. They dissented from the English church, and were forerunners of the Independents.
- ‘Curst’— Ill-tempered
- ‘Thou’st’—In conversation ‘thou’ was used only between intimate friends or, as here, to one treated as an inferior. Hence, in a challenge, it was insulting.
- ‘Cubiculo’—A ‘corrupted word’ for ‘lodging’
- ‘Youngest wren of nine’— Nearly all modern editors read ‘nine,’ as the wren usually lays nine eggs, more or less, and the last hatched may be supposed to be the smallest. As Maria’s part would be acted by a boy, references to her small stature is more likely to be true
- ‘Spleen’— The physiologists of Shakespeare’s time considered the spleen as the cause of laughter.
- ‘Passages of grossness’— Gross tricks or impositions

- ‘The new map...’—This is now generally taken to refer to a map issued to accompany the 1599 edition of Hakluyt’s *Voyages*, which had a fuller representation of the East Indies than any preceding one.

Scene III: Street in Illyria

Antonio and Sebastian are in the city. Antonio, despite a threat to his life in the city, just could not let Sebastian venture into Illyria alone as it could be dangerous for new travellers. On asking Antonio the nature of his deed which has earned him so many enemies, Sebastian does not elaborate but says that the act had brought the duke a lot of financial loss. Antonio gives Sebastian his purse and heads for a lodge (the Elephant) while Sebastian goes to see the city.

Annotations

- ‘Jealousy’—Fear
- ‘Worth’—Wealth, what I am worth
- ‘It would scarce be answered’—It would be hard for me to make a defense that would satisfy him.
- ‘Lapsed’—Some word meaning ‘caught’ seems to be required by the context, but lapsed is not found elsewhere in this sense. It is probably a corruption.
- ‘For idle markets’—Full enough to spend on unnecessary purchases

Scene IV: Garden in Olivia’s house

Olivia is anxious to know whether Cesario will come to visit him and plans to bring him back again. Olivia finds Malvolio’s behaviour stupid. Malvolio keeps misinterpreting everything that Olivia says. Maria tells Olivia that perhaps Malvolio is possessed by a demon. Maria, Fabian, Sir Toby keep Malvolio in a ‘dark room’.

Sir Andrew gives his letter of challenge to Sir Toby to deliver it to Cesario (Viola). But Sir Toby, instead of delivering the letter decides to deliver to Cesario a verbal message because he reasons that since both are cowards the mere words ‘duel’ will be sufficient to scare them.

Olivia makes an unsuccessful pursuit for Cesario and is hurt when he keeps refusing her.

Toby, Fabian et al play games and compel Cesario (Viola) and Sir Andrew Aguecheek to face each other and draw swords. But just then, Antonio arrives and volunteers to fight because he thinks Cesario is Sebastian as Viola looks exactly like Sebastian in man’s clothing. But cops identify Antonio as the pirate from the pirate group who had plundered the Duke, and arrest him. Antonio asks Sebastian (actually Viola disguised as Cesario) for his purse but (Viola) is unable to understand what he wants. Antonio is heartbroken with Sebastian’s (Cesario) behaviour and thinks that Sebastian cheated him and leaves. Sir Toby insists Sir Andrew should follow the ‘cowardice’ Cesario.

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Annotations

- ‘Sad’—Solemn, grave
- ‘Please one...’—The refrain of an old ballad still extant
- ‘Midsummer madness’—The midsummer moon was supposed to cause madness
- ‘Miscarry’—Come to harm
- ‘Come near’—Understand
- ‘Limed’—As with bird-lime
- ‘Incredulous’—Causing incredulity
- ‘Bawcock’—A familiar term meaning ‘fine fellow,’
- ‘Biddy, come with me.’—Probably a snatch of a song
- ‘Cherry-pit’—A game of pitching cherry-stones into a hole
- ‘Collier’—In reference to the saying, ‘Like will to like,’ quoth the devil to the collier
- ‘Genius’—Spirit
- ‘Take air and taint’—Be exposed and so spoiled
- ‘Dark room’—The usual treatment of lunatics until comparatively recent times
- ‘May morning’—A sportive season
- ‘Windy’—Apparently not the ‘windward,’ but the side towards which the wind blows, so that the law can not scent you.
- ‘Commerce’—Conversation, intercourse
- ‘Bum-bailly’—A petty officer who followed close behind to make arrests
- ‘Approbation’—Testimony
- ‘Presently’—Immediately
- ‘Despite’—Malice
- ‘Dismount thy tuck’—Draw thy sword
- ‘Yare’—Ready
- ‘Dubbed... on carpet consideration’—Knighted at home for money, not on the field for valour
- ‘Hob nob’—Have or have not
- ‘Conduct’—Escort
- ‘Quirk’—Humour
- ‘Firago’—Probably an intentional corruption of ‘virago’. The fact that it is properly used of a woman need not trouble us in view of Sir Toby’s habitual liberties with language.

- ‘Stuck’—A corruption of ‘stoccata,’ a thrust
- ‘Answer’—The return hit
- ‘Is as horribly conceited’—Has as horrible a conception
- ‘Duello’—The duelling code
- ‘Undertaker’—One who undertakes business for another
- ‘Favour’—Face
- ‘Having’—Property, possessions.
- ‘Vainness’—Boastfulness
- ‘His image’—What he appeared to be
- ‘Venerable’—Admirable, worshipful
- ‘Feature’—Appearance in general
- ‘Unkind’—Wanting in natural affection
- ‘Trunks o’erflourished’—Chests with ornamental carvings
- ‘So do not ‘—This might mean (1) I do not believe as he does (that he knows me), or (2) I do not believe my own conjecture (that he takes me for Sebastian)
- ‘A couplet or two...’—This is said with reference to the rhymed maxims in Antonio’s speech
- ‘Yet living in my glass’—I am like a mirror reflecting his face, I am so like him
- ‘Religious in it’—Practising it religiously
- ‘Slid’—A corruption of ‘God’s (eye) lid’

Act IV Scene I: A street outside Olivia’s house

The confusion further intensifies in this scene. Feste meets Sebastian and wants to know why he had called him. Feste mistakes Sebastian (for Cesario). Sir Andrew hits Sebastian presuming him to be Cesario. Sebastian hits Sir Augecheek back. Sir Toby intervenes to stop the fight. Olivia comes into rescue Sebastian (whom she considers to be Cesario) so that he doesn’t think ill of her. Sebastian on his part is enchanted to see the beautiful lady and is surprised to know that this lady loves him and readily agrees to marry her.

Annotations

- ‘Cockney’—An effeminate person
- ‘Ungird thy strangeness’—Give up being so far away. Feste is using the stilted language in ridicule
- ‘Greek’—A merry fellow
- ‘After fourteen years’ purchase’—The market price of land at the beginning of the seventeenth century was the sum of twelve years’ rental. The good

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report bought from a fool would have to be paid for longer than its worth deserved

- 'Fleshed'— Rendered eager for slaughter by the taste of blood
- 'Malapert'—Saucy
- 'Ungracious'— Graceless.
- 'Rudesby'—Ruffian
- 'Extent'—Attack
- 'Botched up'— Patched up, clumsily contrived
- 'Lethe'— That one of the four rivers of Hades which brought forgetfulness

Scene II: Room in Olivia's house

Maria brings Feste and makes him wear a disguise and presents him before Malvolio saying he is 'Sir Topas', the clergyman. They continue bothering him for long. But Sir Toby insists they stop this as he fears that because of the prank he played with Cesario (actually Sebastian) Olivia no longer likes him. Eventually Malvolio is allowed to write to Olivia explaining his mental condition.

Annotations

- 'Said'— Called.
- 'Good housekeeper'— A hospitable person
- 'Competitors'—Accomplices
- 'Hermit of Prague'— Jerome
- 'Gorbuduc. A legendary British king.'— Cf. the early Elizabethan play so-called.
- 'Hyperbolical'— The clown's corruption of 'diabolical.'
- 'Clerestories'— The upper part of the wall of a church, containing a row of windows.
- 'Constant question'— Consistent or reasonable discussion
- 'For all waters'—Up to anything
- 'Hey, Robin, ...'— These are fragments of an old song to be found in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*.
- 'Five, wits'— The intellectual powers, which were numbered five, like the senses.
- 'Notoriously'— Exceedingly
- 'Propertied'— The exact meaning is doubtful. The usual interpretations are these: (1) Treated me as a piece of property, not as a person with a will of his own; (2) Treated me as a stage 'property,' which is thrown into a dark lumber-room when not in use

- ‘Advise you’ — Take care. Part of what the clown says in the rest of this scene is spoken in the voice of Sir Topas
- ‘I am gone, sir.’ — This is probably another old song, though not elsewhere extant.

Scene III: Olivia’s Garden.

Olivia brings in a priest and tells Sebastian that their marriage has to remain secret for some time. She still thinks Sebastian is Cesario. On the other hand, Sebastian is surprised by the turn of events that changed his life. He wanders about what might have happened to his friend Antonio.

Annotations

- ‘Credit’ — Belief
- ‘Instance’ — Example
- ‘Discourse’ — Reason
- ‘Deceivable’ — Deceptive
- ‘Chantry’ — Private chapel
- ‘Whiles’ — Until
- ‘Come to note’ — Become known

Act V Scene I: A street in front of Olivia’s house

This is the last scene and all the loose ends are tied up. Chaos finally gives way to order. Duke Orsino, Cesario, Curio et al come to meet Olivia. Duke Orsino recognises Antonio while the guards were carrying him. Antonio claims he is innocent and tells the Duke that he is not a pirate. Antonio accuses Cesario (thinking him to be Sebastian) of cheating him. Though Cesario (Viola) tells the Duke that that man had stood up for him during duel, the duke is not pleased.

Olivia comes out of her house and rejects Orsino’s proposal, declaring she is married to Cesario (she is married to Sebastian but thinks it was Cesario) and expresses her displeasure on seeing Cesario with Orsino. Orsino leaves in anger. Cesario (Viola) is left confused.

In the meanwhile, Sir Andrew comes and beats ‘Cesario’ saying he (Cesario) had beaten him (but actually he was beaten by Sebastian).

Finally, Sebastian enters and everyone is shocked to see two Cesarios. Brother and sister recognise each other. The prank played on Malvolio is revealed. Duke Orsino takes Viola as his wife.

The play ends with Feste’s song where everyone is happy except Malvolio.

Annotations

- ‘Conclusions to be as kisses’ — Conclusions following from premises brought together, as kisses follow from two pairs of lips brought together.
- ‘Triplex’ — Triple time in music.

NOTES

NOTES

- ‘Bawbling’—Insignificant.
- ‘Unprizable’—Of value not to be estimated, as being either too great or too small. The context seems to require the latter meaning.
- ‘Scathful’—Destructive.
- ‘Bottom’—Vessel
- ‘Fraught’—Freight
- ‘Candy’—Candia or Crete
- ‘Desperate of shame and state’—Reckless of disgrace and position.
- ‘Brabble’—Brawl
- ‘Distraction’—Madness
- ‘Dear’—Costly, grievous. The sense of ‘coming home to one intimately’ is frequent in the Shakespearean use of this word.
- ‘Fat and fulsome’—Nauseating.
- ‘Egyptian thief’—Thyamis of Memphis, the captain of a band of robbers, carried off Chariclea and fell in love with her. When, later, he was driven to extremity by a stronger band, he attempted to slay her. The story is told in the *Ethiopica* of Heliodorus, a translation of which was current in Shakespeare’s time.
- ‘Minion’—Darling.
- ‘Tender.’—Regard.
- ‘To do you rest’—To give you ease
- ‘Detested’—This word probably bears here the not uncommon early sense of ‘repudiated.’
- ‘Strangle thy propriety’—Deny thy identity.
- ‘Function’—Official capacity
- ‘Incardinate’—Sir Andrew’s attempt at ‘incarnate.’
- ‘Od’s lifelings’—A corruption and diminution of the oath ‘God’s life.’
- ‘Bespake’—Addressed
- ‘Other gates’—In another fashion
- ‘An ass-head,...’—These reproaches seem to be aimed at Sir Andrew
- ‘That deity... of here and everywhere’—The divine property of omnipresence.
- ‘Participate’—Possess like other men.
- ‘Enlarge’—Set at liberty.
- ‘Weeds’—Garments

- ‘That orb’d continent. . .’—Shakespeare always uses continent in the literal sense of ‘that which contains.’ Here, then, it seems to mean the firmament which contains the night and among them the fire (the sun) and Viola promises to keep her oaths as truly as the firmament that keeps the sun in its path.
- ‘Upon’—On account of
- ‘Enlarge’—Set at liberty
- ‘Perpend’—Weigh, consider. Shakespeare uses it always as humorous bombast.
- ‘Proper’—Own
- ‘Quits’—Sets you free
- ‘From it’—Differently
- ‘Modesty of honour’—The sense of propriety that belongs to honorable persons.
- ‘Lighter’—Less important
- ‘Geck’—Dupe
- ‘Practice’—Plot
- ‘Shrewdly’—Wickedly
- ‘Upon some stubborn. . . him’—In consequence of some stubborn and discourteous qualities which we charged against him
- ‘Importance’—Importunity
- ‘Convents’—Summons

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6.2.1 Characters in *Twelfth Night*

In this section, we will understand the characters in the play *Twelfth Night*.

Viola/Cesario

Viola is the twin sister of Sebastian. After the shipwreck, she lands up in Illyria without her brother. Interestingly, it is never revealed to us why Sebastian and Viola undertook the voyage in the first place. But her resilient nature and the necessity to survive make her take up the guise of a young boy, Cesario, and serve the Duke of the land, Orsino. Viola falls for the Duke almost immediately after meeting him. On the other hand, the Duke takes a fancy to the new young, effeminate pageboy and gives him the charge to woo his love Olivia, on his (Duke’s) behalf.

Viola is the female protagonist of the main plot and the story revolves around her. In comparison to Orsino and Olivia, she is more determined, level-headed, and practical. Her problems are real and she is a more rounded character than the others. She is the daughter of Sebastian of Messaline, a family of noble lineage and repute. Due to her ambiguous gender (a girl pretending to be a boy) her looks draw a lot more attention than other characters. The Duke takes note of her ‘smooth

NOTES

and rubious' lip. Orsino points out that Viola's voice is 'shrill' like a lady's and not heavy like a man's. Both Maria and Malvolio depict her as a fair young man. As a brother, Sebastian remembers Viola as someone whom 'many accounted beautiful,' and Olivia is shown irresistibly attracted to Cesario's (Viola) beauty, manners and personality.

Fate is responsible for putting Viola in difficult circumstances. She is left to struggle on her own in a strange land, without any possessions (apart from a few gold pieces which she exchanges with the Captain for his favour) and without a guardian (in this case her brother). Viola gathers her nerve to survive on her own in Illyria. She adapts herself very quickly to the adverse situation she finds herself in.

Olivia's house is Viola's first choice for a shelter. But the difficulties associated with gaining access to Olivia's household make her go for Duke Orsino's patronage.

Some critics point out that Viola's statement 'bachelor then...' (Act I Scene V) is a very calculated and manipulative remark. Her talent in playing music and singing wins her favourable compliments from the Duke, gaining access to his love life and graduating from being a pageboy to his personal messenger. She manages to impress Olivia, as a pageboy with her oratory skills and good looks. Olivia thinks of Cesario (Viola):

'Thy tongue, thy face, thy limbs, actions and spirit,

Do give thee five-fold blazon...

Methinks I feel this youth's perfections

With an invisible and subtle stealth

To creep in at mine eyes'

Even Sir Toby at one point of the play admits that Cesario / Viola demonstrates 'good capacity and breeding' (Act III, Scene IV).

Viola proves herself to be a very loyal person. She never lets her emotions take her away from her main course of action. She is in love with Orsino herself, but for the sake of the Duke, she takes up with singular determination the job of wooing Olivia on behalf of the Duke. Though she gets to know that Olivia is not in love with the Duke, she never divulges this to the Duke for fear of hurting him. On the other hand, she never lets Olivia get any wrong indication regarding any emotional attachment from her side (Viola's side).

Olivia

Olivia is a rich countess of the land of Illyria. As the story takes off, we see her mourning the death of her brother and we are also informed that to honour her brother's memory she will not see any man for the next seven years. Being a woman of power and position, she also displays concern and sympathy. Despite the fact that her uncle Toby is such a nuisance, she lets him continue staying with her. In fact, she also brings an end to the practical joke played on Malvolio despite his crazy behaviour.

She has a very interesting introduction. We are not introduced to her directly. Rather we 'hear' about her from other characters until we actually meet her. We get the basic information about her through the pining of Duke Orsino in the initial scenes of the play. The rest of the information about her is provided by the sea captain who guides Viola in Illyria. She is more aggressive in her actions and less consistent in her emotions in comparison to Viola.

Olivia is a rich, beautiful and independent countess of Illyria. Duke Orsino describes her looks and says her beauty can purge 'the air of pestilence'. Even Viola believes Olivia's beauty is 'truly blent whose red and white Nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on'. Her father's and her brother's deaths have left her orphaned but more independent as she is the sole owner and administrator of the property and handles her own finances. Her uncle, Sir Toby, is less of a guardian figure and more of a source of constant embarrassment in her life.

Olivia is the perfect female counterpart for Duke Orsino, the caricature of a Petrarchan lover. She is noble, attractive, wealthy and inaccessible. She is also a romantic figure. Love is of primary importance to her. Her constant refusal to Orsino demonstrates her thoughts and her dignity. She is aware of his reputation and fortune, but she does not succumb to these worldly temptations. But she is honest to express her respect and admiration for the Duke for his affection and persuasion. She does not mind pursuing a boy (Cesario) who is socially inferior to her. In fact, the moment Sebastian agrees to the marriage (Olivia still believes that she is marrying Cesario) she immediately calls a priest and gets the marriage sanctioned without thinking of the social mismatch entailed in the marriage.

Her calmness is strikingly in contrast with the general atmosphere of her household, which is scheming, impolite and rowdy. She is both gentle and firm while dealing with people who are her subordinates. Yet at the same time, being a single independent woman of the Elizabethan era, she values and enjoys her social and financial supremacy and that is a big reason for her to refuse the Duke's offer. Sir Toby summarises the situation by saying that she will never accept the Duke's proposal because she will not marry above her rank.

Olivia's inconsistencies are in stark contrast to Viola's consistent nature. Olivia's exaggerated sorrow over the death of her brother and her vow to keep any man at bay for the next seven years, vanishes the moment she sets her eye on Cesario (Viola). In fact, she actually sets the stage for meeting Cesario again immediately after meeting him for the first time. She sends her ring under the false pretext of returning back Cesario his own ring. She marries Sebastian in great haste and does not seem to be affected by the fact that she has married someone else and was pursuing someone else all through.

Olivia's mourning for her brother is genuine but her oath is only a show. She is powerful because she is the master of her life and money. Both Viola and Olivia are complimentary to each other. For Viola, her male attire becomes a stumbling block in her life. She cannot convey her feelings to Orsino while she is in the guise

NOTES

NOTES

of a boy. She cannot reject Olivia because she cannot risk exposing herself. She cannot refuse the duel once she has accepted the challenge.

Duke Orsino

Orsino, the male protagonist of the play, is the Duke of Illyria. Orsino is modelled on Proteus of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The Duke is a romantic hero who is more in love with the idea of love than actually being in love with anyone (here Olivia).

The female characters Olivia, Viola and Maria play a pivotal role both in the main plot as well as in the subplot. The men mostly act as either aids or as silent spectators to the ongoing actions. Orsino is probably the only male character of some importance as he sets the table for further complication in the story after he appoints Viola (Cesario) as his personal messenger for Olivia.

The audience is introduced to Duke Orsino through the words of the sea-captain who rescues Viola. Orsino's noble nature is harped upon many times in the play. The captain describes him as a noble human being. Olivia, despite her hesitation in accepting his love, utters the following words in his context—

'I suppose him virtuous, know him noble,/ of great estate, of fresh and stainless youth;/ In voices well divulg'd, learned and valiant;/ And in dimension and the shape of nature / A gracious person' (Act I Scene V).

He is portrayed as a typical nobleman of Shakespeare's time. He is blessed with beauty, fortune and character. We are not told of his capability to rule until the end of the play.

Orsino is a stereotype of a romantic, sentimental hero who is more in love with the idea of love than with the object of his love, Olivia. His approach towards love is more pompous and dramatic than real. He longs for melancholic music, shows disinterest in hunting and detaches himself from the affairs of the country. For him true lovers are 'unstaïd and skittish in all motions else' and he seems to implement the same rule in his own life. He adopts an unreal language which is elevated, ornate and poetic.

Orsino is a Petrarchan lover. Shakespeare makes fun of the idiosyncrasies and foolishness of the Petrarchan lover. Petrarch wrote nearly 300 sonnets for Laura, some while she was alive and some after her death. They mostly revolved around the groans and sighs of the lover. Olivia is very clear and consistent about her feelings for Orsino from the very beginning of the play. But Orsino, like a true Petrarchan lover, refuses to believe her.

Orsino is so besotted with his being-in-love condition that he is oblivious of Viola's love for him. He even fails to see through the cross-dressed Cesario's disguise, despite the fact that he spends a large part of the day with her. He even fails to understand the implication of the love story that Cesario narrates and refuses to take any hints however much Viola tries to express her feelings.

Maria

Maria is the gentlewoman of Olivia. She is always on favourable terms with her mistress. Despite her dislike for Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, she joins hands with them to teach Malvolio a lesson. She is the master mind behind the comic subplot which involves teaching a lesson to Malvolio.

Maria, apart from being Olivia's handmaid, is also her companion and confidante. She wields a greater power in the household in comparison to the other members; that is why she can sternly ask Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste to stop their late-night nuisance. She constantly jibes at Sir Toby for his misuse of words. Maria is described as more of a rational than emotional person.

In terms of her beauty, she seems to be of attractive appearance because Viola, in the first meeting, has difficulty identifying the lady of the house. The confusion also seems to highlight that Maria is a lady of noble conduct like any lady of position should be. Her shortness is constantly attacked either directly or indirectly. Sir Toby calls her 'Youngest wren of nine' and later on he addresses her as 'Penthesilea'. Penthesilea was the Queen of the Amazons implying that despite being small in size, Maria shared the same sharp tongue, quick temper and wit just like the Amazonian Queen. She uses her wit and intelligence to counterattack Sir Toby's verbal misadventures and to take her revenge (against Malvolio).

Apart from being intelligent, Maria is a cunning lady. Despite her dislike for Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, she includes their company in her plan to put Malvolio in trouble. She knows how to manipulate situations in her favour. But at the same time, these qualities of hers force Malvolio to take off the mask from his face, whose behaviour in Olivia's company and behind her back, is completely different.

Sebastian

Sebastian is the twin brother of Viola. By a coincidence, he too lands up in Illyria after the shipwreck and end up marrying Olivia whom he meets for the first time. Unlike his sister, he is only a minor character. His main contribution to the play is that his arrival brings in the much-needed end to the confusion of the plot. His likeness with his sister is summed up by Orsino in the following words:

'One face, one voice, one habit, and two persons' (*Act V Scene I*)

Within the brief time frame that he appears in the play, he is presented as a noble, brave, loyal, loving brother, possessing all the human virtues just like his sister. After getting Antonio as a friend and brother, he refuses to bring Antonio with him to Illyria because of the danger that looms on his head. He is adventurous, that's why he does not decline the invitation of a duel from Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. His sudden eagerness to marry Olivia whom he does not even know, throws light on his rashness. It is different that the marriage had a purpose to serve in the main story, but the incident highlights a different dimension of Sebastian.

NOTES

NOTES

Antonio

Antonio is a good-natured soul who helps Sebastian in the unknown land of Illyria. He also lends his purse to Sebastian just in case he needs any money. Despite facing a threat to his life, he escorts Sebastian to the city and is responsible for the final commotion in the play which leads to the concluding exposition of the story.

His role in the play is to introduce Sebastian to Illyria so that the complication of mistaken identity comes to an end. He turns out to be a guide for Sebastian in the new place. His being at a crossroads with Orsino and the law of the land brings out the administrative and decision-making capacity of Antonio who until now was only a lover. Antonio is shown to be a man of dignity and honour.

Sir Toby Belch

Sir Toby Belch is Olivia's uncle. He does not display any politeness or sophistication that money and position of high birth brings with it. Unlike his niece, he is hardly ever found speaking properly or articulately. Sir Toby is like a cunning parasite. He continues staying at his niece's place and brings in Sir Andrew to woo Olivia, so that he can use Sir Andrew's money as well.

Sir Toby is one of the main reasons for the comedy in the play. By nature, he is very unlike his niece in whose house he is surviving. He is loud, abusive, and devoid of any kind of subtle humour or good manners, making him stick out like a sore thumb both in Olivia's household as well as in Illyria. His role as a guardian figure to Olivia, especially after the death of her father and brother, is questionable.

Like Feste, Sir Toby does not approve of Olivia taking up such an impossible vow to express her grief. His constant drinking results in his being labelled as a non-serious person. But he is a cunning man; in order to continue his stay at Olivia's house, he fools Sir Andrew so that the latter can bear his expenses. He is also careful to keep up good behaviour in the eyes of Olivia so that he is not thrown out of his shelter. He is also shown to be acting mean towards Malvolio. Most of the humour arises because of Sir Toby's invention of new words or wrong usage of words like 'Tobyisms', 'Castiliano vulgo,' 'pourquoi', 'substractors', 'cubiculo firago', and so on. His absurd idea of a practical joke brings Sir Andrew and Cesario / Sebastian face to face, without thinking about the consequences.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek

Sir Andrew Augecheek is one of the rich knights of Illyria. He is a coward and can be easily brainwashed. That is the sole reason why he does not acknowledge Olivia's refusal of his marriage proposal and continues to believe that Olivia is just pretending to reject him.

He is a contrast to Sir Toby in appearance and manner. Sir Toby is loud, cunning and rowdy while Sir Andrew is timid, foolish, and a weakling. Maria describes him as 'a great quarreler, who has the gift of a coward to allay the gust

he hath in quarrelling' (Act I Scene III). He has no opinion of his own. He functions as instructed to him by others.

Sir Andrew has a telltale name. His appearance, as his name indicates, is thin and pale. He is another source of humour in the play. He actually admits 'many do call me fool' (Act II). He is trained in dancing, bear-baiting and fencing but he laments that he does not have much insight into arts, though we are informed through the conversation between Sir Toby and Maria that he is fluent in three or four languages. He looks up to Sir Toby as an important figure from whom he can imitate the manners and ways of nobility. His habit of imitating Sir Toby goes to a funny extreme when he declares that he will marry Maria even while he is pursuing Olivia.

Feste

Feste is the clown of Olivia. He is full of wisdom and a keen observer. He is licensed to speak anything. He is the only one who manages to make Olivia see sense through her insistence on mourning for seven years. He convinces her that mourning for so long for a dead person is a futile attempt. His liberty as a licensed fool allows him to tell Olivia that she is foolish to observe such a long mourning for her brother's death.

Feste is very much at ease with his profession. He declares to Olivia, 'I wear not motley in my brain' (Act I Scene V) and 'better a witty fool than a foolish wit' (Act I Scene V). He brings out the inconstancy of Orsino's nature by saying, 'thy mind is very opal' (Act II Scene IV).

Malvolio's questioning of Feste's capacities as a jester provokes Feste. This might be because Malvolio was right or because Feste did not like to be wrongly accused of being incompetent in his profession. Whatever the reason might be, he proves his point by being a part of the plot to prove Malvolio insane. He is vengeful - as the Malvolio episode shows - and at the same time he is concerned about his earnings, so he keeps the company of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby because it earns him some extra income.

Malvolio

Malvolio is Olivia's steward who subscribes to Puritanical thoughts. He is ambitious in the sense that he intends to marry Olivia and rise in the social hierarchy. He is also blinded by his own self-love. He refuses to see the trouble that is arising because of his ways. His telltale name points towards his malevolent or unfriendly nature. He is so full of himself that he easily falls into the trap set up by Maria, Toby, Andrew and Feste.

He is in charge of Olivia's household. His sombre appearance and manner befits Olivia's mourning phase. He plays an active role in keeping a check on Sir Toby. He is unpopular among the other servants' because of his strict adherence to rules and his habit of reporting everything to Olivia.

NOTES

NOTES

Being a Puritan, he is always dressed in black. He receives the admiration of Olivia, but his error of judgement makes him believe that Olivia's love for him makes her praise him and her admiration of his efficiency is her way of expressing her love to him.

Despite his dedication to his work, Malvolio is perceived as a hypocrite by many. According to Maria, Malvolio is 'the devil a Puritan that he is, or anything constantly, but a time-pleaser' (Act II, Scene III). Being a Puritan, who despises material gains, he desires to be a count and acquire power and position, exposing his hypocrisy.

He is so self-involved and so vain that he never realises his imperfections. It is only towards the end, after he has learnt his lessons, that he begs Feste to bail him out of his wretched condition. His sense of superiority and self-love became the reason for his downfall.

Fabian

Fabian, another minor character, is an assistant to Olivia. He too is disgruntled with Malvolio; so he is a party to the trio of Maria, Toby, and Andrew in making Malvolio fall from Olivia's grace. He is introduced in Act II, Scene V. As he puts it, Malvolio 'brought me out o' favour my lady over a bear-baiting here.' He like Sir Toby enjoys indulging in fun at another's expense. He is an aid to Sir Toby in arranging the duel between Cesario and Sir Andrew.

- **Valentine:** He is one of the gentlemen of Illyria who is in the service of Duke Orsino.
- **Curio:** He is a gentleman in the service of Duke Orsino.
- **Sea Captain:** He is the helpful captain who helps Viola get a position in Duke Orsino's Court.
- **Priest:** He is the one who conducts the marriage of Olivia and Sebastian.
- **Officers:** They are the law enforcement representatives who come to arrest Antonio.
- **Sailors:** They are the crew who land in Illyria along with Viola after their ship is wrecked.
- **Lords, Musicians, and Attendants:** They are a part of the court of Olivia and/or Orsino.

Check Your Progress

1. What is the opening scene of the play *Twelfth Night*?
2. Who is Viola?
3. How are the male and female characters projected in the play?

6.3 ABOUT THE PLAY

Like all of Shakespearean plays, *Twelfth Night* too has its origin in other sources. It is believed that Shakespeare was influenced by Gl'ingannati (*The Deceived Ones*), Bandello's *Novella* (1534), a collection of Italian stories, Belle Forest's *Histoires Tragiques* (1570) Rich's *Apolonius and Silla*.

Roman plays and Renaissance Italian plays based on Roman or Latin plays dealt with stories of shipwreck, loss, mistaken identity (use of disguise or otherwise) followed by anagnorisis (revelation of real identity or recognition). Apart from Ben Jonson, no one, not even Shakespeare ever thought of publishing his texts.

The Subtitle

When Shakespeare first wrote the play, he had originally named it *What you Will*. But John Marston's popular play *What you Will* was released in the meantime, forcing Shakespeare to change the name of his play. He named it *Twelfth Night* and retained the original title as a subtitle. It literally means 'what you want'. Since the Illyrians that we come across are rich people, they lead their lives the way they desire. There are a few like Feste and Malvolio who are not very prosperous.

It could also be an invitation to the audience to participate in the madness that continues in the play which finds its resonance in the celebratory mood taking place in the real world. Marston's play, which was an attack on Ben Jonson, was a great success so maybe that's why Shakespeare retained the name in his subtitle to draw audiences.

Sources of Comedy in the Play

Twelfth Night is a dark comedy. Comedy in *Twelfth Night* is based on wit (language, dialogues, pun) and humour (action bordering on farce, characterisation, and scenes), mistaken identity (the errors caused because of characters' ignorance about each other's identity, though audience is aware of the identities). The play ends with a marriage, bad matches are dissolved, and right matches translate into unions.

Shakespeare blends *Twelfth Night* with various elements to create the comedy—a pair of twins (of different sex), circumstantial comedy, some dramatic irony, romance of various kinds, three bombastic revelers, and a puritanical arrogant. How Shakespeare uses these is explained below:

Mistaken Identities

Viola and Sebastian are twins who get separated in a shipwreck. Each presumes the other dead. They then struggle to survive in their separate lives, establishing two subplots in the original story that results in hilarious situations arising out of mistaken identities. For example, Olivia marries Sebastian thinking him to be Cesario (Viola).

NOTES

NOTES

Circumstantial Humour

Viola, after taking on the disguise of a young man, makes the plot structure more intricate. In her new identity as Cesario she falls in love with Duke Orsino. When she acts as the Duke's messenger to convince Olivia to accept Orsino's proposal, Olivia falls in love with Viola smitten by 'his' handsome features and soft nature. At this juncture, the play resembles the complexity of a modern comedy. Narrating her dilemma, Viola says—

*my master loves her [Olivia] dearly;
And I, poor monster, fond as much on him;
And she, mistaken, seems to dote on me.
What will become of this? As I am man,
My state is desperate for my master's love;
As I am woman,—now alas the day!—
What thriftless sighs shall poor Olivia breathe!
O time! thou must untangle this, not I;
It is too hard a knot for me to untie! (2.2.24-32)*

Dramatic Irony

When a character in a play, novel or a film, is ignorant of plot progress or background knowledge—which is known by the audience—then that situation is referred to as 'dramatic irony'. Shakespeare's use of dramatic irony in *Twelfth Night* is the basis for a number of memorable comic scenes. Let us for example consider the dialogue between Orsino and Cesario in Act I, Scene II when Duke Orsino sees Viola (Cesario) lost in thought.

DUKE ORSINO...My life upon't, young though thou art, thine eye
Hath stay'd upon some favour that it loves:
Hath it not, boy?
VIOLA...A little, by your favour.
DUKE ORSINO...What kind of woman is 't?
VIOLA...Of your complexion.
DUKE ORSINO...She is not worth thee, then. What years, i' faith?
VIOLA...About your years, my lord. (2.4.23-30)

It is due to her love for the Duke that she is absent-minded. Although she almost describes her love and her feelings for Orsino, he remains unaware of the fact that he is the reason for her distraction.

The other example of dramatic irony could be Olivia's declaration of her love for Cesario, the disguised Viola –

Cesario, by the roses of the spring,
 By maidhood, honour, truth and everything,
 I love thee so, that, maugre all thy pride,
 Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide.
 Do not extort thy reasons from this clause,
 For that I woo, thou therefore hast no cause,
 But rather reason thus with reason fetter,
 Love sought is good, but given unsought better. (3.1.115-122)

NOTES

Love and its complications

The emotion of love overpowers Viola, Orsino and Olivia creating a love triangle. Again Malvolio-Olivia-Sir Andrew forms a part the love triangle that rules the subplot. But the emergence of Viola's brother, Sebastian, along with Sir Toby Belch and Maria further complicates the romantic life of these characters that was already messed up due to Viola's cross-dressing. But Malvolio's self-love and social position deters him from aiming for Olivia.

The Rowdy Revellers

The drinking and late night discourse, planning and singing of Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Feste the Fool provide great comic scenes between the other parts of the play. The prank played on Malvolio by the threesome, with the help of Maria, is slightly crude but nonetheless provides the necessary laughs.

Act III Scene IV is an example of comedy inducing metamorphosis. Characters change for the better. There is a creation of an ideal space. Comedy tries to affect change. Comedy through illusion makes people change.

Performance

Twelfth Night was first performed in February 1602. As customary, the twelfth night of Christmas celebration, which is also the final day of twelve nights of celebration, is a time of celebration and enjoyment. It is also known as the 'Feast of the Epiphany'. It falls every year on 6 January. This festival of '*Twelfth Night*' was called the 'Feast of Fools' during the time of Shakespeare. During this period the natural order of the society was inverted; the king took over the role of the fool to entertain people and fools took over the charge of the king. Read from this perspective, we will be able to figure out the chaos that reigns in Illyria.

Basically, *Twelfth Night* is based on a holiday mood. It celebrates 'Saturnalia' – the inversion of social order. Lower classes are given power; normal order of functioning is disrupted. Olivia's nearest relatives plan to take control as if Olivia cannot take control herself. The trio of Sir Andrew, Maria and Toby invert the household. The madness is carried forward further by mistaken identities, cross-dressings, same-sex love and look-alike persons. Andrew knows nothing about

NOTES

anything and believes Sir Toby knows better and Sir Toby makes fun of him by giving him misinformation.

Act IV is a prologue to Dark comedy. Dark areas lie in treatment of Malvolio by others and Feste's actions.

Film Adaptations

Twelfth Night has been adapted into movies thrice. The first version came out way back in 1910. It starred Florence Turner, Julia Swayne Gordon and Marin Sais. It was a silent film. The next adaptation came out in 1996. It had some prominent actors of the time playing the central roles like Imogen Stubbs, Helena Bonham Carter, Mel Smith, and Ben Kingsley, Imelda Staunton et al. The 2006 version, *She's the Man* is a modern-day adaptation of the play.

Feste, the Fool

Jesters or Fools in Shakespeare's time were actual people in society. They usually hailed from ordinary families, many a time from the margins of society. They had something about their appearance or nature which made people laugh at them. It was a general conception in Shakespearian time that they were associates of Satan because they looked and behaved differently. Others identified them as simpletons (as they were innocent they were more close to Nature). The credit for introducing 'fools' on stage goes to Ben Jonson and Shakespeare. The dress worn by the Fool was motley meaning mixed. Fools were also called 'Sot', which means drunkard. Apart from male fools, the existence of female fools was also common place. Licensed jesters had the ability to make fun of commoners and people of positions including the king himself.

It must be noted that there is a distinction between fool and clown. A fool is a social entertainer; he is witty and humorous, possesses wisdom and is a philosopher. But a clown induces laughter through physical gestures and buffoonery.

In the *Twelfth Night*, Feste occupies a delicate position. He is very different from the Fools that appear in comedies such as *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Merchant of Venice*. Feste, the fool, was employed by Olivia's father and he was a licensed fool ('an allowed fool') (Act I Scene V) that gave him the power to speak the truth about happenings around him. But here, in the play, he is not the only one who is indulging in mindless buffoonery, he finds company in Sir Andrew and Sir Aguecheek. Feste's position doesn't revolve around making remarks about the world around. Instead, he also participates in stupidity indulged in by others. He is capable of accessing the various social hierarchies of the world around and has the ability to interact with people from all backgrounds with equal ease making him stand out in the play as well as among other Shakespearian fools.

Feste is the face of the comedy in the play. Unlike Lear's fool, he does not indulge in any profound philosophical musings but he remains the wisest character in the play. Viola's remark only confirms our knowledge—

'This fellow's wise enough to play the fool' (*III.i.61*).

Feste's license to speak the truth arouses humour. In one of the dialogues with Olivia, he displays his wisdom when he asks her why she is mourning. The point Feste is trying to make is that Olivia's mourning is futile because her dead brother's soul has already reached heaven—

CLOWN: Good Madonna, why mourn'st thou?

OLIVIA: Good Fool, for my brother's death.

CLOWN: I think his soul is in hell, Madonna.

OLIVIA: I know his soul is in heaven, fool.

CLOWN: *The more fool, Madonna, to mourn for your brother's soul, being in heaven.*

In one of the scenes, he dresses up as Sir Topas, and makes Malvolio believe that he has been possessed by devil and has gone insane. During the conversation Feste uses his wit to influence Malvolio's mind with his verbal competency, who is under the impression that he is talking to the fool and not Sir Topas. Feste, in his dual role as Sir Topas, addresses Malvolio a 'lunatic' and 'Satan' (Act IV Scene II). Throughout the play, Malvolio is described as a spoilsport who troubles others. That is why this act of Feste finds acceptance with the audience.

Feste seems to have a melancholic and aggressive side to him. He does not take kindly to Malvolio's words when Malvolio says that Feste had once lost a battle of wits with a village rustic. When the time comes he aids Maria in harassing Malvolio. His melancholic side is reflected by the song which he sings in the end—

'The rain it raineth every day,'

It means each day arrives with its own share of misery, which is slightly odd because a fool usually sings joyous verses. But at the same time a philosophical song like this after the happy ending might also underline the fool's wisdom, who is reminding us that happiness is always short-lived.

Enid Welsford in his seminal work *The Fool; His Social and Literary History* explains 'fool' as someone who is just a commentator on everything and at times he plays advisor even to the king. Shakespeare in *As You Like It* calls the fool Touchstone as 'Nature's natural'. Touchstone is a happy fool in comparison to the sad or the dying fool of *King Lear*. Feste's character lies somewhere between these two extreme examples. He appears to be happy but he is sometimes serious. He is a pragmatic character. He is in need of money so he has to earn good favour from his superiors besides keeping good relations with people who are in a subordinate position to the superior. He is constantly walking a tightrope in order to sustain himself. He is very clever but pretends to be a fool.

Themes in *Twelfth Night*

Some of the important themes explored in this play are discussed in the following sections.

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Love and its Various Manifestations

Love is a theme that forms the crux of the play. But the notion of ‘love’ is different for every character.

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In many ways Duke Orsino’s love for Olivia reminds one of the romantic or courtly love tradition where the protagonist faces similar situations and challenges in his desire to acquire his love. In courtly love the lover places his beloved on the highest pedestal of respect elevating her to an almost semi-divine status, just like Orsino does. There the lover declares his love which is always declined by the lady, which makes her even more virtuous in the eyes of the lover as it happens with respect to Olivia, as she argues that she has taken a vow to live like a nun for the next seven years. The courtly lover always attempts to gain her love through various means, as Orsino does by sending Cesario (Viola) to Olivia with his messages.

Duke Orsino, like the courtly lover, suffers from love sickness, and keeps pining for Olivia, but this in a way works for the Duke bringing him closer to his new servant Cesario. Romantic love is always instigated by unexpected and mysterious ways – there is no reason for Olivia falling for Cesario / Viola (though she is impressed with his oratory skills and persuasive skills and yet it is not enough reason to justify her strong feelings for the messenger boy under such self-imposed adverse situations). Even Orsino tells us that his love for Olivia was instantaneous.

Viola’s love for Orsino can be analysed from a slightly different perspective. Even though her love for Orsino is unattainable while she is in a man’s disguise, she is more rational and selfless in her love. She (as Cesario) goes to Olivia to win her heart on behalf of Orsino, unlike Orsino who is so full of his own love that he is temporarily blinded to Viola’s love. Homoerotic love is never clearly stated in the play. It is only hinted upon because Shakespeare never wanted to be on the side of either law or Church.

The bonding between Sebastian and Antonio is termed as ‘love’. In Shakespeare’s time ‘love’ was used in a very universal sense, love between two men in this context intends to convey brotherly affection or human bonding. It should not be confused with modern-day homo-erotic love. The level of faith they share with each other, the emotional connectivity they have and the nature of risks they face for the other is commendable and underlines their goodness.

Viola’s love for her brother Sebastian and Olivia’s love for her dead brother is also another significant aspect of love that is highlighted. In this play, filial affection results in some major turn of events.

Self-love or narcissism results in some funny situations. The obsession of a character with himself makes him the target of ridicule. But unfortunately, these people are so blinded by their own vanity that they refuse to see the embarrassment they are causing for themselves. The disparity between reality and disguise brings in this deviation from norm. Malvolio is busy with himself and his reason for marrying

Olivia is to rise above in his social situation. These characters intend to project themselves in the best way but unfortunately, they end up presenting themselves as something entirely different, thus exposing their stupidity.

The emotion of love makes the characters indulge in activities which are not expected of them. The ring that Olivia gives to Cesario indicates her love for the page boy. It also highlights Olivia's plan to bring Cesario back to her in the context of returning the ring. Olivia, a woman of repute and wealth, fixes her fancy on a boy who is socially so inferior to him, that under ordinary circumstances this act of hers would have resulted in her getting caught in social criticism. Equally strange are Duke Orsino's actions. Instead of investing his time in state affairs he whiles away his time singing and pining for his beloved.

Shakespeare takes care to strike a balance between the natures of the lovers. Viola's steadiness compensates for Orsino's fickle-mindedness. Orsino, despite his obsession for Olivia, is an honest nobleman. The lines 'my soul within the house' can be compared with 'love make his heart... fair cruelty' (*As You Like It*) because they both relate to similar situations.

Duke Orsino, Olivia and Viola are unidirectional characters. Their romantic triangle is governed by 'love' only. Orsino is pursuing Olivia, who has lost her heart to Cesario and Cesario is the silent lover of the Duke. As Jan Kott points out in his *Shakespeare's Bitter Arcadia* these three characters are the three parallels of Shakespeare's sonnets – 'A man, a youth, a woman.' The sexual ambiguity further intensifies as Sebastian makes his appearance in Illyria. The world of Illyria seems to be musing under one ambiguity after another. The distinction between deceived and deceiver blurs. The play is not only about mistaken identities and presumptions about self, '...the real theme of Illyria' is '... erotic delirium or the metamorphoses of sex', as Jan Kott sums up.

Reality and Illusion

Twelfth Night or the twelfth day of Christmas is traditionally associated with celebrations and masques. Written for such a celebratory period, Shakespeare presents before us the notion of mask wearing in a variety of contexts.

The setting of this play is the city of Illyria, on the Adriatic coast. The characters who are inhabitants of Illyria are like the people with whom we interact in daily life. Yet at the same time they are far removed from everyday life. It has a medieval setting which talks of dukes, knights, sword fights, court jesters etc. We confront people who are from nobility or aristocracy, servants or seamen but no other kind is available. This world of fantasy is full of fantastical elements and neither the audience nor Viola or Sebastian question their strangeness but easily become a part of it.

The dichotomy of appearance and reality does not limit itself to individual instances; rather it permeates through the whole play. Illusion shapes the world just like it happens in another Shakespearian play, *A Mid Summer Night's Dream*.

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The young boy who serves the Duke could either be a girl (Viola) or her brother (Sebastian). One might encounter a social parasite in the form of a Puritan cook. The man who summons to engage in a fight just might be a weakling and a supposedly faint-hearted man might turn out to be a valiant young man. The camouflaging works fine as long as one tries to keep up the social mask, but a peek into the deeper consciousness brings out the real persona. Viola, despite being disguised in male clothing, retains her feminine qualities of virtue, honesty and loyalty towards her master-lover.

Feste, the fool, is the only person who manages to draw our attention to the reality and his insights into the psyche of other people makes him utter words of wisdom.

Most of the characters in this play are concealed under false notions about themselves. This forms the basis of humour and melancholy that adorns the narrative. Sir Andrew Aguecheek lives under the illusion that he is a man of honour and his behavior and mannerisms speak of mobility. But in reality he proves to be an unimpressive man, devoid of courteousness. Malvolio is under the delusion that he is the smartest of all whereas exactly the opposite is true. Orsino is under the impression that he is in love with Olivia but in reality he is possessed with the idea of being in love.

Unlike the disguised Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You like It*, the disguised heroine in *Twelfth Night*, Viola, is not as empowered. And doing away with disguise is also not a solution because in *Twelfth Night* not all reactions are the result of human actions. Some of the events that take place in the play are devoid of human intervention. In fact, a greater power seems to be in control most of the time. The shipwreck which lands Viola in Illyria and the use of men's attire by Viola serves a few functional purposes. The women in Shakespeare's time were socially inferior to men, living within restrictions. The disguise provided masculinity to women, and also more power. Cross-dressing was an offence in Shakespeare's time, except on stage. The underlying theme of the play is 'disguise', an idea that gets complicated as the story progresses.

The concept of 'concealment' or 'disguise' was not new for the Elizabethan stage. During Elizabethan period, boys enacted the roles of girls or women. Shakespeare, like his contemporary dramatists, was well aware of the limitations of having to use a boy play the role of a female; but the most difficult thing was to portray a mature woman. Elizabethan stage did not rely much on the presence of female protagonists on stage to carry forward the story. Both in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Shakespeare successfully uses this ploy of a girl (male actors acting as girl) dressing up as a man and turns this limitation into a major source of laughter. The play directly questions the notion of 'masculine behaviour' and 'feminine behaviour'.

In *Twelfth Night*, things get slightly complicated. The page boy of Duke Orsino - who is the object of Countess Olivia's affection - is a girl dressed as a

boy who in reality is a boy dressed as a girl. Thus, there is a complex problem through the entire love story. In Illyria, everything seems to be ambiguous. Viola occupies an androgynous space, she is not a boy, and she is not a girl. As she tells the captain, she will be the Duke's 'eunuch'.

Twelfth Night

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Check Your Progress

4. List the sources of inspiration for the play *Twelfth Night*.
5. What is 'dramatic irony'?

6.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The play *Twelfth Night* opens with Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, announcing his love for Olivia.
2. Viola is the twin sister of Sebastian. She is the female protagonist of the main plot and the story revolves around her.
3. The female characters Olivia, Viola and Maria play a pivotal role both in the main plot as well as in the subplot. The men mostly act as either aids or as silent spectators to the ongoing actions.
4. It is believed that Shakespeare was influenced by Gl'ingannati (*The Deceived Ones*), Bandello's *Novella* (1534), a collection of Italian stories, Belle Forest's *Histoires Tragiques* (1570) Rich's *Apolonius and Silla* while writing his play *Twelfth Night*.
5. When a character in a play, novel or a film, is ignorant of plot progress or background knowledge—which is known by the audience—then that situation is referred to as 'dramatic irony'.

6.5 SUMMARY

- English poet and playwright William Shakespeare's (1564–1616) plays are considered to be the greatest in the English language and in Western literature. Traditionally, the plays are divided into the genres of tragedy, history and comedy; they have been translated into every major living language, in addition to being continually performed all around the world.
- Most of his plays appeared in print as a series of quartos, but approximately half of them remained unpublished until 1623, when the posthumous *First Folio* was published.
- The play *Twelfth Night* opens with Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, announcing his love for Olivia.

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- The play opens with the lines ‘If music be the food . . . so die’ highlighting Orsino’s undying love for Olivia. ‘Dying fall’ implies decreasing rhythm of the song.
- Viola is the female protagonist of the main plot and the story revolves around her. In comparison to Orsino and Olivia, she is more determined, level-headed, and practical.
- Orsino points out that Viola’s voice is ‘shrill’ like a lady’s and not heavy like a man’s. Both Maria and Malvolio depict her as a fair young man.
- As a brother, Sebastian remembers Viola as someone whom ‘many accounted beautiful,’ and Olivia is shown irresistibly attracted to Cesario’s (Viola) beauty, manners and personality.
- Some critics point out that Viola’s statement ‘bachelor then . . .’ (Act I Scene V) is a very calculated and manipulative remark.
- Her talent in playing music and singing wins her favourable compliments from the Duke, gaining access to his love life and graduating from being a pageboy to his personal messenger.
- Viola proves herself to be a very loyal person. She never lets her emotions take her away from her main course of action.
- Olivia is a rich countess of the land of Illyria. As the story takes off, we see her mourning the death of her brother and we are also informed that to honour her brother’s memory she will not see any man for the next seven years.
- Olivia is a rich, beautiful and independent countess of Illyria. Duke Orsino describes her looks and says her beauty can purge ‘the air of pestilence’.
- Olivia is the perfect female counterpart for Duke Orsino, the caricature of a Petrarchan lover. She is noble, attractive, wealthy and inaccessible. She is also a romantic figure.
- Olivia’s inconsistencies are in stark contrast to Viola’s consistent nature.
- Olivia’s mourning for her brother is genuine but her oath is only a show. She is powerful because she is the master of her life and money. Both Viola and Olivia are complimentary to each other.
- Orsino, the male protagonist of the play, is the Duke of Illyria. Orsino is modelled on Proteus of *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The Duke is a romantic hero who is more in love with the idea of love than actually being in love with anyone (here Olivia).
- The female characters Olivia, Viola and Maria play a pivotal role both in the main plot as well as in the subplot.
- The audience is introduced to Duke Orsino through the words of the sea-captain who rescues Viola.

- Orsino is a stereotype of a romantic, sentimental hero who is more in love with the idea of love than with the object of his love, Olivia.
- Orsino is a Petrarchan lover. Shakespeare makes fun of the idiosyncrasies and foolishness of the Petrarchan lover.
- Petrarch wrote nearly 300 sonnets for Laura, some while she was alive and some after her death.
- Orsino is so besotted with his being-in-love condition that he is oblivious of Viola's love for him.
- Maria is the gentlewoman of Olivia. She is always on favourable terms with her mistress.
- Maria, apart from being Olivia's handmaid, is also her companion and confidante.
- In terms of her beauty, she seems to be of attractive appearance because Viola, in the first meeting, has difficulty identifying the lady of the house.
- The confusion also seems to highlight that Maria is a lady of noble conduct like any lady of position should be.
- Sebastian is the twin brother of Viola. By a coincidence, he too lands up in Illyria after the shipwreck and end up marrying Olivia whom he meets for the first time.
- Antonio is a good-natured soul who helps Sebastian in the unknown land of Illyria. He also lends his purse to Sebastian just in case he needs any money.
- His role in the play is to introduce Sebastian to Illyria so that the complication of mistaken identity comes to an end.
- Sir Toby Belch is Olivia's uncle. He does not display any politeness or sophistication that money and position of high birth brings with it.
- Sir Toby is one of the main reasons for the comedy in the play. By nature, he is very unlike his niece in whose house he is surviving.
- Sir Andrew Augecheek is one of the rich knights of Illyria. He is a coward and can be easily brainwashed.
- He is a contrast to Sir Toby in appearance and manner. Sir Toby is loud, cunning and rowdy while Sir Andrew is timid, foolish, and a weakling.
- Sir Andrew has a telltale name. His appearance, as his name indicates, is thin and pale. He is another source of humour in the play. He actually admits 'many do call me fool' (Act II).
- Malvolio is Olivia's steward who subscribes to Puritanical thoughts. He is ambitious in the sense that he intends to marry Olivia and rise in the social hierarchy.

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- Fabian, another minor character, is an assistant to Olivia. He too is disgruntled with Malvolio; so he is a party to the trio of Maria, Toby, and Andrew in making Malvolio fall from Olivia's grace.
- Like all of Shakespearean plays, *Twelfth Night* too has its origin in other sources. It is believed that Shakespeare was influenced by GI'ingannati (*The Deceived Ones*), Bandello's *Novella* (1534), a collection of Italian stories, Belle Forest's *Histoires Tragiques* (1570) Rich's *Apolonius and Silla*.
- When Shakespeare first wrote the play, he had originally named it *What you Will*. But John Marston's popular play *What you Will* was released in the meantime, forcing Shakespeare to change the name of his play.
- *Twelfth Night* is a dark comedy. Comedy in *Twelfth Night* is based on wit (language, dialogues, pun) and humour (action bordering on farce, characterisation, and scenes), mistaken identity (the errors caused because of characters' ignorance about each other's identity, though audience is aware of the identities).
- When a character in a play, novel or a film, is ignorant of plot progress or background knowledge—which is known by the audience—then that situation is referred to as 'dramatic irony'.
- *Twelfth Night* was first performed in February 1602. As customary, the twelfth night of Christmas celebration, which is also the final day of twelve nights of celebration, is a time of celebration and enjoyment. It is also known as the 'Feast of the Epiphany'.
- Love is a theme that forms the crux of the play. But the notion of 'love' is different for every character.
- The concept of 'concealment' or 'disguise' was not new for the Elizabethan stage. During Elizabethan period, boys enacted the roles of girls or women.

6.6 KEY WORDS

- **Cross-dressing:** It is the act of wearing items of clothing and other accoutrements commonly associated with the opposite sex within a particular society.
- **Dichotomy:** It is a division or contrast between two things that are or are represented as being opposed or entirely different.
- **Narcissism:** It refers to the excessive interest in or admiration of oneself and one's physical appearance.
- **Annotation:** It is a note by way of explanation or comment added to a text or diagram.

6.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a scene-wise summary of Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*.
2. Write brief character-sketches of Viola and Olivia. How are they different from or similar to each other?
3. Discuss any three important characters, other than Viola and Olivia, from the play *Twelfth Night*.
4. What does the sub-title of the play indicate?
5. Discuss the various sources of comedy in the play.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyze Shakespeare's play *Twelfth Night*.
2. "Feste is the clown of Olivia." Critically analyze and substantiate your answer with examples from the play.
3. How is the concept of mistaken identities employed in the play *Twelfth Night*? Elucidate your answer with examples.
4. Describe the major themes in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

6.8 FURTHER READINGS

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UNIT 7 *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*

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Structure

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 Objectives
- 7.2 Analysis of *Much Ado about Nothing*
 - 7.2.1 Treatment of the Theme of Love in *Much Ado About Nothing*
 - 7.2.2 Wit and Humour in *Much Ado About Nothing*
 - 7.2.3 Feminism in *Much Ado About Nothing*
- 7.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 7.4 Summary
- 7.5 Key Words
- 7.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 7.7 Further Readings

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare was one of the greatest men of genius that have ever been born on this earth. The extent, variety and richness of his plays are quite surprising even for the greatest of literary persons. According to the custom of the times, he borrowed freely from plays already in existence, and often simply reshaped older plays. Few of his plots are his own invention. Shakespeare's freshness is perennial, and his appeal is universal. He wrote for the Elizabethan stage and audience, but he is read and enjoyed even today. His works have been translated into all languages of the world. His freshness and appeal seem to grow, the more he is read, the mystery of his own Cleopatra seems to belong to him.

He has absolute command over the complexities of thought and emotion that prompt to action. His characters have the complexity, the fullness, the variety of humanity itself. Hence his works are of interest to all humanity. In this way, his works provide clever psycho-analysis of human nature and are of immense help to man in understanding his own nature and actions. Moreover, throughout his work we find gems of practical wisdom and philosophical truth, which are as true and valuable today as they were when penned.

A Shakespeare's play specially, the tragedy, reaches beyond the facts of human life and suggests the struggle of man against some mysterious powerful forces lurking beyond the world of senses; his characters often appear to be helpless puppets in the hands of some malignant power driving them to their doom.

Two theories have been offered to explain the greatness of Shakespeare. The romantic critics hold that in him 'all came from within' and that we owe his

plays to the overwhelming power of his genius alone. Practical and unimaginative men, however, assert that in Shakespeare ‘all came from without’. He lived in a play-loving age, he studied the crowds, gave them what they wanted and simply reflected their own thoughts and feelings. Probably the truth of the matter lies between these two extreme views. Of his great genius there can be no question, but his genius was certainly shaped and enriched by external influences. Two outward influences were most powerful in developing his genius—the little village of Stratford, and the great city of London. In Stratford he learned about man in his natural environment and in London he learned about the social, the artificial man in the most unnatural of surroundings.

Shakespeare’s greatness and pre-eminence as a dramatist are universally recognized. What is distinctive about Shakespeare is his combining of all the gifts which were scattered in the works of other playwrights of his time. He is superior to others by his many-sided curiosity and the extreme diversity of his talent. His genius was flexible to a marvellous degree. He adapted himself to the most diverse material and seemed to use it all with equal skill and enthusiasm. He poured all his love or lyrical beauty and command of rhymes into his narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, while his plays cover and, indeed, go beyond every dramatic classification hitherto known—national history, tragedy, comedy, romances and fairy plays. But these categories do not suffice to show the variety of even his early plays. The word comedy includes plays so different as *Love’s Labour’s Lost* and *Comedy of Errors*; one being a fantasy consisting of sparkling dialogue, fire-works, and wordplay, and the other being a farce with an involved plot. No two of his dramas of English history have the same shape or are alike. His great tragedies *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* are differentiated by such an astonishing variety of kind, presentment, and dramatic movement that hardly any one formula fits them all.

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7.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss the theme of love in Shakespeare’s play *Much Ado About Nothing*
- Analyse the use of wit and humour in the play *Much Ado About Nothing*
- Discuss the concept of feminism in *Much Ado About Nothing*

7.2 ANALYSIS OF MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

The Merchant of Venice, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* are referred to as ‘Mature Comedies’ and they belong to the period 1596-1600. They are also described as ‘Later Comedies’ or ‘Romantic Comedies’. All these plays are masterpieces in their own way. Here we see Shakespeare’s career

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traversing a kind of plateau. It was, in general, a period of suspended activity and indecision. As A.C. Baugh observes:

These are escapes from thinking, anodynes against worry, inclining heavily to prose in their style. But the mastery of form and balance of social judgement are superb. They mark a gracious interlude in Shakespeare's progress, a halcyon period when he was aware of his matured powers and as yet unwilling to urge them to new tasks.

It is interesting to note that Shakespeare, the Jacobean dramatist, composed the 'Dark Comedies' and 'Romances' while Shakespeare, the Elizabethan dramatist composed the 'Early and Middle Comedies'. Though Shakespeare's most memorable and most penetrating plays are the 'Great Tragedies', his comedies have also been delighting audiences and readers for centuries. In his Preface to his edition of the complete plays, Samuel Johnson affirmed that Shakespeare's imagination enjoyed its fullest freedom in comedy:

In tragedy he often writes, with great appearance of toil and study, what is written at last with little felicity; but, in his comic scenes, he seems to produce, without labour; what no labour can improve. In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comic; but in comedy he seems to repose, or to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature. In his tragic scenes there is always something wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language, and his tragedy for the greater part by incident and action. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.

It was Northrop Frye who investigated the comic form and helped to develop the essential features of this genre in general and Shakespearean comedy in particular. For, Shakespearean comedy is seen as a variant of the comic formula which the English Renaissance dramatists inherited from the New Comedy of Menander, Plautus and Terence. Traditional comedies dramatized the victory of young lovers over the opposition of parents and rivals. Shakespeare adapts this traditional pattern to what Frye calls the drama of the green world. The action begins in a 'normal' world, moves into a 'green' world where the comic resolution is achieved, and then returns to the normal world. The drama thus turns on the contrast between two worlds, two orders of experience, two perspectives on reality.

If love is the common theme in Shakespeare's comedies, love in courtship is the distinguishing feature of his romantic comedies. This theme is closely associated with music, song and dance. They occur at the end of the comedies when almost all the characters are tied in a new relationship. Disguise and mistaken identity are characteristic features common to all the comedies and 'disguise within disguise' is used in one of them. Disguises involved in the plots provide two or more centres of interest within a single scene, and also help to maintain the general width of focus. However, the use of disguise is made differently in different romantic

comedy. For example, the boy-girl disguise in *As You Like It* is not the same as that of *The Merchant of Venice*. The three plays – *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Twelfth Night* have Italy as their scene of action while *As You Like It* is set in France. Though the scene is the Forest of Arden (*As You Like It*) or an Italian city such as Venice (*The Merchant of Venice*), Messina (*Much Ado About Nothing*) and Illyria (*Twelfth Night*), the characters are all recognizably Elizabethan and have been closely detailed with individual voices. The mood of these plays is, for the most part, gay and light as Shakespeare is here more concerned with the happy turn of events than sorrow. In these plays, he gives full play to his imagination and each play is an image of a world full of love, wit, humour, tension and resolution. Added to these features are the vital, musical and varied dialogues, full of wit that endear the audiences to these romantic comedies.

The main plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* is drawn from Book V of *Orlando Furioso* by Robert Greene and a novel by Bandello. The comic theme of the play takes the form of ‘love challenged, and love confirmed’. Shakespeare’s plots are often complicated – lovers are separated by distance or misunderstandings, parents at odds with children, men struggling with ill-understood duty – yet at the end, all loose ends are tied. There are three parts in *Much Ado About Nothing*: (1) The love relationship between Benedick and Beatrice and that between Claudio and Hero; (2) The crisis – when Don John’s treachery causes the repudiation of Hero and her death; (3) The exposure of the deceit and a ‘new’ Hero marrying a remorseful Claudio and Beatrice marrying Benedick. The Hero-Claudio plot is resolved by Dogberry who serves as Don John’s nemesis. The familiar Shakespearean theme of appearance versus reality is made good use of in this play. Hero, who appears to be a wanton woman to Claudio, is in reality, a paragon of virtue. Benedick, the misogynist, and Beatrice, the avowed feminist, seem to hate each other but in reality, fall in love with each other later on. Don John who appears to be genuinely interested in Claudio’s welfare is in reality his enemy.

7.2.1 Treatment of the Theme of Love in *Much Ado About Nothing*

John Russell Brown in his essay entitled *The Presentation of Comedy* observes that one of the strangest qualities of Shakespeare’s comedies is their unassertiveness. The audience follows easily and comprehensively the interweaving threads of narrative, enjoy moments of lyricism, humour, fantasy and conflict, and respond to lively speech and varying spectacle and finally rest assured in a general resolution. But the ideas or themes which shape each of the comedies is never stated explicitly. We can, however, state in general terms that the subject of Shakespeare’s early and mature comedies is love or more precisely, ‘love in courtship’. Their plots move around the initial or consequent difficulties that stand in the way of love, and end eventually, in the triumph of love, with the marriage of the lovers. They are based on the dramatist’s firm belief in the fact that true intersexual love represents the highest good and is the standard of moral judgement. Each of the five most

NOTES

NOTES

rewarding comedies – *The Merchant of Venice*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* – concerns itself a lover's experience, its social and personal implications, its strength and precariousness, its delusions, contradictions, exaltations, humiliations and enchantments.

While attempting to unravel the essential meaning of *Much Ado About Nothing*, one must take as his primary guide, the theme of love in courtship. Most critics agree that *Much Ado About Nothing* is the gayest of Shakespeare's comedies, that its theme is courtship and that the main plot centres on the wooing and winning of Hero. However, a closer study of the play reveals that Shakespeare, under the guise of treating the theme of love in courtship, is actually severely criticizing the weaknesses inherent in romantic love. In the Shavian vein, his sympathies lie, from the beginning, with the strong headed and sharp-tongued Benedick and Beatrice. The main interest in the play then is in common sense and practicality. Shakespeare was too great an artist to state his themes explicitly. He planned his comedies in such a manner that not one pair of lovers but two or more were shown on stage and their stories were simultaneously developed. As the intertwining actions of the plays cause solemn lovers to follow closely upon the light-hearted ones, hesitant upon confident, selfish upon generous, the audience is invited to compare and contrast, to remember how each pair of lovers react to the situations they confront or come out of similar predicaments they find themselves in. Hence, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the witty lovers, Benedick and Beatrice overshadow the troubled lovers, Hero and Claudio. Hero, solemn and silent, is not a credible heroine and the audience is made to take her plight lightly; Claudio, the titular hero, is a 'cad' who should not be rewarded by marrying the lady he has flagrantly slandered.

It is Benedick and Beatrice, the pair of lovers in the sub plot, who bring out the real concerns of Shakespeare in the play. Anticipating the anti-sentimentalism of Sheridan and Shaw, Shakespeare reveals his belief in true love which is realized after much thought, trials and tribulations rather than the result of mere passion. Claudio falls in love with Hero at first sight. Having returned from war, he expresses his love for Hero thus:

*But now I am return'd, and that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is,
Saying I lik'd her ere I went to wars.*

Claudio expresses conventional notions of courtship and romantic love. He declares to Hero, his intended bride:

*Silence is the perfectest herald of joy: I were but little happy if
I could say how much. Lady, as you are mine, I am yours;
I give away myself for you, and dote upon the exchange.*

This polished formal speech with its orthodox idea of surrender in love, is for him, an expression of genuine feeling. However, Claudio has been given a voice and importance in the action of the play even though it is quite conventional. Hero, though the heroine of the main plot, during the courtship period and misunderstandings, has hardly anything to say. She is presented as an amiable creature who does what others want her to do. As Beatrice says, ‘.....it is my cousin’s duty to make curtsy, and say ‘Father, as it please you.’ Hero’s chief dramatic function seems to stand on the stage and look beautiful. If Hero is guilty of passiveness in love, Claudio’s susceptibility to suspicion arising from hearsay indicates that under stress, the immature lover values friendship above his love for Hero.

NOTES

The conventional story of Hero and Claudio, with its simple pattern of courtship, betrayal and restoration is melodramatic and artificial. It is contrasted with the reality of the unorthodox love affair between Benedick and Beatrice, the characters of the sub plot. It is generally regarded that this pair of lovers presents a better kind of courtship and a more convincing kind of drama. Claudio’s idealized notion of Hero is played off against Benedick’s sardonic remarks, juxtaposing the romantic lover against the realistic commentator:

Claudio: That I love her, I feel.

Don Pedro: That she is worthy, I know.

*Benedick: That I neither feel how she
should be loved, nor know how she
should be worthy, is the opinion that
fire cannot melt out of me; I will die in
it at the stake.*

Both Benedick and Beatrice have vowed that they will never marry. They profess to hate each other, and indeed all of the opposite sex. Beatrice makes a joke about her spinsterhood:

*Thus goes every one to the world but I, and
I am sunburnt; I may sit in a corner and cry
‘Heigh-ho for a husband!’*

They are forever wrangling and engaged in a war of words, each trying to outdo the other so much so that everybody believes that they can never come together:

- **BENEDICK:** Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted. And I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly I love none.
- **BEATRICE:** A dear happiness to women. They would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood I am of your humor for that. I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

NOTES

- **BENEDICK:** God keep your Ladyship still in that mind, so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.
- **BEATRICE:** Scratching could not make it worse an 'twere such a face as yours were.
- **BENEDICK:** Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.
- **BEATRICE:** A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.
- **BENEDICK:** I would my horse had the speed of your tongue and so good a continuer. But keep your way, i' God's name. I have done.
- **BEATRICE:** You always end with a jade's trick. I know you of old.

Each of them has a picture of an ideal mate in the mind and is aware that such an ideal is impossible and that is an excuse for avoiding matrimony. Shakespeare seems to be saying that the dedication demanded by the rituals of courtship would be justifiable only if the loved one was perfect but that is never true. In presenting a satiric perspective on the conventional affair of Claudio and Hero, Beatrice and Benedick adopt conventional roles of their own and take their place in a larger formal design. Attacking the experience of the orthodox lovers, they also display a curiosity about it and, one suspects, a kind of envy for those whose feelings can be so simple. As so often in Shakespeare's comedies, there is reality at the heart of the play – the reality of general human experience. Both Beatrice and Benedick are accused of pride, cruelty and of being unworthy of the other's love. In particular, they are attacked for the very wit they have used as a means of keeping the distance between them. They themselves cannot believe that they have fallen a victim of the emotion of love for which they had, all along, laughed at others. Benedick says:

*When I said I would die a bachelor,
I did not think I should live till I were married.
Beatrice's surrender is more direct and simple:
What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true?
Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?
Contempt, farewell, and maiden pride, adieu!
No glory lives behind the back of such.
And Benedick, love on; I will requite thee,
Taming my wild heart to thy loving hand.
If thou dost love, my kindness shall incite thee
To bind our loves up in a holy band.
For others say thou dost deserve, and I
Believe it better than reportingly.*

And so, both are brought to realize the love which had been implicit in their intellectual attraction from the beginning. But before they achieve the consummation

of their love, it has to pass through an ordeal. At the wedding when Claudio accuses Hero of being a whore, Beatrice cannot take this humiliation to her cousin lightly. She confesses her love to Benedick and at the same time throws a challenge at him:

- **BEATRICE:** I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest.
- **BENEDICK:** Come, bid me do any thing for thee.
- **BEATRICE:** Kill Claudio.
- **BENEDICK:** Ha! not for the wide world.
- **BEATRICE:** You kill me to deny it. Farewell.

Behind Beatrice's command, lies something deeper than her loyalty to Hero: a need to test Benedick, to force him to choose between his masculine loyalties and his love, and to prove that he has true manhood, as opposed to the false manhood she sees in his friends. Benedick must prove his worthiness as a lover by proving his manhood by risking his life and cutting off old friendships. Their anti-romantic nature persists in asserting itself, but they try to overcome it all the time. Shakespeare strikes a fine balance between the continuing individuality of their natures and the comically unoriginal situation of being in love. In the final scene, where Hero is ceremonially restored to Claudio, the relationship of Beatrice and Benedick is also consummated with a social ceremony. The concluding dance is a satisfactory symbol of the happiness confirming order with which comedy leaves us. J. R. Mulryne rightly says about the larger design of the play:

.....the play has moved through gaiety and woe on to confirmed happiness: love begun, love challenged and love triumphant in marriage. For an audience or reader the experience is one of 'pleasurable reassurance' – a demonstration in terms of theatre that good will conquer, that 'all shall be well'.

7.2.2 Wit and Humour in *Much Ado About Nothing*

Shakespeare's comedies are called so not only because of their comic plot but also because of their wit and humour. Though much of the mirth and laughter is brought out in the dialogues that the great dramatist gave to his comic characters – Launcelot Gobbo (*The Merchant of Venice*), Dogberry and Verges (*Much Ado About Nothing*), Touchstone, Audery, Silvius, Phebe and Jacques (*As You Like It*), Feste, Sir Toby, Andrew Aguecheek (*Twelfth Night*), it is generally the fool who engages in witty dialogues and voices the dramatist's sarcastic vision of life and humanity. There are two classes of fools – the professional fool who plays with words and those who are not fools by profession, being played with by words. Touchstone and Feste belong to the first category while Dogberry and Verges belong to the second. The former is a 'fool by art' while the latter is a 'fool by nature'.

NOTES

NOTES

Much Ado About Nothing displays the characteristic wit of Shakespeare at its best. It is neither a play of character nor of manners, it is a drama of wit. The play is characterized with vitality, gaiety, self-confidence and a brilliantly witty command of language, qualities all of us respond to and found in abundance here. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the characters of the main-plot – the gentle Hero and the credulous Claudio and the characters of the sub-plot – the inimitably muddle-headed Dogberry and Verges play their parts in order that the verbal interchange between Benedick and Beatrice may be effectively staged. In the play, every character indulges in wordplay and tries to outwit others. But the most resplendent is Beatrice. When Leonato amusingly warns Beatrice that she might light on a husband who had no beard, she replies:

He that hath a beard is more than a youth and he that hath no beard is less than a man; and he that is more than a youth is not for me and he that is less than a man, I am not for him.

This is a typical example of her spontaneous wit.

Beatrice and Benedick perfectly match each other in wit and naturally adopt an apparent antagonism, at least for a while, with each other. Beatrice calls Benedick ‘Signor Mountanto’ and Benedick calls her ‘Lady Disdain’, which indicate their merry disposition. Benedick and Beatrice are given a run of witty speeches and they engage in verbal repartee. The theme of the battle of the sexes is vividly brought out by their clever exchanges of dialogues. The first set of wit they play is typical of many that follow:

- **BENEDICK:** What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?
- **BENEDICK:** Is it possible disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to disdain if you come in her presence.
- **BENEDICK:** Then is courtesy a turncoat. But it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted. And I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly I love none.
- **BEATRICE:** A dear happiness to women. They would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood I am of your humor for that. I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

And so on, almost inexhaustibly. The audience takes delight in their carefree self-reliance, their refusal to acknowledge any claims but those of their own wit. Even as we recognize that they are engaged (whether conscious of it or not) in a common form of preliminary flirtation, the play’s dominant mood does not alter.

In the masque scene, Benedick dances with Beatrice and she refers to him as ‘the prince’s fool’ and a ‘court jester’. Benedick swears to take revenge for this insult. Don Pedro and the others understand the inherent love between them

and plan to bring them together. They make them believe that the other is intensely in love with him/her. The orchard scene provides boundless mirth and laughter. Even minor characters take part in the festivity.

Much Ado About Nothing

In the church scene when Beatrice asks Benedick to 'Kill Claudio', he has to choose between loyalty to Claudio and love for Beatrice. The greater love eclipses the smaller, and Benedick acts contrary to his previous reactions. He swears:

By this hand, I love thee.

To this Beatrice retorts:

Use it for my love some other way than swearing by it.

And Benedick replies with equal economy:

Enough, I am engag'd; I will challenge him.

Only in the church scene, there is a semblance of tragedy, what otherwise would have been an unalloyed enjoyment of fun and laughter. But the sting is removed on discovery of the culprits who authored the plot against Hero. Dogberry and Verges are the means whereby evil is unraveled and tragedy is turned into comedy and sorrow into joy. Even amidst the confusion and shock, Leonato and the others keep their sense of humour.

Shakespeare's gift for words and phrases and his skill at wordplay are extraordinary, one reason why he is still quoted more frequently than any other writer in the English language, qualities that are remarkable in a man of limited education. Elizabethan audiences were especially fond of certain kinds of humour, especially humour that played on words. In her 1993 book, *The Friendly Shakespeare*, Norrie Epstein identifies four types of Shakespearean humour:

Puns: These are the epitome of wordplay. A pun may be based on different meanings of the same word (as in 'noting') or on different words pronounced the same ('whys' and 'wise'; 'Londonderry Air' and 'London derriere'). An example from Act I, Scene 1 of *Much Ado About Nothing* would be:

Messenger: [speaking about Benedick to Beatrice] And a good soldier too, lady. *Beatrice:* And a good soldier to a lady, but what is he to a lord?

Running gags: It is an amusing or derogatory jest that recurs many times, usually with variations. For example, a frequent running gag in Shakespeare is of a *cuckold*: a man whose wife is unfaithful. The word refers to a cuckoo, a bird that lays its eggs in other birds' nests. The cuckold was said to grow horns on his head, invisible to him, obvious to everyone else. Thus, words and symbols suggesting cuckolding include horns, rams, and bulls. In *Much Ado*, the preoccupation with cuckolding begins early in Act I, Scene 1:

Don Pedro: . . . I think this is your daughter? *Leonato:* Her mother hath many times told me so. *Benedick:* Were you in doubt, sir, that you asked her? *Leonato:* Signor Benedick, no, for then you were a child.

NOTES

NOTES

This same scene includes three more indirect references by Benedick to cuckolding, suggesting that his attitude toward women and marriage is probably shaped by his preoccupation with being cuckolded.

Quibbles: Wordplays that squeeze as many meanings as possible out of one word or phrase are called quibbles. Pronunciation may be important, just as it is in puns. A conspicuous quibble in *Much Ado* is the banter between Don Pedro and Balthasar about notes and noting/nothing in Act II, Scene 3:

Don Pedro: . . . Do it in notes. *Balthasar:* Note this before my notes; There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting. *Don Pedro:* Why, these are very crotchets that he speaks. Note notes, forsooth, and nothing!

The use of 'crotchets' here is another kind of wordplay within the larger quibble on notes and noting, since the word means quarter notes as well as whimsical ideas. Still another form of quibble is the exaggerated use of a metaphor. For example, when Beatrice learns that Benedick is the close companion to Claudio, she says:

Lord, he will hang upon him like a disease: he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio, if he hath caught the Benedick. It will cost him a thousand pound ere a be cured.

Topical humour: This kind of humour is the most difficult to decipher without more information about typical knowledge and attitudes of the time. For example, in Act II, Scene 1, Benedick asks Don Pedro to find him a mission that will allow him to escape from Beatrice. In his suggestions he includes:

I will . . . bring you the length of Prester John's foot: fetch you a hair off the Great Cham's beard: do you embassy to the Pygmies.

We must rely on the editor's footnotes on Prester John, Great Cham, and the Pygmies to appreciate this humour fully. However, we understand the gist of it even without knowing what these refer to. On the other hand, some humour is easily missed without such historical information. For example, Beatrice's first line asks about 'Signor Mountanto.' Footnotes explain that 'mountanto' is an upward thrust movement in fencing, which Elizabethan playgoers would understand as a kind of slang for either reaching upward socially beyond his level (social climbing) or sexually thrusting upward. Some actors today pronounce the word as 'mount on to,' making the sexual reference obvious to today's audiences.

It's not essential that today's playgoer understand the underlying references to every humorous remark because the actors can often make the humour clear from their manner of delivering the lines as well as from the context. The reader of the play, however, has the advantage of the footnotes for a richer understanding of Shakespeare's remarkable wordplay.

Shakespeare also excels at other forms of wordplay. For example, Leonato comments on the good news of the messenger in Act I, Scene 1: 'How much

better is it to weep at joy, than to joy at weeping’ — one of those quotable lines of Shakespearean philosophy. In Act II, Scene 3, Benedick has a marvelous monologue illustrating several structural variations of repeated words and phrases: his description of the change in Claudio around the repeated phrase ‘I have known when’ and the symmetry of what he looks for in a woman: ‘... one woman is fair, yet I am well; another is wise, yet I am well; another virtuous, yet I am well’ and ‘rich shall she be, that’s certain: wise, or I’ll none; virtuous, or I’ll never cheapen her; fair, or I’ll never look on her; mild, or come not near me; noble, or not I for an angel.’

In Dogberry’s outrage at being called ‘an ass’ by Conrade, Dogberry has a monologue with wonderful repetitions. The sexton, who was recording the interrogation, has left, so Dogberry regrets, ‘Oh, that he were here to write me down an ass!’ In the middle of his complaint, he raves, ‘remember that I am an ass, though it not be written down, yet forget not that I am an ass,’ and he ends with ‘oh that I had been writ down an ass!’ And in his self-justification, he reminds everyone of his good qualities with simple symmetry and repetition of phrase:

I am a wise fellow, and which is more, an officer, and which is more, a householder, and which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any is in Messina, and one that knows the law, go to, and a rich fellow enough, go to, and a fellow that hath had losses, and one that hath two gowns, and everything handsome about him.

Thus, Shakespeare’s wit is expressed through his use of language – wordplays, puns, quibbles and repetition. As expressed above, today’s playgoer need not understand all the subtleties that characterize Shakespeare’s rich language. The actors’ performances should convey much of the intended meaning of a particular word or phrase. On the other hand, the reader who takes time to examine the explanatory notes and to reread lines will appreciate more the vitality of the characters and will experience more of the emotional impact of their words and actions in the play.

7.2.3 Feminism in *Much Ado About Nothing*

The heart of Shakespeare’s comedy lies in his characters. The heroines of the Romantic Comedies are outstanding and known for their matured outline. The strength of *The Merchant of Venice* lies in Portia, *As You Like It* in Rosalind, *Twelfth Night* in Viola and *Much Ado About Nothing* in Beatrice. This prompted Ruskin to cryptically comment, ‘Shakespeare has no heroes; only heroines.’ In fact, Barbara Everett has in one of her essays on Shakespeare seen the master dramatist as an early leader of the feminist movement. She points out that the essence of these Romantic Comedies is expressed through the women in them. As she observes:

In Messina, Arden and Illyria, the expression of humane principle, of generous and constant feeling, comes principally from the women

NOTES

NOTES

- whether we choose to see them as symbols merely of an area of the mind possessed by both sexes in common, or whether we see Shakespeare creating a world in which some kind of distinctively female rationale is able

to have full play, and to dominate the action.

In a tragedy, the action moves on to the battlements of civilization and beyond, the difference of the sexes becomes of minor importance, thus diminishing the role of women. They are reduced to being mere functions of the hero's mind whether it is Lady Macbeth, Ophelia, or Desdemona. Something of the tragic heroes' passionate constancy and painful knowledge, and something of the sane and honourable happiness that is felt most sharply in the tragedies by its absence, is first developed in the secure limitations of the Mature Comedies and is chiefly expressed through the talkative and intelligent women who guide events and guard principles.

Among Shakespeare's Mature Comedies, it is *Much Ado About Nothing* in which he takes a stand against sentimentality and is especially concerned with the theme of the battle of the sexes. It belongs to a different type of comedy whose premise is sexual antagonism. Instead of the conflict of generations, we watch the war between the sexes, instead of the theme of age versus youth, the dramatic patterning pits male against female. In *Love's Labour Lost*, this sexual opposition is further emphasized by the setting: Navarre has his court, the Princess her tents and the action consists of raids, sorties and ambushes between these hostile camps. The developing action of *Much Ado About Nothing* sets scenes involving women in contrast and parallel with scenes involving men; attempts to bring the sexes together in a masque or marriage produce comic mistakes or tragic mishaps almost to the end of the play. So in *Twelfth Night*, Orsino's household is set against Olivia's in a kind of amatory stalemate, with a girl in boy's clothing as ambassador and go-between.

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the battle of the sexes is carried on between Benedick and Beatrice who are forever engaged in a verbal duel. Their antagonism makes Leonato explain to the Messenger that Beatrice and Benedick have had many lively skirmishes of wit in a long-standing 'merry war'. They stand on a war-like path, abhor betrothal and marriage vehemently and are scornful of all kinds of sentimentality. Beatrice is Shakespeare's embodiment of feminism in its nascent stage. She is a great lady of the Renaissance, overflowing with spirits and energy, defiantly virginal, inclined to use her wit and freedom of speech with daring and aggression. Her behaviour to Benedick, whom she cannot help to tease perpetually, is as headstrong as Katherine's treatment of Petruchio. In her battles with Benedick, she outdoes him in fantasy and marvelous diction. About Beatrice John Dover Wilson says:

Beatrice is the first woman in our literature, perhaps in the literature of Europe, who not only has a brain but delights in the constant employment of it.

Beatrice is not without beauty. This is vouchsafed by Benedick himself who believes that she exceeded Hero 'as much in beauty, as the first day of May doth the last day of December'. But she never uses her beauty as a weapon in her dealings with men. On the contrary she says, 'I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me'. She does not want to catch men at all; what interests her in them is not their person but their intelligence, of which she holds a poor opinion. Her chief delight in life was – not hunting men for capture but shooting at them barbed arrows and watching them quiver. And she takes special delight in teasing Benedick because he is as impatient as she is with the ideas of love and marriage. She knows enough about marriage to dread it:

For hear me, Hero, wooing, wedding, and repenting is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinquepace. The first suit is hot and hasty like a Scotch jig, and full as fantastical; the wedding, mannerly modest as a measure, full of state and ancientry; and then comes repentance, and with his bad legs falls into the cinquepace faster and faster till he sink into his grave.

It is only at the crisis of the play, in the church scene, that this dogged, loyal and irrational femininity that characterizes Beatrice comes into its own. When her poor cousin is falsely accused and cruelly put to shame, when those who should have been her natural protectors fall away from her, then it is Beatrice alone who, unaffected even for an instant by the slander, indignantly and passionately takes up her cause and shows herself faithful, high-minded, right-thinking, far-seeing, superior to every one of them – a gem of a woman. Even Benedick is forced to believe in Hero's innocence by her obstinate passion of loyalty:

Is he not approved in the height a villain, that hath slandered, scorned, dishonored my kinswoman? Oh, that I were a man! What, bear her in hand until they come to take hands and then, with public accusation, uncovered slander, unmitigated rancor—O God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace.

Much Ado About Nothing concerns itself with what can be called the most mundane or 'local' fact in the world of love, in all its forms, that the comedies create, that is, that men and women have a notably different character, different mode of thinking, different systems of loyalties, and, particularly, different social place and function. Not only this, but it is the first play, perhaps, in which the clash of these two worlds is treated with a degree of seriousness, and in which the woman's world dominates.

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Check Your Progress

1. Name a few mature comedies of Shakespeare.
2. Where is the main plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* drawn from?
3. What is one of the strangest qualities of Shakespeare's comedies?
4. State the types of fools in Shakespeare's plays.

7.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* are referred to as 'Mature Comedies' and they belong to the period 1596-1600.
2. The main plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* is drawn from Book V of *Orlando Furioso* by Robert Greene and a novel by Bandello.
3. John Russell Brown in his essay entitled *The Presentation of Comedy* observes that one of the strangest qualities of Shakespeare's comedies is their unassertiveness.
4. There are two classes of fools – the professional fool who plays with words and those who are not fools by profession, being played with by words.

7.4 SUMMARY

- *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* are referred to as 'Mature Comedies' and they belong to the period 1596-1600.
- They are also described as 'Later Comedies' or 'Romantic Comedies'.
- It was Northrop Frye who investigated the comic form and helped to develop the essential features of this genre in general and Shakespearean comedy in particular.
- For, Shakespearean comedy is seen as a variant of the comic formula which the English Renaissance dramatists inherited from the New Comedy of Menander, Plautus and Terence.
- Traditional comedies dramatized the victory of young lovers over the opposition of parents and rivals. Shakespeare adapts this traditional pattern to what Frye calls the drama of the green world.

- If love is the common theme in Shakespeare's comedies, love in courtship is the distinguishing feature of his romantic comedies. This theme is closely associated with music, song and dance.
- Disguise and mistaken identity are characteristic features common to all the comedies and 'disguise within disguise' is used in one of them.
- The main plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* is drawn from Book V of *Orlando Furioso* by Robert Greene and a novel by Bandello. The comic theme of the play takes the form of 'love challenged and love confirmed'.
- There are three parts in *Much Ado About Nothing*: (1) The love relationship between Benedick and Beatrice and that between Claudio and Hero; (2) The crisis – when Don John's treachery causes the repudiation of Hero and her death; (3) The exposure of the deceit and a 'new' Hero marrying a remorseful Claudio and Beatrice marrying Benedick.
- John Russell Brown in his essay entitled *The Presentation of Comedy* observes that one of the strangest qualities of Shakespeare's comedies is their unassertiveness.
- Most critics agree that *Much Ado About Nothing* is the gayest of Shakespeare's comedies, that its theme is courtship and that the main plot centres on the wooing and winning of Hero.
- However, a closer study of the play reveals that Shakespeare, under the guise of treating the theme of love in courtship, is actually severely criticizing the weaknesses inherent in romantic love.
- Shakespeare's comedies are called so not only because of their comic plot but also because of their wit and humour.
- Though much of the mirth and laughter is brought out in the dialogues that the great dramatist gave to his comic characters, it is generally the fool who engages in witty dialogues and voices the dramatist's sarcastic vision of life and humanity.
- There are two classes of fools – the professional fool who plays with words and those who are not fools by profession, being played with by words.
- Elizabethan audiences were especially fond of certain kinds of humour, especially humour that played on words.
- In her 1993 book, *The Friendly Shakespeare*, Norrie Epstein identifies four types of Shakespearean humour.
- The heart of Shakespeare's comedy lies in his characters. The heroines of the Romantic Comedies are outstanding and known for their matured outline.
- Barbara Everett has in one of her essays on Shakespeare seen the master dramatist as an early leader of the feminist movement. She points out that the essence of these Romantic Comedies is expressed through the women in them.

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- In a tragedy, the action moves on to the battlements of civilization and beyond, the difference of the sexes becomes of minor importance, thus diminishing the role of women.
- Among Shakespeare's Mature Comedies, it is *Much Ado About Nothing* in which he takes a stand against sentimentality and is especially concerned with the theme of the battle of the sexes.
- The developing action of *Much Ado About Nothing* sets scenes involving women in contrast and parallel with scenes involving men; attempts to bring the sexes together in a masque or marriage produce comic mistakes or tragic mishaps almost to the end of the play.

7.5 KEY WORDS

- **Comedy:** It refers to a play characterized by its humorous or satirical tone and its depiction of amusing people or incidents, in which the characters ultimately triumph over adversity.
- **Tragedy:** It refers to a play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.
- **Antagonist:** It refers to a character in a story who is against the protagonist.
- **Orthodox:** It means following or conforming to the traditional or generally accepted rules or beliefs of a religion, philosophy, or practice.

7.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Give a short background on Shakespeare's comedies.
2. How is the theme of feminism portrayed in the play *Much Ado About Nothing*?
3. How are female characters different from their male counterparts in *Much Ado About Nothing*?

Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain how the theme of love is used in *Much Ado About Nothing*.
2. How is wit and humour employed in Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*? Use incidents from the play as examples.

7.7 FURTHER READINGS

Much Ado About Nothing

- Wells, Stanley W. 2003. *Shakespeare: For All Time*. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Traub, Valerie. 2016. *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare and Embodiment: Gender, Sexuality, and Race*. UK: Oxford University Press
- DK. 2015. *The Shakespeare Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained*. UK: Dorling Kindersley Ltd.
- Bloom, Harold. 2009. *Shakespeare's Tragedies*. US: Infobase Publishing.

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UNIT 8 *HENRY IV, PART I:* WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Structure

- 8.0 Introduction
- 8.1 Objectives
- 8.2 *Henry IV, Part I*: Summary
- 8.3 Falstaff in *Henry IV, Part I* and Early Responses
- 8.4 Honour in *Henry IV, Part I*
- 8.5 Prince Hal in *Henry IV, Part I*
- 8.6 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 8.7 Summary
- 8.8 Key Words
- 8.9 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 8.10 Further Readings

8.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit critically examines Shakespeare's play, *Henry IV, Part I*. It is one of the history plays written by Shakespeare. Shakespeare's history plays are thought of as a distinct genre. They differ somewhat in true, form and focus from his other plays.

8.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Discuss Shakespeare's historical play *Henry IV, Part I*
- Describe the characteristics of important characters in the play
- Analyze the notion of honour in the play
- Assess Prince Hal's character in *Henry IV, Part I*

8.2 *HENRY IV, PART I*: SUMMARY

William Shakespeare's *Henry IV* has two sub-plots that indulges in a dramatic battle by the end of the text. The first plot is about King Henry IV and Prince Harry (his son), and their problematic relationship. The next one is about a rebellion that is uprising against King Henry. This was being instigated by the noblemen family, the Percys, who are dissatisfied because King Henry was not acknowledging their contribution.

Prince Harry (King Henry's son) is seen drinking in a bar in the company of criminals and highwaymen. This makes King Henry feel sorry for his son. The kingship knew that Harry indulged in ways which were not befitting for royalty. Harry wasted most of his time in dingy dungeons of London streets and made friends with vagabonds.

Falstaff, a close friend of Harry, was another ruffian; he was also a father figure to the prince. Physically, Falstaff happens to be a worldly wise and a fat old man who stole and told lies to earn a living. However, along with it, Falstaff was blessed with an extraordinarily wit. Harry argues that spending time with these so called 'good for nothings' is a visionary way of getting access to public once he becomes part of kingship.

A friend of Falstaff, Poins, arrived at the inn and declared that he has drawn a plan to rob wealthy travellers. Even though Harry at first did not agree to participate, Poins tells him in person that he is actually playing a practical joke on Falstaff. According to Poins, his plan is to hide prior to the occurrence of the robbery, pretending to leave Falstaff right before the crime. However, after the actual robbery, Poins and Harry will go a step further and rob Falstaff after which they will make fun of him once he tells them his story of being robbed, because in any case, he will fabricate the issue.

Hotspur meets the king at Henry's court and explains the reasons for his family being dissatisfied with the king. It has to be mentioned here that the Percys were instrumental in aiding Henry overthrow the previous ruler and take over the throne. Yet on the other hand, Henry had failed to pay back the help. Once King Henry leaves, Hotspur's family members inform about their plan to build an alliance so as to overthrow the king and take over the throne.

Meanwhile, both Harry and Poins implement their plan to dupe Falstaff with success and enjoy the whole experience at Falstaff's expense. At the tavern, while most of the people were enjoying their drinks, a royal messenger comes for Harry. He informs him that his father has received news of the civil war that is about to take place and he wants Harry to return to the royal court at the earliest.

At the same time, the Percys manage to put together a formidable group of army and turn into leaders of huge rebel armies who are from Scotland and Wales. Some of them were powerful English nobles and clergymen as well who were not happy with King Henry. But again, many important figures from the kingdom announce their disinterest in overthrowing the king, thus jeopardizing the fate of the rebellion.

Following his father's request, Prince Harry returns to the royal palace. Once he arrives, King Henry expresses his extreme displeasure over his son's behaviour and suggests that Hotspur's plan and prank might probably make him more befitting to the throne than Prince Harry's association with royalty. Harry realizes that it was definitely time for reform and promises to abandon his untamed

NOTES

NOTES

ways and defeat Hotspur in battle so that he can reclaim his good name. Soon he makes his tavern friends to join King Henry's army, and Harry joins his father and heads for the battlefield.

At Shrewsbury, the civil war takes place. Harry, in his brave act, saves his father's life in the battlefield which results in winning back his father's love and confidence. Interestingly, Harry also challenges and makes Hotspur lose in a combat. Soon, King Henry's army wins and we see that most of the leaders belonging to the Percy family are faced with death. Falstaff too survives the battle without getting involved in any actual fighting.

However, a threat from the powerful rebel forces still looms over in Britain. So King Henry sends his sons and his forces to the extreme corners of his kingdom to tackle the problem.

(The sequel to this play, *Henry IV, Part 2* takes off from where *Henry IV, Part 1* ends).

Character List

The play has the following characters.

- **King Henry, the Fourth of England**—He murdered Richard II and took over the throne of England. His sons were Henry, the Prince of Wales and Prince John of Lancaster.
- **Henry, Prince of Wales**—The son of King Henry IV. He was a friend and confidant of Falstaff. Prince Henry was also known as Prince Hal.
- **Sir John Falstaff**—A man of disreputable honour. He was a thief, con man and drunkard, but by virtue of his wit, he enjoyed the friendship as well as the protection of Prince Hal.
- **Sir Harry Percy**—Addressed as 'Hotspur' and an arch enemy of Prince Hal. He was a bold man of action.
- **Sir Walter Blunt**—A loyal aid to King Henry IV and Hal. He is the one who actually fights in the final battle under the guise of King Henry.
- **Earl of Northumberland**—He was the father of Hotspur as well as a leader of the rebel camp.

Check Your Progress

1. What are the two sub-plots in Shakespeare's play *Henry IV*?
2. How did Harry win back his father's confidence?
3. Who was the Earl of Northumberland?

8.3 FALSTAFF IN *HENRY IV, PART I* AND EARLY RESPONSES

Henry IV, Part I:
William Shakespeare

Henry IV, Part I is always considered to be a controversial play. The centre of much of the controversy has surrounded around Sir John Falstaff and the contradictory behaviour of his character. Falstaff, like many other characters, also appears in *Henry IV, Part 2*. Criticism of the early times consider *Henry IV* as one play just split into 2 parts. In fact, most scholars agree that it is impossible to describe the critical history of *Henry IV, Part I* without taking into account Part 2. Moreover, the debate with regards to the relationship between the two plays has preoccupied many critics over the years. As to make matters further complicated, an important proportion of the twentieth-century criticism indulges in discussion of *Part One* in context to Shakespeare's other plays dealing with history especially *Richard II*, *Henry IV* Parts 1 and 2, and *Henry V*. Many scholars also label it as the 'Henriad'.

The earliest printed critiques of *Henry IV, Part I* might look like another play: *The First Part of the True and Honourable Histories, of the life of Sir John Old-Castle, the Good Lord Cobham*. It seemed as if it was composed by a group of playwrights who worked for a rival company of Shakespeare's. Nevertheless, a quarto of 1600 mentions that it was 'Written by William Shakespeare'.

Sir John Old-Castle in this performance was created as a good influence in opposition to Shakespeare's sketching of Prince Hal's companion in *Henry IV* (both the plays). The name Sir John Falstaff was later changed from Sir John Oldcastle, after it allegedly offended the descendants of Old-Castle family who considered themselves as martyrs of the protestant cause. In fact, the prologue to Sir John Old-Castle insists that:

*It is no pampered glutton we present,
Nor aged counsellor to youthful sins;
But one whose virtues shone above the rest,
A valiant martyr and a virtuous peer (Prol. 6–9)*

Shakespeare's presentation of a gluttonous and not so brave knight definitely did not at all please most of his contemporaries. That is why this character received critical responses of the extreme nature. Many including *The Mirror of Martyrs* and *Sir John Old-Castle* indulged in critiquing Shakespeare's authenticity as far as history is concerned. These critiques were all the more in news because of the popularity of *Henry IV, Part I*. Most comments regarding *Henry IV, Part I* have mentioned about its crowd pulling efforts. Leonard Digges (1640) insists that Shakespeare can be compared with the playwright, Ben Jonson. But while Jonson's

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characters might not always be able to entertain, Shakespeare never disappoints, 'let but Falstaff come, Hal, Poins, the rest you scarce shall have a roome / All is so pester'd'. English poet and playwright John Dryden, who was probably one of the first commentators on Shakespeare's Falstaff, said 'Falstaff is a Lyar, and a Coward, a Glutton, and a Buffon, because all these qualities may agree in the same man'.

In the early eighteenth-century, there seemed to be some issues regarding Falstaff's popularity. Shakespeare's first editor, Nicholas Rowe, in 1709, brought in much required critical perspective when he wrote:

Falstaff is allow'd by every body to be a Masterpiece.... If there be any Fault in the Draught he has made of this lewd old Fellow, it is that tho' he has made him a Thief, Lying, Cowardly, Vain-glorious, and in short every way Vicious, yet he has given him so much Wit as to make him almost too agreeable; and I don't know whether some People have not, in remembrance of the Diversion he had formerly afforded 'em, been sorry to see his Friend Hal use him so scurvily when he comes to the Crown in the End of the Second Part of Henry IV.

By the second half of the eighteenth century, Shakespeare was considered so powerful a writer that his works and his characters were never criticized. Scholars insisted on paying attention to the moral lesson that Falstaff presented despite of the vices he possessed. Samuel Johnson loved both the *Henry IV* plays. He even went on to mention, 'Perhaps no author has ever in two plays afforded so much delight'. Johnson considers Falstaff as 'a thief and a glutton, a coward and a boaster, always ready to cheat the weak, and prey upon the poor', but simultaneously, he is 'obsequious and malignant'. Johnson insists that Falstaff presents a wit that is not tarnished with 'enormous or sanguinary crimes'.

One comes across similar train of thoughts in Elizabeth Montagu's *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare*, which came out in print in 1769. It considers Falstaff as one of the felicitous reasons through which Shakespeare gives protection to the reputation of Prince Hal. British literary critic Montagu goes on to say that 'it was a delicate affair to expose the follies of Henry V before a people proud of his victories.... How happily therefore was the character of Falstaff introduced, whose wit and festivity in some measure excuse the Prince for admitting him into his familiarity'. The character of Falstaff along with his vices and defects makes him 'as contemptible as entertaining'.

In 1777, Shakespearean literary scholar Maurice Morgann, in another reading of Falstaff's character, refuted the idea that Falstaff was a coward. This essay by Morgann on Falstaff, titled 'An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff', is considered to be a benchmark effort in literary criticism. The work raised questions about the consolidation of Shakespeare's prestige as a writer of genius along with Morgann's own desire to examine Shakespeare's characterization under the serious terms which was probably missing until then.

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Morgann takes a close investigation of several Falstaff scenes as well as references about him in both parts of *Henry IV*. He underlines that though Falstaff at times appears to be cowardice but that is not all about him. Morgann suggests that ‘the real character of Falstaff may be different from his apparent one; and, possibly, this difference between reality and appearance, whilst it accounts at once for our liking and our censure, may be the true point of humour in the character’.

Morgann in his essay considers Falstaff as someone who is of actual flesh and blood. He harps upon Falstaff’s birth and reputation as a soldier and a knight. In an interesting argument, Morgann interprets Falstaff’s behaviour at the battle of Shrewsbury to some ‘kind of military free thinker’. He is projected as a man of ‘common sense’ with ‘too much wit for a hero’.

Morgann and his view of Falstaff met with its fair share of criticism but that did put the stage for further debate. Irish author Richard Stack had mentioned Morgann for his ‘dexterity in support of a paradox’ but he insist that that although Falstaff is full of vices, yet we forgive him because ‘he entertains, surprises and charms’ us; therefore, probably it is futile to level him as coward.

Eighteenth-century understanding of the play *Henry IV* and their discussions on the figure of Falstaff continued beyond nineteenth-century. Even until 1927, many scholars were still debating about Morgann’s perspective.

English writer William Hazlitt, in 1817, reiterated that Falstaff was a great comic character that Shakespeare or anyone else had ever portrayed. He insisted that Falstaff’s ‘exaggeration of his own vices,’ and his ‘masterly presence of mind’ makes him class apart. George Bernard Shaw also echoed similar views. He visualized Hal as ‘consciously and deliberately treacherous’, especially in *Henry IV, Part I*, while Falstaff is ‘the most human person in the play’.

Though Prince Harry’s treatment towards Falstaff had always intrigued scholars, it reached a climax only when A. C. Bradley in his significant essay ‘The Rejection of Falstaff’ (1902) reintroduced the issue. Bradley points out that the Prince’s rejection of Falstaff in the second part is in sync with his behaviour in Part 1. Nevertheless, such a rejection elicits emotions for Henry which are not desirable and probably was not intended by Shakespeare himself. Bradley terms Falstaff as ‘the humorist of genius’ who had the power to ‘make(s) himself out more ludicrous than he is, in order that he and others may laugh’. Bradley believes that the lies that Falstaff offers about the men in Buckram or about the killing of Hotspur are nothing but his insistence to not take anything seriously. He too echoes Morgann’s ideas that Falstaff is not a coward. Bradley suspects that Shakespeare probably intended to gradually weaken Falstaff’s influence but definitely failed in his mission: ‘In the Falstaff scenes [Shakespeare] overshot his mark. He created so extraordinary a being, and fixed him so firmly on his intellectual throne, that when he sought to dethrone him he could not’.

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Bradley projected Falstaff as a larger-than-life character, who in some way or the other managed to move beyond his context and the author's original plans. This idea initiated debates and discussion for later day scholars. The latter half of the twentieth-century saw critics like Harold Bloom discussing about Falstaff as in the same breath as *Hamlet*: 'the invention of the human, the inauguration of personality as we have come to recognize it' and as 'a character deeper than life, a wit unmatched by anyone merely real whom we will ever know'. The critics of the early twentieth-century wrote about Falstaff within the context of theatrical (old and contemporary) as well as literary traditions.

In 1943, the scholar of Renaissance drama John Dover Wilson brought out his book, *The Fortunes of Falstaff* that connects both the *Henry IV* plays. Wilson described it as 'this great twin-play'. Wilson points out that the various theatrical antecedents that Hal showers on Falstaff, including words like 'the Devil of the miracle play, the Vice of the morality, and the Riot of the interlude' makes it clear that Falstaff 'inherits by reversion the function and attributes of the Lord of Misrule, the Fool, the Buffoon, and the Jester... In short, the Falstaff-Hal plot embodies a composite myth which had been centuries in the making'. Wilson continues to argue that the play is some kind of morality fable that shows Hal's prodigal reformation. The play uses its scope to offer rejection of Falstaff as something to be engrossed with prompting many critics to disagree. They wanted to stress about Shakespeare's dramatic ambiguity. However, that too led to the critical floor being over flooded with interpretations of the play which were mythical in nature. One of such interpreter was Scottish novelist and academic JIM Stewart who identified Falstaff's association with images like that of oxen, brawn or even meat, which gives a symbolic connection to sacrifice that takes place during the festival (animals were sacrificed to look into the new fertility).

Literary critic C.L. Barber in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959) discusses about festive elements in the *Henry IV*. Barber supports Stewart's idea of Falstaff and brings some sort of ritual comic scapegoat. After all, at the end, his sacrifice removes bad luck from the Prince. Barber associates the comic elements of the plays to the great tradition of saturnalia, where Falstaff can be identified as a figure of Misrule. Just like his predecessor Wilson, Barber likes to place Prince Hal at the locus of *Henry IV, Part I* as a prodigal character who is surrounded by tempters. Yet at the same time, he argues that Shakespeare makes his plot further complicated by shifting his emphasis on whether Hal 'will be noble or degenerate, whether his holiday will become his everyday'. As far as Barber is concerned, 'that holiday' is clearly curtailed by Hal himself as much as by history:

The Falstaff comedy, far from being forced into an alien environment of historical drama, is begotten by that environment, giving and taking meaning as it grows.... Shakespeare dramatizes not only holiday but also the need for holiday and the need to limit holiday. (192)

Later critics have further posed and developed the idea of festival. One of the major critic in this regard would be Mikhail Bakhtin who proposed the idea of the ‘carnavalesque’ that was developed in his book *Rabelais and his World* (1965). Bakhtin introduced the term the ‘grotesque body’ in order to describe how in comedy we focus on the lame aspects of the human entity. A comedy makes us enjoy by reiterating to us that all human beings fart and belch, including the king. For Bakhtin, comedy is all about bringing people back to the ground. Literary texts, in ways like this, can change the way one thinks about the world by contesting the accepted ideas regarding what can be termed as normal and questioning power structures that look to justify one group’s power over another.

In 1985, Michael Bristol asserted that ‘the Battle of Carnival and Lent is an explicit structuring device in the two parts of *Henry IV*’. This thought process has been developed by another scholar, Graham Holderness, in his critical work *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (1992). Other books that deal with similar themes are Jonathan Hall’s *Anxious Pleasures: Shakespearean Comedy and the Nation-State* (1995), as well as David Ruiter’s *Shakespeare’s Festive History* (2003). In fact, psychoanalytic criticism has taken recourse to Barber and Bakhtin in order to discuss Falstaff, where the equation between the grotesque body and the female reproductive body has been highlighted. English author Hugh Grady in his article, ‘Falstaff: Subjectivity between the Carnival and the Aesthetic,’ assumes that the character of Falstaff is presenting questions about the limits of carnival:

Especially if we take into account Hal’s remarks ‘If all the year were playing holidays... he is not only rationalizing his own sowing of wild oats, but also enunciating the problem that Sir John lives: what are the limits of a carnival wrenched out of its setting in the cycle of the year’s months and seasons and set up as an end in itself in a society of constant moral and cultural disintegration and reconfiguration, such as is constituted by modernity?’

Check Your Progress

4. State two reasons why *Henry IV, Part I* is considered as a controversial play.
5. Which essay by Maurice Morgann, written on the character of Falstaff, is considered to be a benchmark effort in literary criticism?

8.4 HONOUR IN *HENRY IV, PART I*

In Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part I*, the notion of honour takes up a significant role while analysing the actions of different individuals who appear throughout the play. Yet the idea of honour is perceived in different ways by each character.

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NOTES

Therefore, they all take recourse to very different courses of actions. In the play, three prominent individuals who take the notion of honour differently throughout the play are Prince Hal, Hotspur and Falstaff. As far as Hotspur is concerned, his idea of honour is associated with feelings of duty, especially on the battlefield and the reputation of the family. However, for Prince Hal, honour is always attributed to virtuous behaviour. Hal works hard to redeem his own image by striving to achieve honour through his behaviour. Yet, unlike Hotspur and Hal, Falstaff entertains a very different notion of the meaning and importance of honour. Though Hotspur and Hal both identify honour as something that is indispensable and admirable, Falstaff considers honour as a word only. He thinks the word stays with those people whose souls have fled for the heavenly abode and the word definitely eludes the living souls.

This is the only reason for which Falstaff wants to disassociate himself from the word 'honour'. All through the play, honour is considered in variety of ways, and some characters identify honour as important while others cannot understand the significance of the meaning of honour. The concept of honour takes different turns in case of each individual, and in this way the notion of honour loses one specific meaning. Instead, it confines itself to meanings which is specific to each character's perception of the word 'honour'.

King Henry considers Hotspur as 'the theme of Honor's tongue,' (1. 1. 80) that clearly means the king considers Hotspur as the classic example of a man of honour. Similarly, the king narrates how Sir Walter Blunt told him of Hotspur's battle with Archibald, and how Hotspur finally managed to take his opponents as prisoners, which according to the king was 'an honourable spoil/a gallant prize' (1.1. 74 75). Needless to say, for the king, Hotspur is honourable because he is a successful man in battle field, he is brave and likes to invest his time among royal bloods, unlike his own son (Hal) who spends his time in the company of people who hailed from low life. King Henry also felt that Northumberland (Hotspur's father) was indeed lucky to have such a talented son. Moreover, Hotspur believes that taking action against the king, who (according to Hotspur) had side-lined every one of those who had helped him ascend the throne, is another way of getting back the lost honour. Hotspur comes up with a plan to overthrow the king with Northumberland and Worcester. This plan was all about fighting and defeating the king's army on the battlefield, thus, associating honour with battles. Hotspur tells them how they have been kept aside and shamed by the king who they had helped. Hotspur goes on to say:

*Yet, time serves wherein you may redeem
Your banished honors and restore yourselves
Into the good thoughts of the world again,
Revenge and jeering and disdained contempt
Of this proud king, who studies day and night
To answer all the debt he owes you (1. 3. 184 189).*

Hotspur believed that the lost honour that one faced due to the king's ill treatment can be redeemed only after the king is defeated and dethroned. As we read through the play, we realize that Hotspur is determined to go to any length to redeem what he considers as honour. He goes on to explain that he will:

*Pluck bright honor from the pale faced moon,
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up the drowned honor by the locks (1. 3. 207 210).*

Again when Hotspur gets to know that Glendower will not join their army and the king already has amassed thirty thousand soldiers, he understands that his army does not have much chance; however, that does not deter him from not fighting back and he says:

*Forty let it be,
My father and Glendower being both away,
The powers of us may serve so great a day.
Come let us take a muster speedily.
Doomsday is near. Die all, die merrily (4. 1. 138 142).*

As it is already obvious, Hotspur's idea of honour relied exclusively on redeeming reputation through revenge. As we see, the king himself is very fond of Hotspur because he is the upholder of the ideal image of honour, while on the other hand, the king's own son, Hal, is looked down upon because of his friend circle.

King Henry consistently mentions how he would prefer to have an honourable man as a son, someone like Hotspur, and would not want someone who he believes is dishonourable as his son. King Henry makes himself sufficiently clear when he utters the lines:

*Whilst I, by looking on the praise of him,
See riot and dishonor stain the brow
Of my young Harry. O that it could be proved
That some night tripping fairy had exchanged
In cradle clothes our children where they lay,
And called mine 'Percy' and his 'Plantagenet'!
Then would I have his Harry, and he mine (1. 2. 83 89).*

Obviously, Prince Hal's own biological father does not consider Hal as honourable and wishes if he could exchange his son. Prince Hal wastes most of his time with his friends at a tavern where he is busy playing jokes and indulging in robbery. This by no means is an attitude that a man of honour would adopt. There is no doubt that the prince is aware that he is doing wrong, and he is also aware that he has had 'loose behaviour'. At the same time, he longs to redeem himself so that he can become honourable. Prince Hal narrates how he wants to change

NOTES

NOTES

himself and become honourable by repaying those people whom he thinks he has dishonoured. Hal says:

*So when this loose behavior I throw off
And pay the debt I never promised,
By how much better than my word I am,
By so much shall I falsify men's hopes;
And, like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
...Redeeming time when men think least I will (1. 2. 215-224).*

Once he decides to redeem himself, Prince Hal goes and discusses with King Henry (his father) regarding his plan to vanquish Hotspur in the battle, and regain family and individual honour. Hotspur insists:

*I will redeem all this on Percy's head,
And, in the closing of some glorious day,
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,
When I will wear a garment all of blood
And stain my favors in a bloody mask,
Which, washed away, shall scour my shame with it (3. 2. 137-142).*

Moreover, Hal goes on to declare:

*This gallant Hotspur, this all-praised knight,
And your unthought of Harry chance to meet.
For every honor sitting on his helm,
Would they were multitudes, and on my head
My shames redoubled! For the time will come
That I shall make this northern youth exchange
His glorious deeds for my indignities (3. 2. 145-151).*

These lines make it extremely clear that Hal considers getting rid of his personal shame by gaining honour, which can be acquired only after defeating Hotspur, although he has no intentions of simply trying to gain honour. He is keener on trading his shame for Hotspur's honour. Prince Hal considers it to be the only chance to redeem himself in his father's eyes and desires his father to be proud of himself.

Unlike Hal and Hotspur, Falstaff is a person who plans and executes robbery. He never repays his money in the inn. He misuses his role as an officer. In no way can one consider Falstaff as a character with honour. Long before the battle initiates between the king and the rebel groups, Falstaff decides to make money for himself by taking bribe from men who do not want to participate in the battle or even

become soldiers. So in place of taking actual soldiers to the battle field, Falstaff appoints men who are beggars and prisoners, and makes use of them in the army—an action which by all means should be considered as dishonourable, especially when throughout the play, honour is continuously associated with something that can only be won in the battle field. Falstaff is definitely not an individual who is looking forward to fight in a battle with the idea of getting sacrificed. It is also clear that he does not care as to what will happen to the men he is carrying to the battlefield when he says:

*Tut, tut, good enough to toss; food for powder;
food for powder. They'll fit a pit as well as
better. Tush, man, mortal men, mortal men (4. 2. 66 68).*

Later in the play, Falstaff goes on to elaborate on his own idea of honour even more by highlighting how honour cannot 'take away the grief of a wound' (5. 1. 133), and it is not something that a living person can stay with.

Therefore, in the play *Henry IV, Part I*, Hotspur, Hal and Falstaff are three very different characters with very different ways of living life. Each of these characters define the idea of honour and being honourable in different ways.

Check Your Progress

6. State the concept of honour in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*.
7. State the reason for which Falstaff wants to disassociate himself from the word 'honour'.

8.5 PRINCE HAL IN *HENRY IV, PART I*

Henry IV, Part I probably holds more intense critical disagreement than any of the Shakespearean plays. It has already been mentioned that it is a history play, and there were no specific forms or traditions that were to be followed with respect to history plays. The play offers interesting aspects of private life and public life along with high life as well as low life, war along with peace, which is almost impossible for any critical reading to do justice to such an interesting text.

Differences of opinion abound, especially while concerning about the interpretation of the text. However, several critics agree that the most significant figure in the play is Prince Hal. Moreover, the structure of the play is defined by Hal's relationship to King Henry, Hotspur, along with Falstaff.

Most interpretations of modern times of *Henry IV, Part I* emphasize on psychological development that is necessary to form the basis of dramatic action.

Shakespeare takes on his stride the earliest opportunity to tell the audience what Henry is unaware of for several acts. However, many may find that the

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soliloquy, provided at the end of Act 1, Scene 2, is more than enough to subvert the inexplicably singular notion of Hal as the prodigal son. According to Peter Alexander ‘Could we imagine the prodigal preface his departure with a statement which would assure us that he was going to enjoy just enough riotous living to make his father glad to see him home again, we should be nearer Prince Hal’s case.’ Moreover, J. Dover Wilson considered that Hal is not, a ‘Prodigal Prince’; instead, he is a protean prince. So for him, prodigality is simply one such guise that he assumes and discards at his own will.

There is another popular strain of belief that *Henry IV, Part I* involves as a commitment on Hal’s part to one specific role which makes him reject other roles. This misconstrued belief imposes an unnecessary preference, not just on Hal, the prince, but on the reader as well, indirectly demanding that the audience themselves decide which is the ‘real’ Hal—the Hal who is part of the tavern, or the one in the court, or the one who was in the battle field. However, critically speaking, all of these are as ‘real,’ as anything and, thus, anything that suggests otherwise will only lead to a misleading understanding of Hal’s heroic stature. The pattern that one comes across in *Henry IV, Part 2* is more or less of a psychomaniac. Hal is faced with the unavoidable and the uncompromising choice that struggles between the values argued by Falstaff and those represented by the Lord Chief Justice. Yet at the same time, the burdens of a king are not forced prematurely on the prince. The prince Hal we come across in *Part I* is a character who is extremely different from the *Henry IV Part 2* as visibly as the *Henry IV, Part I* is different from the Bolingbroke of *Richard II*.

Saying that, it does not mean that *Henry IV, Part I* can be considered as an independent work like any other play. It is not directly related to *Henry IV, Part 2* nor to *Hamlet*, another such play that more or less is concerned with the issues of princes and kings, fathers and sons. Literary critic Harold Jenkins suggests that *Henry IV* ‘is both one play and two,’ and, thus, relationship between both the parts of the text is definitely paradoxical: ‘Though Part Two frequently recalls and sometimes depends on what happened in Part One, it also denies that Part One exists. Accordingly, the ideal spectator of either part must not say with Shakespeare’s Lucio, ‘I know what I know.’

He, therefore, must remember at times what he knows and sometimes has to be content with what he has forgotten.

Much like any play-within-a-play structure, the ‘play extempore’ that takes place in Act 2, Scene 2 builds an elaborate set of concentric circles that more often than not calls into question the basic dichotomy between the ‘illusion’ which takes place in the stage world and the ‘reality’ of the audience who are watching the illusion. In this particular instance, the audience comes across the potentially dizzying spectacle of a certain actor who is playing Hal and who is also playing the

part of the perfect ‘madcap Prince’—the same person who is first ‘playing’ himself and then later on, his father. In the final scene, Shakespeare moves with the theatrical illusion with much caution and precision especially when the ‘resurrected’ Falstaff is about to stab the corpse of Hotspur. He attempts to justify this himself by questioning, ‘Why may not he rise as well as I?’ (V.iv.125)

Literary critic Sigurd Burckhardt echoes the same concern that must haunt the members of the audience, even though semiconsciously:

Not only may Hotspur rise but he will, as soon as the scene has ended and the ‘body’ been lugged off the stage. Like other leading actors in tragedies and histories, he makes a living by counterfeiting dying, and to do so ‘is to be no counterfeit, but the true and perfect image of life indeed.’ Falstaff’s rising destroys all kinds of reassuring symmetries. The first being that of stage and world. (‘The Player Prince: Hal in Henry IV Part I’, David Boyd)

Prince Hal tried to refute his father’s charges because he knew time will vindicate him, and also because he had created an implicit defence. Soon after the real interview scene takes off when Henry charges Hal’s taste for ‘barren pleasures, rude society’ (III.ii.14), he is responsible for lowering him below the position of a prince. The mock-interview scene that starts with Hal suggests that it has actually elevated him to the next level. This kind of boast is extremely ironic, but this kind of irony serves to qualify, rather than rule out, the gravity of the significant point:

I have sounded the very bass-string of humility. Sirrah, I am sworn brother to a leash of drawers and can call them all by their christen names, as Tom, Dick, and Francis. They take it already upon their salvation that, though I be but Prince of Wales, yet I am the king of courtesy, and tell me flatly I am no proud Jack like Falstaff, but a Corinthian, a lad of mettle, a good boy (by the Lord, so they call me!), and when I am King of England I shall command all the good lads in Eastcheap (II.iv.5-15).

Of all the great things that *Henry IV, Part I* does is its celebrations of the plenitude and the glorious multiplicity of a human birth. The only character in the whole play who is seen to be responding successfully to these variety, shifting effortlessly from tavern to court to battlefield is Prince Hal.

He is able to so by becoming a player. He is definitely not a ‘poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage,’ neither is he a player like Henry or Hotspur or Falstaff, but turns out to be a prince of all players.

Check Your Progress

8. What is the function of the ‘play extempore’ that takes place in Act 2, Scene 2, of the play?
9. What does the mock-interview scene suggest?

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8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

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1. William Shakespeare's *Henry IV* has two sub plots that indulges in a dramatic battle by the end of the text. The first plot is about King Henry IV and Prince Harry (his son), and their problematic relationship. The next one is about a rebellion that is uprising against King Henry.
2. At Shrewsbury, a civil war takes place. Harry in his brave act saves his father's life in the battlefield which results in winning back his father's love and confidence.
3. The Earl of Northumberland was the father of Hotspur as well as a leader of the rebel camp.
4. *Henry IV, Part 1* is always considered to be a controversial play. The centre of much of the controversy has surrounded around Sir John Falstaff and the contradictory behaviour of his character. Moreover, debate with regards to the relationship between the two plays (*Henry IV, Part 1* and *Henry IV, Part 2*) has preoccupied many critics over the years.
5. The essay titled 'An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff' by Maurice Morgann is considered to be a benchmark effort in literary criticism.
6. In Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part 1*, the notion of honour takes up a significant role while analysing the actions of different individuals who appear throughout the play. Yet the idea of honour is perceived in different ways by each character. Therefore, they all take recourse to very different courses of actions.
7. Falstaff considers honour as only a word. He thinks the word stays with those people whose souls have felt for the heavenly abode and the word definitely eludes the living souls. This is the only reason for which Falstaff wants to disassociate himself from the word 'honour'.
8. Much like any play-within-a-play structure, the 'play extempore' that takes place in Act 2, Scene 2 builds an elaborate set of concentric circles that more often than not calls into question the basic dichotomy between the 'illusion' which takes place in the stage world and the 'reality' of the audience who are watching the illusion.
9. The mock-interview scene that starts with Hal suggests that it has actually elevated him to the next level. This kind of boast is extremely ironic, but this kind of irony serves to qualify, rather than rule out, the gravity of the significant point.

8.7 SUMMARY

Henry IV, Part I:
William Shakespeare

- William Shakespeare's *Henry IV* has two sub-plots that indulges in a dramatic battle by the end of the text. The first plot is about King Henry IV and Prince Harry (his son), and their problematic relationship. The next one is about a rebellion that is uprising against King Henry.
- *Henry IV, Part I* is always considered to be a controversial play. The centre of much of the controversy has surrounded around Sir John Falstaff and the contradictory behaviour of his character.
- English poet and playwright John Dryden, who was probably one of the first commentators on Shakespeare's Falstaff, said 'Falstaff is a Lyar, and a Coward, a Glutton, and a Buffon, because all these qualities may agree in the same man'.
- Samuel Johnson considers Falstaff as 'a thief and a glutton, a coward and a boaster, always ready to cheat the weak, and prey upon the poor', but simultaneously, he is 'obsequious and malignant'. Johnson insists that Falstaff presents a wit that is not tarnished with 'enormous or sanguinary crimes'.
- In 1777, Shakespearean literary scholar Maurice Morgann in another reading of Falstaff's character, refuted the idea that Falstaff was a coward. This essay by Morgann on Falstaff, titled 'An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff', is considered to be a benchmark effort in literary criticism.
- Morgann in his essay considers Falstaff as someone who is of actual flesh and blood. He harps upon Falstaff's birth and reputation as a soldier and a knight.
- In an interesting argument, Morgann interprets Falstaff's behaviour at the battle of Shrewsbury to some 'kind of military free thinker'. He is projected as a man of 'common sense' with 'too much wit for a hero'.
- English writer William Hazlitt, in 1817, reiterated that Falstaff was a great comic character that Shakespeare or anyone else had ever portrayed. He insisted that Falstaff's 'exaggeration of his own vices,' and his 'masterly presence of mind' makes him class apart.
- In 1943, scholar of Renaissance drama John Dover Wilson brought out his book, *The Fortunes of Falstaff* that connects both the *Henry IV* plays. Wilson described it as 'this great twin-play'.
- Literary critic C. L. Barber in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (1959) discusses about festive elements in *Henry IV*. Barber supports Stewart's idea of Falstaff and brings some sort of ritual comic scapegoat.

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- In Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part I*, the notion of honour takes up a significant role while analysing the actions of different individuals who appear throughout the play.
- Though Hotspur and Hal both identify honour as something that is indispensable and admirable, Falstaff considers honour as a word only.
- Falstaff thinks the word stays with those people whose souls have felt for the heavenly abode and the word definitely eludes the living souls. This is the only reason for which Falstaff wants to disassociate himself from the word 'honour'.
- *Henry IV, Part I*, probably holds more intense critical disagreement than any of Shakespearean plays.
- The play offers interesting aspects of private life and public life along with high life as well as low life, war along with peace.
- Most interpretations of modern times of *Henry IV, Part I* emphasize on psychological development that is the necessary to form the basis of dramatic action.

8.8 KEY WORDS

- **Literary Criticism:** It refers to the art or practice of judging and commenting on the quality and character of literary works.
- **Paradox:** It refers to a seemingly absurd or contradictory statement or proposition which when investigated may prove to be well founded or true.

8.9 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Identify the various characters in the play *Henry IV, Part I*.
2. Critically analyze the character of Falstaff in the play *Henry IV, Part I*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Explain the significance of honour throughout the play. Also, assess the various views of literary critics on this concept.

2. How does the skill for wordplay affect the fortunes of the characters in the play *Henry IV*? Is talent with words a sure sign of intelligence and capability, or does it indicate manipulative cunning and shrewdness? Give reasons for your answer.

Henry IV, Part I:
William Shakespeare

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8.10 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - III
SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS

NOTES

**UNIT 9 SHAKESPEARE'S
CHARACTER: MARCUS
ANTONY**

Structure

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Objectives
- 9.2 William Shakespeare: About the Author
 - 9.2.1 Dramatic Works
 - 9.2.2 Elizabethan Age or the Renaissance
- 9.3 A Brief Background to the Play *Anthony and Cleopatra*
- 9.4 Character Sketch: Marcus Antony
- 9.5 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 9.6 Summary
- 9.7 Key Words
- 9.8 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 9.9 Further Readings

9.0 INTRODUCTION

William Shakespeare is known not only for his sonnets and plays but also for fascinating characters that he created in his plays. Each of his plays creates some characters for which the play is known – for example, the tragedy *Macbeth* is known for both the characters of Macbeth as well as Lady Macbeth who acts as a ‘fourth witch’ to instigate Macbeth to kill the King Duncan and emerge as the new King. There is very little space that Lady Macbeth has in the play, yet within that limited space William Shakespeare could create such immensity and depth in the character of Lady Macbeth that till today scholars and academicians are exploring her character to find different shades of significance and different facets of the character. It is not only true about Lady Macbeth but for the innumerable characters that William Shakespeare created in his plays.

In the present unit, we will be focusing on the character of Marcus Antony – one of the protagonists of the play *Anthony and Cleopatra* who is caught in the quagmire when he is unable to choose between his Roman ideal for duty and his personal passion for Alexandria and Cleopatra. Antony is a creature who is trapped in his own web and finds himself in much more angst and anguish as he is not able to deal with his own self.

9.1 OBJECTIVES

Shakespeare's Character:
Marcus Antony

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the character of Marcus Antony from the play *Antony and Cleopatra*
- Discuss the characteristics of the Elizabethan era
- Explain the plot of the play *Antony and Cleopatra*.

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9.2 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Widely regarded as the greatest writer of all time, William Shakespeare occupies a unique position in world literature. The prophecy of his great contemporary, the poet and dramatist Ben Jonson, that Shakespeare “was not of an age, but for all time,” has been fulfilled.

The Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, registers that he was baptized there on April 26, 1564; his birthday is on April 23. His father, John Shakespeare, was engaged in various kinds of trade and appears to have suffered heavy losses. Shakespeare studied in the Grammar School, Stratford where he studies primarily consist mostly of Latin studies – learning to read, write, and speak the language fairly well and studying some of the classical historians, moralists, and poets. Shakespeare did not go on to the university. At the age of 18 he married to Anne Hathaway of Stratford and had two daughters – Susanna and Judith and one son, Hamnet.

How Shakespeare spent the next eight years or so, until his name begins to appear in London theatre records, is not known. There are many stories; some of them being – earning his living as a schoolmaster in the country; of going to London and gaining entry to the world of theatre by minding the horses of theatergoers, etc. but these stories have no strong proofs to assert their validity.

The first mention to Shakespeare in the literary world of London comes in 1592, when a fellow dramatist, Robert Greene, talked about Shakespeare in a pamphlet. It is not clear how his career in the theatre began; but from about 1594 onward he was an important member of the company of players known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men (called the King's Men after the accession of James I in 1603). Shakespeare became a full-time professional man of his own theatre, sharing in a cooperative enterprise and closely concerned with the financial success of the plays he wrote. For twenty years Shakespeare dedicated himself industriously to his art, writing thirty seven plays, one hundred and fifty four sonnets and two longer narrative poems – *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece*.

9.2.1 Dramatic Works

Let us briefly mention the dramatic works of Shakespeare.

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The early plays

The record of Shakespeare's early theatrical success is obscure. His brilliant two-part play on the Wars of the Roses, *The Whole Contention between the two Famous Houses, Lancaster and Yorke*, is among his earliest achievements. *The Comedy of Errors* had hilariously comic situations. *Titus Andronicus* is tragedy in the high Roman fashion. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* was a new kind of romantic comedy. *The Taming of the Shrew* is famous for its wit. *Love's Labour's Lost* is a witty and satirical observation of society. *Romeo and Juliet* combines a tragic situation with comedy and gaiety.

The histories

For his English history plays, Shakespeare primarily drew upon Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which appeared in 1587, and on Edward Hall's earlier account of *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre and York* (1548). From these and numerous secondary sources he inherited traditional themes: the divine right of royal succession, the need for unity and order in the realm, the evil of dissension and treason, the cruelty and hardship of war, the power of money to corrupt, the strength of family ties, the need for human understanding and careful calculation, and the power of God's providence, which protected his followers, punished evil, and led England toward the stability of Tudor rule. After the last group of English history plays, Shakespeare chose to write about Julius Caesar, who held particular fascination for the Elizabethans. After six or seven years Shakespeare returned to a Roman theme again in, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.

The "great," or "middle," comedies

The comedies written between 1596 and 1602 have much in common. With the exception of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, all are set in some "imaginary" lands. – Illyria, Messina, Venice and Belmont, Athens, or the Forest of Arden, the sun shines as. In these plays, the lovers are young and witty. The action concerns wooing; and its conclusion is marriage. Whether Shakespeare's source was an Italian novel (*The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing*), an English pastoral tale (*As You Like It*), an Italian comedy (the Malvolio story in *Twelfth Night*), or something of his own invention (probably *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and parts of each) Shakespeare portrayed remarkable mastery in theatre.

The great tragedies

Shakespeare's greatness is nowhere more visible than in his tragedies—*Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*.

The dark comedies

Troilus and Cressida, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*—have become known as dark comedies for their distempered vision of the world. They are questioning, satiric, intense, and very dark in respect to the comic essence.

The late plays.

Pericles, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *Henry VIII*, written between 1608 and 1612, are commonly known as Shakespeare's "late plays," or his "last plays." One of the common characteristics of these plays is that, although they portray tragic or pathetic emotions, events move toward a resolution of difficulties in which reconciliations and reunions are prominent.

Shakespeare died on 23rd April 1616. He was buried in the same church where he was baptized. On his tombstone, the following lines are inscribed:

*Good Friend for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here;
Blest be the man who spares these stones,
And curst be he that moves my bones."*

9.2.2 Elizabethan Age or the Renaissance

'**Renaissance**' is an Italian word, meaning re-birth. Renaissance as we understand it today is associated with major social and cultural developments in Europe between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. The contribution of the Renaissance to the emergence of modernity in early modern Europe, and especially England, has been for many years an appropriate entry point to the history of the modern world.

The period of reign of Queen Elizabeth in British throne (1558—1603) which is usually termed as the Elizabethan age or the Elizabethan Era is often used synonymously for Renaissance or for The Early Modern Period of English literature and culture. Many literary scholars and historians often used the term 'renaissance' or the early modern period to refer to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. The term "Renaissance"—meaning "rebirth" or "reawakening", applies to the socio-political and cultural development that happened all over Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In case of England, the term Renaissance applies to the sixteenth century when England witnessed a socio-cultural upheaval and a change that affected the lives of all. This period witnessed a rapid growth in English Commerce, naval power and nationalist feeling, along with it being the greatest age of English literature, especially plays and poems. The prominent writers of the age were William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Francis Bacon, Walter Raleigh and others. The age is considered to be one of the most fruitful periods in terms of literature and art. Elizabethan age is also considered by many literary historians as the first Modern Age, as the development in terms of science and the rise of capitalism and

*Shakespeare's Character:
Marcus Antony*

NOTES

NOTES

mercantilism led to a new outlook towards life. The focus of study shifted from god to man as 'man' became the centre of literary and cultural concern. Religion, that is, Christianity, still played a great role in man's life, but god was not the centre anymore, leading to a new and fresh outlook, often termed by literary historians and scholars as 'Renaissance Humanism'.

Renaissance applied to the period of European history following the Middle Ages; it is commonly said to have begun in Italy in the late fourteenth century and to have continued in Western Europe through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In this period the art of painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature reached an eminence not exceeded by any civilization in any age. The development came late to England in the sixteenth century and did not have its flowering until the Elizabethan and Jacobean period; sometimes, in fact, Milton (1608-1674) is said to be the last great Renaissance poet.

Many attempts have been made to define "the Renaissance." It has been described as the birth of the modern world out of the ashes of the dark ages; as the discovery of the world and discovery of man; as the era of untrammelled individualism in life, thought, religion, and art. Recently some historians, finding that these attributes were present in various people and places in the Middle Ages, and also that many elements long held to be medieval survived into the renaissance, have denied that the Renaissance ever existed. It is true that history is a continuous process, and that "periods" are invented not by God but by historians; but the concept of a period is a convenience, if not a necessity, of historical analysis, and one is able to identify, during the span of the Renaissance, a number of events and discoveries which in the course of time altered radically the views, productions, and manner of life of the intellectual classes.

All these events may be regarded as putting a strain on the relatively closed and stable world of the great civilization of the later Middle Ages, when most of the essential truths about man, the universe, religion, and philosophy were held to be well known and permanently established. The full impact of many of these Renaissance developments did not make itself felt until the later seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, but the very fact that they occurred in this period indicates the vitality, the audacity, and the restless curiosity of many men of the Renaissance, whether scholars, thinkers, artists, or adventurers.

(1) The New Learning: Renaissance scholars of the classics, called Humanists, revived the knowledge of the Greek language, discovered and disseminated a great number of Greek manuscripts, and added considerably to the number of Roman authors and works which has been known to the Middle Ages. The result was to enlarge immensely the stock of ideas, materials, literary forms, and styles available to Renaissance writers. In the mid-fifteenth century the invention of printing on paper from movable type made books for the first time cheap and plentiful, and floods of publications, ancient and modern, poured from

the presses of Europe to satisfy the demands of the rapidly expanding literate audience. The speed of the inauguration and spread of ideas, discoveries, and types of literature in the Renaissance was made possible by this technological development.

The humanistic revival sometimes resulted in pedantic scholarship, sterile imitations of ancient works and styles, and a rigid rhetoric and literary criticism. It also bred, however, the gracious and tolerant humanity of an Erasmus, and the noble concept of the cultivated Renaissance gentleman expressed in Baldassare Castiglione's *Il Cortegiano* (*The Courtier*), published in 1528. This was the most admired and widely translated of the many Renaissance courtesy books, or books on the character, obligations, and training of the man of the court. It presents the ideal of the completely rounded or "universal" man, developed in all his faculties and skills, physical, intellectual, and artistic. He is trained to be a warrior and statesman, but is capable also as athlete, philosopher, artist, conversationist, and man of society. His relations to women are in accord with the quasi-religious code of Platonic love, and his activities are crowned by the grace of sprezzatura – the seeming ease and negligence with which he meets the demands of complex and exacting rules of behavior. Leonardo da Vinci in Italy and Sir Phillip Sidney in England were embodiments of the courtly ideal.

- (2) **The New Religion:** The Reformation led by Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a successful heresy which struck at the very basis of the institutionalism of the Roman Catholic Church. This early Protestantism was grounded on the individual's inner experience of spiritual struggle and salvation. Faith (based on the word of the Bible as interpreted by the individual) was alone thought competent to save, and salvation itself was regarded as a direct transaction with God in the theater of the individual soul, without the need of intermediation by Church, priest, or sacrament. For this reason Protestantism is sometimes said to have been an extreme manifestation of "Renaissance individualism" in northern Europe; it soon, however, developed its own institutionalism in the theocracy proposed by John Calvin and his Puritan followers. England in characteristic fashion muddled its way into Protestantism under Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, empirically finding a middle way that minimized violence and hastened a stable settlement.
- (3) **The New World:** In 1492 Columbus, acting on the persisting belief in the old Greek idea that the world is a globe, sailed west to find a new commercial route to the East, only to be frustrated by the unexpected barrier of a new continent. The succeeding explorations of this continent gave new materials and stimulus to the literary

*Shakespeare's Character:
Marcus Antony*

NOTES

NOTES

imagination; the magic world of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, for example, is based on a contemporary account of a shipwreck on Bermuda. More important for literature, however, was the fact that economic exploitation of the new world put England at the center, rather than as theretofore at the edge, of the chief trade routes, and so helped establish the commercial prosperity that in England, as in Italy earlier, was a necessary though not sufficient condition for the development of a vigorous intellectual and artistic life.

- (4) **The New Cosmos:** The cosmos of medieval astronomy and theology was Ptolemaic (that is, based on the astronomy of Ptolemy, second century A.D.) and pictured a stationary earth around which rotated the successive spheres of the moon, the various planets, and the fixed stars; Heaven, or the Empyrean, was thought to be situated above the spheres, and Hell to be situated either at the center of the earth (as in Dante's *Inferno*) or else below the system of the spheres (as in Milton's *The Paradise Lost*). In 1543 Copernicus published his new hypothesis concerning the system of the universe; this gave a much simpler and more coherent explanation of accumulating observations of the actual movements of the heavenly bodies, which had led to ever greater complications of the Ptolemaic world picture. The Copernican theory pictured a system in which the center is not the earth, but the sun, and in which the earth is not stationary, but one planet among the many planets which revolve around the sun.

Investigations have not borne out the earlier assumption that the world picture of Copernicus and his followers delivered an immediate and profound shock to the theological and secular belief of thinking men. For example, in 1611, when Donne wrote in "The First Anniversary" that "new Philosophy calls all in doubt," for "the Sun is lost, and th' earth," he did so only to support the ancient theme of the world's decay and to enforce a standard Christian *contemptus mundi*. Still later, Milton in *Paradise Lost* expressed a suspension of judgment between the Ptolemaic and Copernican theories; he adopted for his own poem the older Ptolemaic scheme because it was more firmly traditional and better adapted to his imaginative purposes.

Much more important, in the long run, was the effect on men's opinions of the general principles and methods of the new science of the great successors of Copernicus, such as the physicists Kepler and Galileo, and the English physician and physiologist, William Harvey. The cosmos of many Elizabethan writers was not only Ptolemaic, and subject throughout to God's Providence; it was also an animate universe, invested with occult powers, inhabited by demons and spirits, and often thought to control men's lives by stellar influences and to be

itself subject to control by the power of witchcraft and of magic. The cosmos that emerged in the seventeenth century, as a product of the scientific procedure of constructing exact hypotheses capable of being tested by precisely measured observations, was the physical universe of Rene Descartes (1596-1650). “Give me extension and motion,” Descartes wrote, “and I will construct the universe.” This universe of Descartes and the new science consisted of extended particles of matter which moved in space according to fixed mathematical laws, entirely free from interference by angles, demons, human prayer, or occult magical powers, and subject only to the limited manipulations of scientists who, in Francis Bacon’s phrase, had learned to obey nature in order to be her master. In this way, the working hypotheses of the physical scientists were converted into a philosophical world view, which was made current by many popular expositions, and – together with the methodological principle that controlled observation, rather than tradition or authority, is the only test of truth in all areas of knowledge – helped constitute the climate of eighteenth century opinion known as the *Enlightenment*.

Shakespeare’s Character:
Marcus Antony

NOTES

Check Your Progress

1. When was Shakespeare first mentioned in the literary world?
2. What inspired Shakespeare’s history plays?

9.3 A BRIEF BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY *ANTHONY AND CLEOPATRA*

“We remain confronted with the inexplicable fact, or the no less inexplicable appearance of a world travailing for a perfection, but bringing to birth together with glorious good any evil which it is able to overcome only by self torture and self waste. And this fact or appearance is tragedy.”

– A.C. Bradley, *The Substance of Tragedy*

Shakespearean tragedies usually affirm the code that A.C. Bradley states, but *Antony and Cleopatra* seems to be an exception as the protagonists of the play punish themselves for not living up to the image of the code of honour that society has set for them. Usually in a tragedy, the protagonist tries to achieve more than what the Fate has ascribed for him or her and therefore transgresses the limits to reach the domain which is not just for him or her and consequently suffers. But in *Antony and Cleopatra*, the tragic protagonists fail to live up to the ideals of honour and give their lives in the futile attempt to achieve it. Antony and Cleopatra, both commit suicide as they think that it is only in death that they will be able to live up to their expectations.

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Mervyn James explored the changing conceptions of honour between 1485 and 1642 and concluded that there occurred “a change of emphasis, apparent by the early seventeenth century ... (involving) ... the emergence of a “civil” society in which the monopoly both of honour and violence by the state was asserted.” (Mervyn James, *English Politics and the Concept of Honour 1485 – 1642*). In this state, William Shakespeare deliberately and consciously took up Sir Thomas North's *The Life of Marcus Antonius*, a translation of Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* to deal with the concept of honour in a civil society.

According to Plutarch, Cleopatra deliberately allowed Caesar to discover that she had kept half her treasure in order to create the false impression that she planned to survive. In William Shakespeare's version, however, it is uncertain whether she wishes to give this impression or genuinely hopes to come to terms with Caesar. William Shakespeare deliberately keeps it unclear whether her intention to kill herself is out of her devotion for Antony or to “pack cards with Caesar.” Therefore, Honigmann writes –

“Though Cleopatra's choice of death seems unconditional when Antony dies, she has time to think again, and her final decision affects is differently.”

It cannot be certainly said that Cleopatra does because of her love for Antony, but it is true that she knows that Octavius Caesar can resist her charm and will triumph over her. So, instead of choosing a heavenly afterlife with Antony, she dies as she wants to defy the absolute power of Caesar. She will never give her up in front of Caesar and lose her honour. She thinks it is better to die a honourable death than to serve the European's male's whims and wishes. Therefore, like Antony, she takes up “the high Roman fashion” and commits suicide as she is not able to live up to the code of honour that she had set for herself. It shows the autonomy of her character as she denies being dominated by the European male and succumb under Caesar's power. Her defiance makes Caesar understand that this is one power which he will never be able to conquer. When Cleopatra says – “This mortal house, I'll ruin/ Do Caesar what he can” (Act V, Scene ii, Lines 50 - 51), Caesar knows that he is defeated in his game as he is unable to break a woman who very easily had manipulated her friend Antony to consolidate her control. Consequently, the powerful Caesar is left powerless and therefore he orders the guards to give her an honourable burial, as he says –

*“Take up her bed
And bear her women from the monument;
She shall be buried by her Antony
No grave upon the earth shall clip in it
A pair so famous ...
... Our Army shall
In solemn show attend this funeral,*

*And then to Rome. Come, Dolabella, see
High order, in this great solemnity.”
(Act V, Scene ii, Lines 334 – 364)*

When Caesar is marching towards Alexandria, he already had this notion that probably the lady, Cleopatra, would defy his power and therefore we see Dolabella saying to Caesar –

*“O Sir, you are too sure an augurer;
That you did fear, is done”
(Act V, Scene ii, Lines 332 – 333)*

To this Caesar could only say –

*“Bravest at the last
She levell’d at our purposes, and being royal
Took her own way”
(Act V, Scene ii, Lines 334 – 336)*

The word “levell’d” points out to the fact that she has undone all the expectations and dreams of Caesar, but still he gives proper honour to Egyptian Queen Cleopatra as like the Roman emperor she has lived up to the Roman ideal. Her “bravery” has to be properly honoured and, being the Roman Emperor, Caesar had to act honourably to provide proper respect to his only enemy.

Moreover, when he decided to bury Cleopatra beside Antony, he is also trying to give proper honour to his friend Antony. It is true that Roman ideal and code of honour could not provide Antony with the freedom to give vent to his passion for Cleopatra. From the beginning of the play he is torn between his passion and duty. He tries to break away from his passion, as he says –

*“These strong Egyptain fetters I must break
Or lose myself in dotage.”
(Act I, Scene ii, Lines 113 – 114)*

Caesar also tries to make Antony strong enough to face his passion bravely and live up to the Roman code of honour by making him marry Octavia so that the male-bonding makes Antony stronger enough to get out of the enthralling effect of Cleopatra. Caesar knew that Antony’s passion is very strong and therefore he agrees he give away his sister Octavia’s life for the sake of his friend. Antony also understands this and when he fails to live up to the expectations of Caesar and the Roman ideal, he finds it honourable to give up his life. Therefore, even in his death Antony reaffirms the moral ideal of Rome as he says –

*“Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My country man ... A Roman by a Roman
Valiantly vanquished.”
(Act Iv, Scene xv, Lines 56 – 58)*

*Shakespeare’s Character:
Marcus Antony*

NOTES

NOTES

Peter Erickson writes in "Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Dramas"—

"Octavius finds in Antony a heightened image of his own abstemiousness, Cleopatra's celebration of the bountiful Antony projects a model in which she discovers her own bounty."

Antony is probably caught between the two and at last chooses the Roman ideal and dies honourably.

Caesar being the friend of Antony understands the psychological battle that Antony has gone through and therefore decides that if Antony and Cleopatra could not meet in the earthly life, then they should at least be one in the heavenly afterlife. But more than that he had to show his magnanimity as a Roman emperor and decides that these two honourable persons should be respected for their just attempt to live up to the social code of the civil society.

Thus, in the play, both Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide and evoke pity in audience's mind as the circumstances of the honour code make them unable to carry on with their lives. Similarly, Caesar's defeat and his consequent magnanimity also evokes pity as Caesar is forced to accept the greatness and solemnity of the "high order" of Antony and Cleopatra. When the audience leaves the theatre hall they do not go with the purgation of the feelings of pity and fear; moreover, they experience the greatness of the protagonists and understands the significance of social codes in the civil society. The death of Antony and Cleopatra makes the play a tragedy but unlike other tragedies the play evokes the feeling where "honour becomes an informal personal code with an extremely attenuated social dimension." (Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy*).

9.4 CHARACTER SKETCH: MARCUS ANTONY

Mark Antony, as a character, figures for the first time in William Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*. In *Julius Caesar*, Mark Antony's character is a complex mixture of many different traits which make a mark not only to the Roman minds, but also to the audience world over. Anthony is first not held in very high esteem as he seems to be living a frivolous life and Brutus thinks that after Caesar's death he will be rendered helpless and of no use. But things happen otherwise after Caesar's death as in the oratory on Cesar's death he succeeds in winning the sympathy of the public and in the process could drive away the conspirators from Rome. Even in the battlefield of Philippi, Antony proves himself to be a great soldier and a wise general. His character truly shines in *Julius Caesar*.

When we come to *Antony and Cleopatra*, he is portrayed with much glory as he is the senior most of the triumvirs. He is portrayed to have an absolute command over the eastern states. Antony is portrayed by William Shakespeare in such terms in the play *Antony and Cleopatra* he seems more than human in his gigantic status which makes critics like Drowden say –

“The Characters of Antony and Cleopatra insinuate themselves through the senses, trouble the blood, ensnare the imagination, invade out whole being like colour or like music. The figures dilate proportions greater than human, and are seen through a golden haze of sensuous splendor.”

Shakespeare's Character:
Marcus Antony

This also seems true about Mark Antony as he stands as a symbol of power, wealth and glory of the Roman Empire. But at the same time, we see that this great powerful man could not hold himself proper when Cleopatra's charms are involved. He undergoes a rapid change in the play as he seems to be falling as victim of the charm of Cleopatra. His followers, Demetrius and Philo, are not completely wrong about Antony when they say –

*“Nay, but his dotage of our general's
O'erflows the measure, those his goodly eyes,
That o'er the flies and musters of the war
Have glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn.
The office and devotion of their view
Upon a tawny front: his captain's heart
Which in the scuffles of great fight hath burst
The buckles of his breast, reneges all temper,
And is become the bellows and the fan
To cool a gipsy's lust.”*

This to some extent seems to be true about Mark Antony as before the charm of Cleopatra he seems to get unsettled and instead of thinking about Rome's prosperity and greatness things in terms of his own love for Cleopatra. His shows his contempt for the wealth and grandeur of the empire's richness as he compares them with Cleopatra's beauty.

Even though he gets infatuated to Cleopatra, when he comes back to Rome for some time, he seems to get over that infatuation and patches up his difference with Caesar and goes to the extent of subduing Pompey who is their common enemy. Here he married Caesar's sister, Octavia as it is by marrying her that he is trying to consolidate his empire and strengthening his position in the triumvirate. But even though he marries Octavia, but some where he knew in his heart that he will return to Cleopatra sooner or later, as he himself states –

*“I will to Egypt:
And though I make this marriage for my peace,
I, the east my pleasure lies.”*

Thus, we see him caught between the two opposite ends of life – on the one side he knows that as a part of the triumvirate, it is his duty to ensure the safety of his empire and not think of any other concerns, but on the other hand, he has his heart with Cleopatra with whom he has fallen in love. Thus, his character seems to be a perfect creature who is caught between his head and his heart and he seems to be undecided about which one to choose. When he is in Rome, he feels that he

NOTES

NOTES

should by all means try to think only in terms of Roman good, but in some weaker moments, his heart takes over him and he thinks of fleeing to Cleopatra.

Soon he returns to Cleopatra. Octavia asks for permission to go to Rome and act as a mediator between her husband and her brother. The permission is readily given as Mark Antony wants Octavia to go quickly get away from his way to Cleopatra. As Octavia leaves for Rome, Mark Antony leaves for Egypt and hence many people think that there is a ready deterioration of his character as he loses all his character as well as his will to take correct decisions and is completely taken over by Cleopatra.

Later when Antony says the following, we find a correct estimate of why he does what he did –

*“Egypt, thou knew'st too well
My heart was to thy rudder tied by the strings
And thou shouldst tow me after: O'er my spirit
Thy full supremacy thou knew'est, and that
Thy back might from the bidding of the gods
Command me.”*

This is a very honest confession of Antony in his helpless state when he does not know what to do with his weak heart. He may be a great soldier and a very wise general, but when it comes to his matter of heart and when Cleopatra is concerned he has no way with the world and that is very much clear from the above quoted passage.

In this state he carries on and soon his fleet deserts him and he is driven to commit suicide. Here it is to be understood that he commits suicide not to escape shame and dishonor, but in the hope of meeting Cleopatra in the Elysian lands –

*“I will o'ertake thee, Cleopatra, and
Weep for my pardon ...
I come, my queen, ... stay for me:
Where souls do couch on flowers, we'll hand in hand
And with our sprightly part make the ghosts gaze
Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops
And all the hunt be ours.”*

Mark Antony thus can be seen as one of the most complex characters that William Shakespeare has created as he is composed of valour, heroism on the one side and self-indulgent on the other. He is a man who is not just heroic, but at the same time is human and has his own pitfalls. It is the greatness of Shakespeare that he created characters who are so life-like.

Check Your Progress

3. What feelings do Antony and Cleopatra's suicide evoke in the audience?
4. In which play did the character of Antony first appeared?

NOTES

9.5 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. The first mention to Shakespeare in the literary world of London comes in 1592, when a fellow dramatist, Robert Greene, talked about Shakespeare in a pamphlet.
2. For his English history plays, Shakespeare primarily drew upon Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which appeared in 1587, and on Edward Hall's earlier account of *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre and York* (1548).
3. In the play, both Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide and evoke pity in audience's mind as the circumstances of the honour code make them unable to carry on with their lives.
4. Mark Antony, as a character, figures for the first time in William Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*.

9.6 SUMMARY

- Antony is a creature who is trapped in his own web and finds himself in much more angst and anguish as he is not able to deal with his own self.
- William Shakespeare occupies a unique position in world literature.
- The prophecy of his great contemporary, the poet and dramatist Ben Jonson, that Shakespeare "was not of an age, but for all time," has been fulfilled.
- The period of reign of Queen Elizabeth in British throne (1558—1603) which is usually termed as the Elizabethan age or the Elizabethan Era is often used synonymously for Renaissance or for The Early Modern Period of English literature and culture.
- Many literary scholars and historians often used the term 'renaissance' or the early modern period to refer to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century.
- The term "Renaissance"—meaning "rebirth" or "reawakening", applies to the socio-political and cultural development that happened all over Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

NOTES

- In case of England, the term Renaissance applies to the sixteenth century when England witnessed a socio-cultural upheaval and a change that affected the lives of all.
- This period witnessed a rapid growth in English Commerce, naval power and nationalist feeling, along with it being the greatest age of English literature, especially plays and poems.
- In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the tragic protagonists fail to live up to the ideals of honour and give their lives in the futile attempt to achieve it.
- Antony and Cleopatra, both commit suicide as they think that it is only in death that they will be able to live up to their expectations.
- Mark Antony, as a character, figures for the first time in William Shakespeare's play *Julius Caesar*.
- When we come to *Antony and Cleopatra*, he is portrayed with much glory as he is the senior most of the triumvirs. He is portrayed to have an absolute command over the eastern states.
- His character seems to be a perfect creature who is caught between his head and his heart and he seems to be undecided about which one to choose.
- When he is in Rome, he feels that he should by all means try to think only in terms of Roman good, but in some weaker moments, his heart takes over him and he thinks of fleeing to Cleopatra.
- Mark Antony thus can be seen as one of the most complex characters that William Shakespeare has created as he is composed of valour, heroism on the one side and self-indulgent on the other.

9.7 KEY WORDS

- **Prophecy:** It is a statement that says what is going to happen in the future, especially one that is based on what you believe about a particular matter.
- **Tudor:** Family line relating to the English royal dynasty which held the throne from the accession of Henry VII in 1485 until the death of Elizabeth I in 1603.
- **Satire:** It is the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.

9.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a brief note on the life and works of William Shakespeare.

2. Give a brief description of various dramatic works by Shakespeare such as early play, history plays, great tragedies, etc.
3. Describe the characteristics of the Elizabethan Age or the Renaissance.
4. Give a brief background of the play *Antony and Cleopatra*.

*Shakespeare's Character:
Marcus Antony*

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically discuss the character of Marcus Antony from the play *Antony and Cleopatra*.
2. Do you agree that Marcus Antony tried to live a life of honour and perished doing so? Give reasons for your answer.

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UNIT 10 SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTER: CLEOPATRA

Structure

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Objectives
- 10.2 A Brief Background to the Play *Antony and Cleopatra*
 - 10.2.1 Status of Women during Elizabethan Times
- 10.3 The Character of Cleopatra
- 10.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 10.5 Summary
- 10.6 Key Words
- 10.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 10.8 Further Readings

10.0 INTRODUCTION

Women had a limited role in the Elizabethan society and therefore even in Elizabethan plays we figure out women are given limited space as William Shakespeare was writing for the masses and the beliefs of the masses is something that he had to cater to. In spite of this, he created some memorable women characters in his plays who are known for their own right and who through their words and actions create a great impression in the minds of the readers and viewers.

Cleopatra is one such character in the play *Antony and Cleopatra* whom the readers cannot forget even after four hundred years of its creation. Till today, Cleopatra is seen to be a rebellious woman who fought for her own cause and created such an ideological space for herself in the minds of the readers and the viewers that among the whole of Shakespearean canon of tragedy she is still thought to be amongst the greatest.

10.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the background of the play *Antony and Cleopatra*
- Analyze the character of Cleopatra in the play
- Assess the status of women in the Elizabethan era

10.2 A BRIEF BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY *ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA*

Shakespeare's Character:
Cleopatra

If literature is all about the reconciliation of opposites, then in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the binary opposition of Caesar and Cleopatra finds reconciliation in Antony's death. Antony is the battle ground where the two ideologues have their fight and therefore from the very beginning of the play, we do find the Romans misunderstanding him, as a Philo says in Act I, scene I –

*"You shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transformed
Into a strumpet's fool"*
(Lines 11 – 13)

The triple pillars are Octavius Caesar, Antony and Lepidus who are pursuing the extravaganza of the hegemony of the Roman Empire. From time immemorial, the Romans are associated with a masculine military ideal where the personal pleasure of no importance when compared to the splendor of the Roman Empire. The Romans, in their fight between the personal and the political, always emphasized the political. When Antony comes to Rome, after Fulvia's death, Caesar's sister Octavia is made to marry Antony to "consolidate 'male relations'" (Erickson) so that the political alliance between the triumvirs becomes stronger. If Romans give some space to the personal it is only to promote their political pragmatism. Therefore, Antony at the beginning of the play also says –

*"These strong Egyptian fetters I must break,
Or lose myself dotage"*
(Act I, Scene ii, Lines 112 – 113)

What Antony terms as "Egyptian fetters" is nothing but the passion of his heart which Romans were successfully neglecting for ages. But as soon as Antony is introduced to the mysticism of 'eastern enchantment', we find, his head losing to his heart. Throughout the play, Antony makes a to and fro movement between Egypt and Rome, both literally and symbolically. He says to Cleopatra –

*"That Thou, residing here, goes yet with me:
And I hence fleeting, here remain with thee."*
(Act I, Scene iv, Lines 103 – 104)

But his Roman ideal makes him unsuccessful to reconcile pragmatism and passion the play becomes a quest for identity for Antony as he repeatedly tries to affirm his Roman blood throughout the play –

"I am/ Antony yet" (Act III, Scene viii, lines 92-93)

NOTES

NOTES

It is difficult for the colonizer Antony to accept that his encounter with the colonized had given birth to a “hybridity” in his identity.

Shakespeare deliberately presented Alexandria to be a feminine space as the colonizer thinks the colonized to be feminine in nature, where the personal passion rules more than the political prowess. For Antony, it is difficult to accept that femininity has invaded his being, as it will be supposedly stooping down on the part of the colonizer. Therefore, even in his death, Antony reaffirms the moral ideal of Rome as he says –

“My Countrymen, ... A Roman by a Roman

Valiantly vanquished.”

(Act IV, scene xv. Lines 56 – 58)

As against him, Cleopatra at the end of the play could take up the Roman ideal of not surrendering to the enemy as she says –

“This mortal house I’ll win,

Do Caesar what he can”

(Act V, Scene ii, Lines 50 – 51)

She could very easily take up the masculine role of the Romans as for her the ‘hybridity’ of identity is not a problem like Antony’s. In her suicide is the heroic defiance of the Roman male authority which is a subversive statement that the play *Antony and Cleopatra* provides. Therefore, the New Historicist critic John Danby in the essay “Antony and Cleopatra: A Shakespearean Adjustment” writes –

“Opposites are juxtaposed, mingled, married; then from the very union which seems to promise strength dissolution follows. It is a process of this dialectic – the central process of the play – which we must trace if we wish to arrive anywhere near Shakespeare’s meaning.”

Thus, the play *Antony and Cleopatra* is a juxtaposition of many binary opposites – passion/politics, Egypt/Rome, feminine/masculine, Cleopatra/Caesar. The symbolic world of the male adult needs these binary oppositions to perpetuate their domination over the feminine, colonized, peripheral assertions. But these peripheral assertions of Cleopatra in her suicide defies the symbolic order of the male to show the vanity of the Roman ideal and to deconstruct the notion that the personal and the political are two spheres of life. In this sense, Cleopatra’s defiance of Caesar can be seen as a feminist resistance to phallo-centrism. Shakespeare’s project in writing *Antony and Cleopatra* seems to be a radical ‘dispersal of identity’ and the consequent loss of coherence which will destabilize the European male’s notion of superiority, as Caesar says –

‘Bravest at the last,

She levell’d at our purposes”

(Act V, Scene ii, lines 334 – 335)

The word “levell’d” itself suggests that Caesar’s purpose is defeated at the end of the play. Peter Erickson in the essay ‘Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare’s Drama’ says –

“Octavius finds in Antony a heightened image of his own abstemiousness, Cleopatra’s celebration of the bountiful Antony projects a model in which she discovers her own bounty.”

Both their purposes fail as Antony is neither able to abstain his personal passion to assert his Roman manliness, neither is he able to live up to the bounteousness of the Alexandrian charm. Consequently, the readers and the viewers are left with a painfully divided response for which there is no resolution.

10.2.1 Status of Women during Elizabethan Times

If one talk about Elizabethan literature, then one can notice that there is no literature written by women existing today. Is it that no women writers were there in that age or is it that the writings of the women writers don’t exist today and the academicians of the past thought that they are not good enough and therefore didn’t take any effort to preserve it or to write about it or to take notice of it. The only document that exists which is written by a woman is by Jane Anger. It’s a pamphlet called *Her Protection for Women*, which was in some ways a reaction against the Puritans writing against Women. One line of the Pamphlet is worth mentioning, where Jane Anger writes “if our virtues decay daily, it’s because men’s virtue decay hourly.” It show how much of rage, Jane Anger must be having which makes her react in this way.

I think before going any further into the discussion of women in the age of Renaissance, it is necessary to discuss a bit about the Pamphlets of Stephen Gosson, who being a puritan not only wrote against the women but also against theatre. According to Stephen Gosson, both theatre and Women are transgressive in nature. The Globe Theatre is in the outskirts of London. There is a reason why it is so. The State thought that the content of the play is always transgressive and therefore there is always a site where there is a threat to the state order, therefore theatre is always in the periphery in the Elizabethan world.

The Elizabethan people also thought that the women are transgressive in nature. Therefore, they compared women with theatre. Stephen Gosson is of the view that women are a threat to the larger patriarchal economy because of their transgressive nature and therefore requires a highly structured process involving their passage from the house and surveillance of the father to the house and surveillance of the husband. Therefore, Joan Kelly in the essay “Did Women have a Renaissance?” compares the status of women in Renaissance with that of the so called Dark Age (Medieval Age) and comments that there was “no renaissance for women,” as the situation worsened for the “fairer sex.” And almost all the works of the Renaissance establish “chastity” as the female norm and restructure

*Shakespeare’s Character:
Cleopatra*

NOTES

the relation of the sexes to one of “female dependency” and “male domination” as Catherine Belsey says in her Essay “Disrupting Sexual Difference” –

“Women, then as now, were defined in relation to men and in terms of their relations with men.”

NOTES

In the sonnets written in Petrarchan love tradition, the women were portrayed to be far from the poet lover and he decided that he can never express his love though the way he tries to portray the sensual beauty of the beloved makes us feel that the lover unconsciously is using his “male gaze” in viewing the beloved. Sidney, Earl of Surrey, Thomas Wyatt – all of them show a similar mentality. In Philip Sidney’s *Astrophil and Stella*, the poet lover uses Stella (Penelope Devereux in Real life) as the lady who inspires him to achieve the grace of being a famous poet. In the Metaphysical Love Poetry, the poets like John Donne and Andrew Marvell portray the beloved as the objects – whom the poets want to enjoy in sensual terms. The women are not given any voice and the silence of the women is always treated as affirmation. Moreover, in many cases the beloved’s body is treated as the “new found land” where the imperialistic male would rove.

Similarly, in Elizabethan Drama, the women are not given any voice. In Shakespearean Comedies, the women protagonists are given a prominent voice – but those voices are usually outside the parameters of the structured society. In *As You Like It* Rosalind could not decide for herself what she intends to do or to say till the point of time she visits the Forest of Arden. Only when she cross-dresses as Ganymede that she is able to come up her true critique of the patriarchal society and the Petrarchan love of Orlando. Similarly, in *Twelfth Night*, it is only in the times of revelry that Viola is shown to have a voice of her own. Therefore, not only outside the structured society but only when the female characters in the Elizabethan world cross-dresses as male the female protagonist does have a voice. Therefore, in *Merchant of Venice*, Portia had to enter the court room dressed as a male. In the Comedies the women Characters are given certain space, but that space is given only in comedies as comedies are treated as a low form of art where the transgression of the hierarchy of the society is permitted.

But in tragedies, the women are not given any space. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare starts the play showing Lady Macbeth to be much stronger character than Macbeth, but ultimately, he is forced to show that Lady Macbeth could not stand up to the crime that she has committed with Macbeth and we see the pathetic situation of lady Macbeth in the sleep walking scene. Similarly, in *Othello*, Desdemona though shows her spirit of female autonomy when she chooses to marry Othello against the wishes of her father Brabantio. But at the end we see her pathetic end when she is being killed by her husband thinking that if Desdemona can transgress her father’s household she can do the same in the husband’s household. In John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*, the Duchess tries to shoe her

autonomy and tries to fight for the female rights, but she ultimately faces wretched death from his brothers.

Thus, the whole of the Renaissance Literature portrays women to be second rate creatures and does not provide any space to her in the societal roles except from that of the “angel in the household” or “the whore in the market place”.

Shakespeare's Character:
Cleopatra

NOTES

10.3 THE CHARACTER OF CLEOPATRA

Cleopatra is one of the most complex dramatic creations of the greatest playwright William Shakespeare. Cleopatra is so magnificent in her deeds and death in the play that audience and readers often wonders at the creator of the character to feel the depth with which Shakespeare must have thought and felt about her. In the play itself, Enobarbus, who plays the role of a choric character in *Antony and Cleopatra* and at the same time, is presented to be a shrewd judge of character in the play mentions “the infinite variety” of Cleopatra’s nature. It is this “infinite variety” which makes Cleopatra’s character so memorable not only in the whole of the Shakespearean canon, but also in the whole of European literature.

Cleopatra’s nature throughout the play *Antony and Cleopatra* is so varied that it is almost impossible to bring her into one umbrella and term her in a singular way. It is her myriad ways which is one the reasons of her charms apart from her beauty. She has her mental accomplishments, her unequalled grace, her woman’s wit and woman’s wiles, her irresistible allurements, her irregular grandeur as well as her bursts of ungovernable temper, her vivacity, her imagination, her petulant caprice, her fickleness as well as falsehood, her tenderness and her truth, her susceptibility to flattery, her magnificent spirit, her royal pride and at the same time the gorgeous eastern colouring. All these contradictory things are being put together by William Shakespeare in the character of Cleopatra which makes her one of the most interesting character studies in the whole of the Shakespearean canon.

From the beginning of the play it was noticed that Cleopatra’s moods and caprices change with the quickness of lightning as she is a lady who had to keep her empire intact with her charm against the grand alliance of the Romans. When the play begins, we see her playing the part of a sweetheart tenderly asking her lover (Antony) the limits of his love for her –

Cleopatra: I'll set a bourn how far to be beloved.

Antony: Then must thou needs find out new heavens, new earth.

Cleopatra evokes in Antony a feeling resembling the pure passion of love. It is to be remembered here that William Shakespeare really keeps it in dark whether Cleopatra is really in love with Antony or is it that to save her kingdom she is playing the role of being in love with Antony.

The messengers from Rome arrive, and she turns their arrival into an opportunity for banter. She suggests to Antony that perhaps they have brought a

NOTES

mandate from Caesar, or from his terrible wife Fulvia of whom as a henpecked husband he stands in slavish awe—

*"Fulvia perchance is angry; or, who knows
If the scarce-bearded Caesar have not sent
His powerful mandate to you, "Do this, or this;
Take in that kingdom, enfranchise that;
Perform't or else we damn thee."*

Antony is irritated and yet finds a strange fascination in her banter—

*"Fie, wrangling queen!
Whom everything becomes, to chide, to laugh,
To weep; whose every passion fully strives
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired!"*

She typifies every mood, and, in every mood, she is equally fascinating, the play is interspersed with varying moods and caprices of this woman of 'infinite variety'. She makes an eager search for Antony, but withdraws when she meets him—

"We will not look upon him; go, with us."

When Antony comes, and she derives from his looks that he is about to leave Egypt, she pretends to swoon. Then she plays the part of a beloved betrayed by a false lover. When he breaks to her the news of Fulvia's death, she refuses to believe him—

*"Though age from folly could not give me freedom,
It does from childishness, can Fulvia die?"*

But when he assures her that he is in earnest, her gibes are turned upon him for the calmness with which he bears the news of his wife's death. How can she expect love and loyalty from a man who is so callous and unfeeling? It is not his duty to shed tears in memory of his departed wife, even if he did not love her? He can at least assume a virtue though he is not—

*"O most false love!
Where be the sacred vials thou shouldst fill
With sorrowful water? Now, I see, I see,
In Fulvia's death, how mine received shall be."*

When her taunts lash Antony to wrath she immediately softens her gibe with a subtle flattery of Antony—

*"Look, prithee, Charmain
How this Herculean Roman does become
The carriage of this chafe."*

And then her mood changes to tenderest regrets and fond farewells, as she acknowledges the necessity of his leaving for Rome immediately –

*“Your honour calls you hence;
Therefore be deaf to my unpitied folly,
And all the gods go with you! Upon your sword
Sit laurel victory! And sweet success
Be strew’d before your feet!”*

In the absence of Antony, Cleopatra plays a lovelorn lass, who is constantly thinking of her lover. She would ‘sleep out this great gap of time mu Antony is away.’ She asks Charmian if she loved Caesar as deeply as she loves Antony; and when Charmian repeats the tender words she used to say of Caesar, she replies –

*“My salad days,
When I was green in judgement: cold in blood,
To say as I said them.”*

The news from Rome that Antony is married to Octavia shows Cleopatra in an entirely different mood. Unable to bear the humiliation of a rival being preferred to her she flies into an uncontrollable rage, strikes the poor messenger to the ground, hales him up and down by the hair, and draws a knife to kill him. But she quickly recovers herself and demands to have the hateful truth repeated. Soon she burns with the curiosity to know more about her rival, and is eager to cross-examine the messenger about her. When the messenger describes her in detail, she derives some consolation from the thought that she does not possess a single quality to attract Antony, who, therefore, will return to her.

Cleopatra is well adept in the art of dealing with men. By the witchery of her charm, she has made three mighty Roman generals yield to her fascination. Her hold over Antony is not her due to her physical charm so much, as to her varied tricks and the brilliancy of her wit. She is painfully conscious of the fact that she has lost the freshness and beauty of her early youth, that she is “with Pheobus” amorous pinches black and wrinkled deep in time.” But she knows the art of retaining her hold on those who have once fallen a victim to her charm. Antony having once got entangled into her meshes cannot escape from them, do what he may. When Antony is busy with his messengers, she is vexed at his absence from her side, and asks her servants to go and see where he is and what he is doing. She particularly instructs them to inform Antony that she is in a mood just the opposite of his –

*“See where he is, who’s with him, what he does:
I did not send you: if you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth report
That I am sudden sick.”*

Shakespeare’s Character:
Cleopatra

NOTES

NOTES

When her attendant points out that she is not employing the right methods to retain her hold on Antony, and suggests that she should “in ach thing give him way, cross him in nothing”, Cleopatra replies – “Thou teachest like a fool; the way to lose him.” The mistress knows better than her servants how to retain her hold on men. In his description of Cleopatra, Enobarbus particularly mentions her wonderful power to retain her hold on men, the power which does not depend only on her physical charm –

“Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale

Her infinite variety: other women cloy

The appetites they feed: but she makes hungry

Where most she satisfies.”

Octavius is the only Roman who is not influenced by her charm. But if in her life Cleopatra fails to fascinate him, she does not make him notice her compelling charm after her death –

“But she looks like sleep

As she would catch another Antony

In her strong toil of grace.”

Cleopatra's death sentence is one of the greatest triumphs of Shakespeare's dramatic art. Cleopatra, the artful, ensnaring witch, the voluptuous royal harlot, the cause of the ruin of Antony and his empire, at once rises to tragic dignity and grows into a high stature to which she never before rises in the play. She has “immoral longings” in her, and by her heroic death, she claims the honour of being called Antony's wife –

Husband I come:

Now to that name my courage prove my little.

She experiences a new purity in her, is “fire and air” and gives her other elements to baser life. And yet this queen who lived in wealth and luxury throughout her life, would not die but in her royal robes and crown. She lived a magnificent life and dies a magnificent death.

Check Your Progress

1. Who are the triple pillars in *Antony and Cleopatra*?
2. What are Egyptian fetters?
3. Why did Shakespeare present Alexandria as a feminine space?
4. What is the significance of Cleopatra's suicide note?

10.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

Shakespeare's Character:
Cleopatra

1. The triple pillars are Octavius Caesar, Antony and Lepidus who are pursuing the extravaganza of the hegemony of the Roman Empire.
2. What Antony terms as "Egyptian fetters" is nothing but the passion of his heart which Romans were successfully neglecting for ages.
3. Shakespeare deliberately presented Alexandria to be a feminine space as the colonizer thinks the colonized to be feminine in nature, where the personal passion rules more than the political prowess.
4. In *Cleopatra's* suicide is the heroic defiance of the Roman male authority which is a subversive statement that the play *Antony and Cleopatra* provides.

NOTES

10.5 SUMMARY

- Women had a limited role in the Elizabethan society and therefore even in Elizabethan plays we figure out women are given limited space as William Shakespeare was writing for the mass and the beliefs of the mass is something that he had to cater to.
- Cleopatra is one such character in the play *Antony and Cleopatra* whom the readers cannot forget even after four hundred years of its creation.
- If literature is all about the reconciliation of opposites, then in William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the binary opposition of Caesar and Cleopatra finds reconciliation in Antony's death.
- The triple pillars are Octavius Caesar, Antony and Lepidus who are pursuing the extravaganza of the hegemony of the Roman Empire.
- From time immemorial, the Romans are associated with a masculine military ideal where the personal pleasure of no importance when compared to the splendor of the Roman Empire.
- The Romans, in their fight between the personal and the political, always emphasized the political.
- What Antony terms as "Egyptian fetters" is nothing but the passion of his heart which Romans were successfully neglecting for ages.
- But as soon as Antony is introduced to the mysticism of 'eastern enchantment', we find, his head losing to his heart. Throughout the play, Antony makes a to and fro movement between Egypt and Rome, both literally and symbolically.

NOTES

- But his Roman ideal makes him unsuccessful to reconcile pragmatism and passion the play becomes a quest for identity for Antony as he repeatedly tries to affirm his Roman blood throughout the play.
- It is difficult for the colonizer Antony to accept that his encounter with the colonized had given birth to a “hybridity” in his identity.
- Shakespeare deliberately presented Alexandria to be a feminine space as the colonizer thinks the colonized to be feminine in nature, where the personal passion rules more than the political prowess.
- For Antony, it is difficult to accept that femininity has invaded his being, as it will be supposedly stooping down on the part of the colonizer.
- the play *Antony and Cleopatra* is a juxtaposition of many binary opposites – passion/politics, Egypt/Rome, feminine/masculine, Cleopatra/Caesar.
- The symbolic world of the male adult needs these binary oppositions to perpetuate their domination over the feminine, colonized, peripheral assertions.
- But these peripheral assertions of Cleopatra in her suicide defies the symbolic order of the male to show the vanity of the Roman ideal and to deconstruct the notion that the personal and the political are two spheres of life.
- In this sense, Cleopatra’s defiance of Caesar can be seen as a feminist resistance to phallo-centricism.
- Shakespeare’s project in writing *Antony and Cleopatra* seems to be a radical ‘dispersal of identity’ and the consequent loss of coherence which will destabilize the European male’s notion of superiority.
- If one talks about Elizabethan literature, then one can notice that there is no literature written by women existing today.
- The only document that exists which is written by a woman is by Jane Anger. It’s a pamphlet called *Her Protection for Women*, which was in some ways a reaction against the Puritans writing against Women.
- The Elizabethan people also thought that the women are transgressive in nature. Therefore, they compared women with theatre.
- In the sonnets written in Petrarchan love tradition, the women were portrayed to be far from the poet lover and he decided that he can never express his love though the way he tries to portray the sensual beauty of the beloved makes us feel that the lover unconsciously is using his “male gaze” in viewing the beloved.
- In the Metaphysical Love Poetry, the poets like John Donne and Andrew Marvell portray the beloved as the objects – whom the poets want to enjoy in sensual terms.

- The women are not given any voice and the silence of the women is always treated as affirmation.
- Similarly, in The Elizabethan Drama, the women are not given any voice. In Shakespearean Comedies the women protagonists are given a prominent voice – but those voices are usually outside the parameters of the structured society.
- But in tragedies, the women are not given any space.
- In Macbeth, Shakespeare starts the play showing Lady Macbeth to be much stronger character than Macbeth, but ultimately, he is forced to show that Lady Macbeth could not stand up to the crime that she has committed with Macbeth and we see the pathetic situation of lady Macbeth in the sleep walking scene.
- Thus, the whole of the Renaissance Literature portrays women to be second rate creatures and does not provide any space to her in the societal roles except from that of the “angel in the household” or “the whore in the market place”.
- Cleopatra is one of the most complex dramatic creations of the greatest playwright William Shakespeare.
- Cleopatra is so magnificent in her deeds and death in the play that audience and readers often wonders at the creator of the character to feel the depth with which Shakespeare must have thought and felt about her.
- Cleopatra's nature throughout the play *Antony and Cleopatra* is so varied that it is almost impossible to bring her into one umbrella and term her in a singular way. It is her myriad ways which is one the reasons of her charms apart from her beauty.
- Cleopatra evokes in Antony a feeling resembling the pure passion of love. It is to be remembered here that William Shakespeare really keeps it in dark whether Cleopatra is really in love with Antony or is it that to save her kingdom she is playing the role of being in love with Antony.
- Cleopatra's death sentence is one of the greatest triumphs of Shakespeare's dramatic art.
- Cleopatra, the artful, ensnaring witch, the voluptuous royal harlot, the cause of the ruin of Antony and his empire, at once rises to tragic dignity and grows into a high stature to which she never before rises in the play.

NOTES

10.6 KEY WORDS

- **Reconciliation:** It is a situation in which two people or groups of people become friendly again after they have argued.
- **Mandate:** It is an official order or commission to do something.

NOTES

- **Pragmatism:** It is an approach that evaluates theories or beliefs in terms of the success of their practical application.
- **Metaphysical:** Something relating to the part of philosophy that is about understanding existence and knowledge.

10.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Give a brief background to the play *Antony and Cleopatra*.
2. Why did Shakespeare deliberately present Alexandria to be a feminine space? Elaborate and substantiate your answer with examples from the play.
3. "The play *Antony and Cleopatra* is a juxtaposition of many binary opposites". Critically comment.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically discuss the character of Cleopatra in the light of the play *Antony and Cleopatra*.
2. Enobarbus talks about "infinite variety" of Cleopatra. Do you agree with Enobarbus' statement? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Critically examine the status of women during Elizabethan times.

10.8 FURTHER READINGS

- Barroll, J. Leeds. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Genre, Tradition, and Change in Antony and Cleopatra*. Washington, D.C.: Folger Books, 1984.
- Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998.
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*Shakespeare's Character:
Cleopatra*

NOTES

NOTES

UNIT 11 SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTER: ENOBARBUS

Structure

- 11.0 Introduction
- 11.1 Objectives
- 11.2 Character Study of Enobarbus
- 11.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 11.4 Summary
- 11.5 Key Words
- 11.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 11.7 Further Readings

11.0 INTRODUCTION

Enobarbus is a choric character in William Shakespeare's tragic play *Antony and Cleopatra*. Apparently, he is not a significant character in the play in terms of being the protagonist of the play, but he serves an important role as a judge of the characters in the play. He not only judges Antony properly but also makes right statements about Cleopatra. From that point of view, he can be said to be one of the most important characters of the play. Though he may be of no help in taking the action of the play forward in the way the protagonists of a play do, but he serves the important role in terms of providing the just statements about characters which makes the audience and the readers come up with right views about the characters and also helps them in judging the play.

In this unit, you will study the character of Enobarbus in detail.

11.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the character of Enobarbus from the play *Antony and Cleopatra*
- Explain Enobarbus' role as a choric character in the play

11.2 CHARACTER STUDY OF ENOBARBUS

Enobarbus is one of the most significant secondary characters in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Like Mark Antony he is a soldier, the most intelligent in Antony's service. He is also the closest male friend of Antony. His observations of people and on the events are particularly acute, even though they are always given in an ironic and sometimes cynical manner. Loyalty to Antony is his personal mark of

distinction. He values his loyalty very highly. In the name of this loyalty he looks after Antony's affairs and is rather critical of Antony being under the influence of Cleopatra.

*Shakespeare's Character:
Enobarbus*

At the same time, it should be kept in mind that Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra* does almost the same job in the play as it was done by Chorus in Greek drama. Similar to chorus, he is an impartial judge of action and character. He is endowed with a lot of common sense and practical wisdom and is clear-sighted enough to see things in their right perspective. He is a shrewd judge of character. That is why the judgments he passes on the protagonists of and on are sound and convincing. G. B. Harrison calls Enobarbus as "another of the commentator characters, reincarnations of the old chorus, which Shakespeare invented to give his own reflections as a chorus to the action, from time to time he voices that commonsense wisdom which is usually forgotten in the visionary brilliance." If we look at his function in the play, we find that he has some close affinity with Jacques in *As You Like It*, Fool in *King Lear* and Horatio in *Hamlet*. It can be said that like these other Shakespearean characters he works and acts as an objective commentator.

Of all the characters in the play, he understands Cleopatra best. He understands well the 'infinite variety' of her nature, her pomp and power. He gives a marvelously picturesque account of Cleopatra's journey by boat to meet Antony. From the mouth of any other character that account would appear exaggerated. But when practical, matter-of-fact Enobarbus gives that description, it sounds literal truth. How correctly he explains the cause of Cleopatra's power over men—

*"Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale
Her infinite variety; other women cloy
The appetites they feed; but she makes hungry
Where most she satisfies: for vilest things
Become themselves in her; that holy priests
Bless her when she is riggish."*

But while he regards Cleopatra as "a wonderful piece of work", is conscious of her "infinite variety" and pomp and splendour, he also understands theatrical aspect of her nature. Hence, he says to Antony – "We cannot all her winds and waters, sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report."

His pieces of advice to Cleopatra and Antony are sound and practical. When Cleopatra insists on her going to the battle of Actium as the head of her state, he frankly tells her—

*"Your presence needs must puzzle Antony:
Take from his heart, take from his brain
From 's time
What should then be spared."*

NOTES

NOTES

And the subsequent events prove how correct his opinion is. He rightly perceives “a diminution in our captain’s brain” after Actium. For:

“I see men’s judgements are

A parcel of their fortunes; and things outward

Do draw the inward quality after them

To suffer all alike.”

When Antony begins to act like a fool after Actium, he decides to “seek some way to leave him” for

“The loyalty will held to fools does make

Our faith more folly.

But in spite of all his commonsense and practical wisdom, Enobarbus fails to notice one thing in human nature, namely the spiritual element in it. He fails to understand that man is not entirely of this earth, earthly and that there is also hidden a divine spark in his nature. He deserts Antony because he is disgusted with his folly. But he stands dumb founded when the divine spark in Antony’s nature expresses itself in terms of the unique generosity extended to a deserter. But Enobarbus cannot be completely brushed aside on this count as he is primarily a commentator and an observer and not a participant in the actual drama. He is what Granville Barker calls him, “a type very useful to the dramatist lacking a chorus.”

Check Your Progress

1. Who is Enobarbus?
2. What is Enobarbus’ function in the play?
3. What is the one thing that Enobarbus fails to understand?

11.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Enobarbus is one of the most significant secondary characters in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Like Mark Antony, he is a soldier, the most intelligent in Antony’s service.
2. It can be said that like other Shakespearean characters, Enobarbus works and acts as an objective commentator.
3. Enobarbus fails to notice one thing in human nature, namely the spiritual element in it. He fails to understand that man is not entirely of this earth, earthly and that there is also hidden a divine spark in his nature.

11.4 SUMMARY

- Enobarbus is a choric character in William Shakespeare's tragic play *Antony and Cleopatra*. He is one of the most significant secondary characters in the play.
- Like Mark Antony he is a soldier, the most intelligent in Antony's service. He is also the closest male friend of Antony.
- Though he may be of no help in taking the action of the play forward in the way the protagonists of a play do, but he serves the important role in terms of providing the just statements about characters which makes the audience and the readers come up with right views about the characters and also helps them in judging the play.
- He is endowed with a lot of common sense and practical wisdom and is clear-sighted enough to see things in their right perspective. He is a shrewd judge of character.
- Of all the characters in the play, he understands Cleopatra best. He understands well the 'infinite variety' of her nature, her pomp and power.
- But while he regards Cleopatra as "a wonderful piece of work", is conscious of her "infinite variety" and pomp and splendour, he also understands theatrical aspect of her nature.
- But in spite of all his commonsense and practical wisdom, Enobarbus fails to notice one thing in human nature, namely the spiritual element in it.

NOTES

11.5 KEY WORDS

- **Choric:** It means belonging to, spoken by, or resembling a chorus in drama or recitation.
- **Spiritual:** It means something relating to or affecting the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things.
- **Protagonist:** It is the leading character or one of the major characters in a play, film, novel, etc.

11.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a critical note on the character of Enobarbus from the play *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Long-Answer Questions

NOTES

1. Do you agree that Enobarbus does the role of a choric character in the play *Antony and Cleopatra*? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Critically comment on Enobarbus' estimation on the character of Cleopatra in the play *Antony and Cleopatra*.

11.7 FURTHER READINGS

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BLOCK - IV

PLAYS II

Hamlet

UNIT 12 *HAMLET*

NOTES

Structure

- 12.0 Introduction
- 12.1 Objectives
- 12.2 *Hamlet* as a Tragedy
 - 12.2.1 *Hamlet* as a Revenge Tragedy
 - 12.2.2 Soliloquies in *Hamlet*
- 12.3 Theatre as a Theme in *Hamlet*
 - 12.3.1 Hamlet as a Tragic Hero
- 12.4 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 12.5 Summary
- 12.6 Key Words
- 12.7 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 12.8 Further Readings

12.0 INTRODUCTION

Hamlet, one of the four great tragedies of Shakespeare, has so fascinated successive generations of readers and theatre goers that it has provoked more discussion, more performances and more scholarship than any other play in the history of drama. It stands at the very centre of Shakespeare's dramatic career, on the one hand concluding a decade that had seen the composition of the mature comedies and the English history plays and on the other preceding the sequence of the great tragedies.

The full title of the play *The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, was meant to be self-explanatory. Tragedies deal with the death of a noble hero and *Hamlet* as Prince of Denmark had all the necessary qualities of a tragic hero. He was a good, brave, intelligent scholar and courtier, and the play is the story of his search for both justice and revenge.

It is always difficult to determine the date of composition of Shakespeare's plays and there is no agreement among scholars regarding the dates of any of his plays. However, on the basis of some evidence, it is generally believed that *Hamlet* was written in 1601. A list of Shakespeare's plays published in 1598 does not mention *Hamlet* but as the play has always been popular, it seems unlikely that it would have been omitted. References within the play to topical events suggest that it could not have been written earlier than 1601.

Hamlet, like the other plays of Shakespeare, is based on more than one source. In writing his plays, Shakespeare frequently made use of contemporary

NOTES

literature and this is certainly true of *Hamlet*. He probably based *Hamlet* on a play of the same name which is no longer in existence. Thomas Nashe referred to a revenge tragedy in 1589 in his introduction to Robert Greene's *Menaphon*. This earlier play was possibly by Thomas Kyd and references to it suggest that its theme and action were similar to Shakespeare's.

A story similar to that of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* is to be found in the folk literatures of several European countries but it first appeared in written form in the works of the Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus in 1514. Saxo Grammaticus tells the story of Amleth in which a Danish king is murdered by his brother. The brother then usurps the throne and marries his dead king's wife, Gerutha. Gerutha's son, Amleth, plans to take revenge on his uncle and in the course of his campaign, he pretends to be mad. Amleth kills a courtier who spies on him and is sent to England. He manages to escape and returns to Denmark and kills his uncle.

It is clear that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has much in common with Saxo Grammaticus's narrative but the Danish historian's work was not translated into English until 1608 and so Shakespeare could not have borrowed directly from him. The *Hamlet* story had, however, been translated into French and published in 1570. It thus appears that Shakespeare either used the French version or the lost revenge tragedy by Kyd as the basis of his play. But from wherever he drew his inspiration for *Hamlet*, it is undeniably true that as with all his writings, Shakespeare absorbed his source materials and created a play which refined and transformed them.

12.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Assess *Hamlet* as a tragedy
 - Explain the use of soliloquies in *Hamlet*
 - Analyze the theme of theatre in the play *Hamlet*
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12.2 HAMLET AS A TRAGEDY

It is perhaps impossible to discuss tragedy without mentioning Aristotle who carefully studied the practice of contemporary Greek tragic dramatists and then noted his observations down with a mathematical exactness and precision. His contribution to the theory of drama is so great that he has generally been taken to be a law-giver than a mere observer of what was happening around him. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as:

‘The imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a

narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.'

Hamlet

He further defines the tragic hero and observes:

'A tragedy deals with a man of a noble and high rank, pre-eminently good, who falls and meets his tragic doom because of certain inherent flaw in his character. The tragic hero is generally a man of historical, semi-historical or mythological importance so that with his fortunes are connected the fortunes of a whole people or nation. By exhibiting the downfall of such a hero, the tragic dramatist seeks to arouse the emotions of pity and fear and thereby affect Catharsis.'

In the classical tragedies, fate or destiny plays a very important part. They show a man of high and noble birth who comes under the wrath of the gods and falls from good fortune and meets his tragic doom. A latent flaw (Hamartia) in the character of the tragic hero forces him to commit an act of misjudgment and the tragic wheel is set into motion. It is difficult to determine as to what plays a more important role in the classical tragedies – the character of the tragic hero or Fate.

Shakespeare was too great an artist to be bound by the Aristotelian notions of tragedy or tragic hero. Although in his tragedies he observes most of the Aristotelian dictums, he flouts the conventions of the classical tragedies as and when necessary to suit his genius and artistic temperament.

The four great tragedies, namely *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* are Shakespeare's 'tour de force' and they hold a mirror to life's joys and fears. The theme of a Shakespearean tragedy is the struggle between good and evil resulting in serious disturbances, sorrows, sufferings and death. He paints on the horrors and terrors of life in their ghastly forms without justifying their ways. Envy, pride and ingratitude cease to be mere discords in a harmony and take appalling shapes. Fate is no longer a capricious goddess playing harmless freaks with lovers but something blind and terrible.

The Shakespearean tragic hero is a man of great social and historical importance and belongs to a very noble and respectable family. Othello is a great military general; Macbeth is the Thane of Glamis, next in importance to the king; Lear is the king and *Hamlet* is the Prince of Denmark. All these heroes have an Achilles' heel or what Aristotle calls 'Hamartia'. So, Othello is uncontrollably jealous; Macbeth is over-ambitious; Lear is over-credulous and *Hamlet* thinks too precisely on events at a time when he has to act. *Hamlet* is, in fact, one of the most complex of Shakespeare's tragic heroes and it is not easy to pinpoint one specific flaw which brought about his untimely death. He was a thinker involved in a dilemma which could only be resolved by a man of action. His inability to act swiftly and decisively in connection with his father's murder brought havoc to the Danish court. The distinguishing feature in Shakespeare's conception of the tragic hero is his representation of the effect of the tragic flaw which nails him in his coffin. Hence, all his tragic heroes fall because of their inherent weakness and they exemplify Heraclitus's dictum that character is destiny.

NOTES

NOTES

The role of fate and the supernatural is very important in a tragedy. These tragic heroes are confronted with forces that lie beyond them and work on their tragic flaws to take them closer to their downfall. We cannot help but agree with Gloucester (in *King Lear*):

As flies to wanton boys are we to gods

They kill us for their sport.

So, it is fate which seals Othello's chances of happiness when Desdemona accidentally drops her handkerchief before Iago who is in need of it. Whether it is the witches who spur Macbeth into action or the ghost in *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* or the soothsayer in *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar*, it is a supernatural element which conspires against human fortunes. It is the ghost which prompts *Hamlet* to act. The ghost demands revenge for his father's murder but *Hamlet* struggles against his own finiteness. He is a man of amiable qualities, intellectually and emotionally honest, religious minded with a sensitive conscience. His melancholy and cynicism lead him to brood over the subject of suicide. He meets his tragic doom precisely because he is over thoughtful and keeps pondering over trivial things. *Hamlet* could have avoided the tragedy had he acted on the spur of the moment. In fact, the tragedy of *Hamlet* would not have occurred if we had Othello in place of the Prince of Denmark in the play. Hence, in a Shakespearean tragedy, the supernatural element plays an important role but ultimately it is the protagonist's own actions that bring about his tragic fall.

Conflict is the most important part of Shakespearean tragedy—conflict between the outer and the inner world and within the inner world itself. The external conflict is between the hero and the villain, between Macbeth and Banquo, Othello and Iago or *Hamlet* and Claudius but what is more important is the inner conflict within Macbeth, Othello or *Hamlet*. This conflict is forever epitomized by *Hamlet* in the famous soliloquy:

To be, or not to be: that is the question:

Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,

Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,

And by opposing end them?

To murder Duncan or not, to kill Desdemona or not, to murder Claudius or not – these are the conflicting questions that Macbeth, Othello or Hamlet have to decide upon. And it is the intensity of these conflicting questions that determines the depth of Shakespearean tragedy.

Shakespearean tragedy does have a cathartic effect in the audience. Our emotions of pity and fear are aroused when we see Macbeth, Othello, King Lear and Hamlet caught in the snares of fate, circumstances and their own tragic flaws. When each one of them dies we do think that they did not deserve this punishment. The Shakespearean tragic heroes are great but become greater in moments of

their death. This brings us to the question whether Shakespeare believes in poetic justice. And the answer seems to be no because Shakespeare holds the mirror up to nature and nature hardly offers examples of poetic justice. This would explain the undeserved sufferings of King Lear, Desdemona and Ophelia.

Shakespeare seeks to impress upon our minds that Man, in spite of his faults and innumerable weakness is, after all, great. Though Johnson infamously proclaimed that Shakespeare seemed to write without any moral purpose, *Hamlet* is a play in which a moral is implicit. In this connection, Harold Jenkins says:

‘.....it (*Hamlet*) commends a man who, after questioning the meaning of creation, comes to accept a design in it beyond our comprehending, and who therefore, after seeking to withdraw from life through an abhorrence of all that is ugly and vicious in it, is finally – though tragically not until death approaches – content to live life as it is, able to acknowledge, in word and deed, “The readiness is all”.’

Hamlet is thus a play which responds to the definitions of an Aristotelian tragedy while retaining some typically Shakespearean elements.

12.2.1 *Hamlet* as a Revenge Tragedy

Hamlet belongs to a genre of plays often called Revenge ‘Tragedies’. They were very popular in Elizabethan England. In fact, revenge was an important part of the plot structure of many Renaissance tragedies. Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* published perhaps in 1589 was the first Elizabethan play with revenge as the central theme and established the tradition of revenge plays and set the standard elements in such plays – the ghost, intrigue, betrayal, a hesitant, unsure hero, and his inaction chiefly based on moral scruple, madness and melancholy and his final alienation from the audience’s sympathy. Influenced by Seneca and Machiavelli, many Elizabethan dramatists attempted to write revenge tragedies. Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* were highly popular plays written in this genre. Revenge as a theme and an integral element of the plot is found in many of Shakespeare’s plays – *Richard II*, *The Tempest*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar* and *Richard III*. But it is *Hamlet* which embodies Shakespeare’s most significant handling of the revenge theme.

The typical structure of the revenge play has five parts. The first part is the ‘exposition’ usually by a ghost. Exposition is followed by ‘anticipation’ in which an elaborate plan for carrying out the revenge is prepared. A central and most dramatic part of the structure of the revenge play is the ‘confrontation’ in which the avenger and the intended victim come face to face, though some time the confrontation takes a different form as it does in *Hamlet* in the prayer scene. ‘Delay’ is a major structural device which allows the avenger to deliberately keep postponing taking action on account of moral scruples, a feeling of inadequacy regarding the intended task or for other reasons. The ‘fulfilment’ or ‘completion’ of revenge takes the form normally in which both the victim and the avenger are destroyed along with many other innocents.

NOTES

NOTES

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* follows the tradition of the revenge play. The revenge motive is very strong in the play and it would be obvious from the fact that *Hamlet* does not kill his uncle while the latter is praying. *Hamlet* follows the set pattern of the Elizabethan revenge tragedy as far as the general scheme of the play is concerned. The revenge motive, the supernatural element, the ghost, madness and all other such things in *Hamlet* have obviously been derived from the revenge play. That Shakespeare has been able to do away with crudeness and physical horrors is a compliment to his art. The ghost of *Hamlet* is much more than a ghost and becomes a symbol of the unseen power that works through us.

Hamlet has not one but four revenge plots. Fortinbras wants to take revenge on Denmark for the losses sustained by his father in a duel with Hamlet's father. His motives are openly expressed and his actions honourable, so he manages to vindicate his father and to win back much more than his father had lost. Laertes seeks to avenge the death of his father and the insanity and the subsequent death of Ophelia. Initially, he acts with the same sort of openness as Fortinbras, but he allows himself to be persuaded to get involved in a dishonest duel. He eventually succeeds in punishing the murderer of his father but only at the cost of his own life. Like Fortinbras and Laertes, Hamlet has lost a father and he has also been hurt by the over-hasty marriage between his mother and his uncle. Unlike Fortinbras and Laertes, however, Hamlet feels he cannot act without having complete proof of Claudius's guilt. His scruples cause him a great deal of self-criticism:

*Why, what an ass am I! This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
And fall a-cursing, like a very drab,*

Yet when Hamlet finally decides to take revenge, he wants to punish those who have offended him not only in this world but also in the next. Hamlet refuses to kill Claudius when he finds him praying. To kill his body and perhaps send his soul to heaven would not be sufficient punishment. Hamlet feels he must kill Claudius:

*When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th'incestuous pleasure of his bed;
At gaming, swearing; or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in't –
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and black
As hell, whereto it goes.*

Hamlet shows a similar desire for eternal vengeance when he sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death in England, with the strict instructions that they be:

*put to sudden death,
Not shriving-time allowed.*

And there is yet another son who vows revenge in *Hamlet*: Pyrrhus slaughters Priam, whose son had killed Pyrrhus's father.

Hamlet opens with the appearance of the ghost before the royal guards who refuses to speak to them or Horatio. But he speaks to Hamlet:

*List, list, O list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love....
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder....
Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange and unnatural...
O, horrible! O, horrible! Most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee bear it not,
Let not the royal bed of Denmark beli.
Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me.*

Hamlet is horrified to learn that the murderer is Claudius who has not only usurped the throne but has also committed incest by marrying Gertrude, the Queen. He is forced to take revenge as an obligation to his dead father but many weeks pass and no action is taken. Hamlet does not relish the role of an avenger and wants to ascertain the truth before he finally acts. In order to find out the truth, he feigns madness which confounds his enemies but brings him no closer to the certainty of truth. He vacillates between his belief that the ghost was actually his father's spirit and had a just cause to approach his son, and his apprehension that it was an evil spirit and meant to cause harm.

Even though *Hamlet* is a revenge play, the focus of the play is on the higher principles of life and living. With his genius, Shakespeare was able to experiment with the conventions of revenge plays. He makes Hamlet a three dimensional figure which distinguishes him from the protagonist of a typical revenge play. *Hamlet* values personal relationships and is as much shocked by his father's death as he is by his mother's hurried marriage to his uncle. He cannot accept Ophelia siding with her father. Polonius's lack of loyalty to the old King Hamlet, his friends' attempt to allow themselves to be used by the King for his own nefarious purposes are acts which violate the social laws, moral order and religious sanctity. The crudity of violence is replaced here by intellectual reflection and introspection. In fact, Hamlet's soliloquies and the amount of objective self-analysis that they contain remove the play far away from an Elizabethan revenge tragedy. Hamlet's procrastination and delay, though elements of a revenge play, are transformed into

NOTES

a remarkable poetic stuff. He ponders over many significant issues related to human life which make him a philosopher. Even his madness is entirely different from that of Hieronimo.

NOTES

Despite the fact that *Hamlet* has been read through centuries as a play written in the Elizabethan tradition of revenge plays, it manages to rise above these readings and interpretations just as Shakespeare himself was able to transcend the limitations of his age. It is, in a sense, a play about revenge rather than a revenge play. Goggin rightly says that '*Hamlet* is not to be regarded as a tragedy of revenge, but as the tragedy of a human soul.' Hamlet assumes a symbolic significance and becomes almost an archetypal character. And it is in this sense a tragedy of a human soul and not merely a revenge play. As Francis Bacon maintains:

'This is certain, that a man that studies the revenge keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well. Public revenges for the most part are fortunate, as that for the death of Caesar. But in private revenges it is not so. Nay rather, vindictive persons live the life of witches, who, as they are mischievous, so end they unfortunate.'

12.2.2 Soliloquies in *Hamlet*

Critics are undivided in their opinion regarding the use of soliloquies in drama. It has been suggested that the soliloquies tend to disrupt 'the willing suspension of disbelief' which Coleridge viewed as necessary for the success of a play. Whether they are prepared to accept the soliloquy as a valid dramatic device or not, the fact is that Shakespeare makes a simply remarkable use of the soliloquies and if we were to remove the soliloquies from his tragedies, they would be left poorer and lose half their charm.

In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare makes a splendid use of this dramatic device and the soliloquies spoken by Hamlet unravel and unlock the heart of the protagonist. The soliloquies in general are meant to serve two dramatic purposes: first, to inform the audience about the incidents which either have not been presented on the stage or will not be presented and secondly, to present an analysis of the inner mind of the speaker. Nearly all the soliloquies in *Hamlet* serve the purpose of revealing the inner mind of Hamlet. They throw a vivid light on the character of Hamlet, his reflective habit and hyper-sensitive nature. If we remove the soliloquies from *Hamlet*, we would be depriving the play of a great deal of poetry and we would not be able to get a keen insight into the character of Hamlet. The soliloquies in the play are neither superfluous nor isolated. They are inter-connected and intimately linked with one another. They lay bare the conflict going on in the heart and mind of Hamlet.

There are seven soliloquies spoken by Hamlet in the play and a few of them refer to the various reasons for the delay in taking revenge on the part of Hamlet. If these soliloquies are removed from the play, the problem of delay would be automatically solved. But then we would not be able to understand the most important and most precious aspect of Hamlet's character.

The first soliloquy in the play is important for a clear understanding of the character of Hamlet:

*O, that this too too solid flesh would melt
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely. That it should come to this!
But two months dead: nay, not so much, not two:
So excellent a king; that was, to this,
Hyperion to a satyr; so loving to my mother
That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly. Heaven and earth!
Must I remember? why, she would hang on him,
As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it fed on: and yet, within a month –*

This soliloquy shows the effect of intense melancholy on the mind of Hamlet. He is shocked to note the incestuous and hasty marriage of his mother. As Professor Schucking comments, 'He is a man of high moral ideals; for if he had not a profound faith in mankind combined with the strongest impulse towards what is good he could never have been so greatly disillusioned.' Moreover, his veneration for his father commands our sympathy. But other less pleasing qualities are apparent in him too. Others of an idealistic temperament similar to his might well in seeking the cause of their disillusionment may come to realize the fact that such as themselves are included in all mankind. But not so Hamlet. In the protest there is a surprising amount of denunciation. He not only looks at things crudely and relentlessly, but he constantly pronounces judgments on them ('Frailty, thy name is woman.'). Although to a certain extent he is merely torturing himself, for instance, in regarding his own mother as a lascivious wanton – his invective against her is nevertheless unmerciful. It is clear that Hamlet, however deeply he may suffer, is not the kind to bear a great misfortune silently and with resignation.

The second soliloquy in the play is the first important soliloquy introducing the revenge motive. Spoken by Hamlet after his meeting with the ghost, this soliloquy is an expression of the rude shock that Hamlet has sustained. The ghost tells him things that almost paralyze Hamlet's capacity to act:

*O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell? O, fie! Hold, hold, my heart!*

NOTES

NOTES

*And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up.
Remember thee?
Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
In this distracted globe.
Remember thee?
Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there;
And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter.*

The next important soliloquy occurs when Hamlet has just met the players. He reveals his thoughts to the audience. The soliloquy expresses Hamlet's serious doubt as to the validity of the reality of the ghost: an important factor in the delay of the action on the part of Hamlet:

*Oh, what a rogue and peasant slave am I!
Is it not monstrous that this player here,
But in a fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wann'd,
Tears in his eyes –*

And this contrast makes him conscious, painfully conscious of the fact that he has not been able to carry out the revenge as yet. The question of delay on the part of Hamlet has been debated endlessly. One of the reasons is put forward here by Hamlet himself:

*Am I a coward?
.....who calls me villain? Breaks my pate across?*

He asks with all possible earnestness and comes to no definite conclusions. He then decides to lay a trap to catch his uncle's conscience. At the same time, he has a faint doubt about the reality of the ghost:

*The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape.
After debating all this, he comes to one conclusion at least:
I'll have grounds*

*More relatives than this: the play's the thing
Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king.*

Then we come to the famous soliloquy:

*To be, or not to be: that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die: to sleep;
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come...*

This soliloquy can never be over-quoted, though it has been quoted by almost every critic who has anything to say about Hamlet. One of the most profound poetic passages not only in *Hamlet* but also perhaps in the whole range of Shakespearean drama, it gives us an insight into the inner workings of Hamlet's mind, his sense of despair and dejection. Hamlet for a moment thinks of suicide but then drops the idea because he is not sure of the other world from where no traveller returns. This soliloquy shows Hamlet's cynicism, his melancholic frame of mind, his irresolution and partly his conscience or to avoid a controversy, his scrupulous nature.

The next soliloquy that we come across shows Hamlet prepared for the act which he had so long been putting off, he is happy to witness the success of the play:

*Tis now the very witching time of night,
When churchyards yawn and hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world: now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on. Soft! now to my mother.
O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
Let me be cruel, not unnatural:
I will speak daggers to her, but use none;
My tongue and soul in this be hypocrites;
How in my words soever she be shent,
To give them seals never, my soul, consent!*

Hamlet

NOTES

NOTES

In the next scene, we come across possibly the most important soliloquy from the point of view of the delay in the main action in Hamlet –

Now might I do it pat. Now he is a-praying.

And now I'll do 't. And so he goes to heaven.

And so am I revenged.—That would be scanned.

A villain kills my father; and, for that,

I, his sole son, do this same villain send

To heaven.

Oh, this is hire and salary, not revenge.

He took my father grossly, full of bread,

With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May.

And how his audit stands who knows save heaven?

But in our circumstance and course of thought

'Tis heavy with him. And am I then revenged

To take him in the purging of his soul

When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?

No.

Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,

Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,

At game a-swearing, or about some act

That has no relish of salvation in 't—

This soliloquy serves as a substitute for the actual revenge. Hamlet is standing on the threshold of the best opportunity that has come in his way and still he does not make the most of it. He does not kill his uncle, not because he is troubled by his conscience but because he doesn't want his villainous uncle to go to heaven at all. He is preoccupied not with the religious problem of killing a man while he is praying but with the practical problem of sending his victim to hell and not to heaven. Hamlet puts off the revenge not because of ecclesiastical reasons but because of purely practical, utilitarian and Baconian reasons. It is not ethics that troubles him at the present moment – he kills the king unethically when he is entirely defenceless rather than challenging him to a duel. In this soliloquy, Hamlet appears to be a practical man who is not only prepared to take revenge but also to take it with perfect assurance that his victim would lose both the worlds.

In the last soliloquy of the play, Hamlet reproaches himself for unnecessarily delaying the revenge:

I do not know

Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do,'

*Sith I have cause and will and strength and means
To do 't. Examples gross as earth exhort me.
Witness this army of such mass and charge
Led by a delicate and tender prince,
Whose spirit with divine ambition puffed
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is mortal and unsure
To all that fortune, death, and danger dare,
Even for an eggshell.....*

Hamlet

NOTES

The soliloquies in *Hamlet* are intimately connected and have a logical link with each other. They succinctly bring out the turmoil in Hamlet's mind and help us to understand him not only as a tragic hero but an extraordinarily sensitive human being. The soliloquies answer several questions related to Hamlet's delay in taking revenge and the play would cease to exist without them. Moreover, these passages contain perhaps the finest poetry that Shakespeare ever wrote and without them the tragedy of Hamlet would be ineffective and meaningless.

12.3 THEATRE AS A THEME IN *HAMLET*

Shakespeare began his dramatic career as an actor on the London stage and then went on to become the greatest dramatist in the history of English literature. Hence, he was familiar with the nitty-gritty of dramatic art and the importance of theatre as a social institution. In *As You Like It*, Jacques voices his creator's idea that:

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.*

But in no other play but *Hamlet* does he subject the art of theatre to intense scrutiny. So much so that the submerged theatre within the play, as if, takes over and, we have in *Hamlet*, reality looking like a theatrical activity. Life in Elsinore comes alive with theatrical activity – plays are staged, role-playing is resorted to, false, metaphorical, as well as real, masks are put on to deceive people. But in the end, Shakespeare's scepticism regarding theatre as an infallible weapon to perceive and discover the truth prevails.

Hamlet takes recourse to this device in order to make sure that his uncle has really committed the sin which the ghost holds him responsible for. He is doubtful about the validity of the ghost and the authenticity of its claims; he thinks that the ghost might well be some devilish spirit pretending to be his sympathizer. Hamlet

NOTES

catches hold of the actors and proposes to use them as tools in order to catch the conscience of his uncle:

....the play's the thing

Wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.

He proposes to let them stage a play called *The Murder of Gonzago* to achieve his end. He hopes to assess the reaction of Claudius to this play and hence prove his guilt. With this end in mind, he trains the actors and does succeed in making the play within the play a great success. Claudius leaves the scene in a state of emotional disturbance that assures Hamlet that the allegations levelled at him by the ghost were all correct. The play scene is undoubtedly central to the structure of *Hamlet*. It allows Hamlet and Claudius to know exactly what the other feels – Hamlet knows that Claudius is a murderer and Claudius realizes that Hamlet is aware of his crime and is thus a threat to his life and position.

Critics of Shakespeare have argued that the play-within-the-play does not help the dramatic action in any way, especially because even after confirming Claudius's guilt, Hamlet does not act and delays taking revenge on the king. But the point here is that Hamlet does not introduce the play within the play to quicken the action but simply to make sure whether he should act at all. To say that the play within the play fails to achieve the end which it was introduced for is no valid criticism. *Hamlet* could not have acted, even in the absence of such a play: he would have been less certain of the crime and hence he would have taken quite some time to make sure of the real issue involved. Hence to relate the play within the play to the problem of delay in Hamlet would lead us nowhere.

Apart from the dramatic significance of the play within the play, it is important because it helps us to learn a little bit about Shakespeare the dramatist whose 'negative capability' has been praised unanimously. Here, at least once, he tells us something about himself and his dramatic art even when he has not been asked. Hamlet castigates bad acting, thus:

'O! there be players that I have seen play, and heard others praise, and that highly, not to speak it profanely, that, neither having the accent of Christians nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor man, have so strutted and bellowed that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably.'

Among any audience there are 'the judicious' as well as 'the unskillful' and 'barren' theatre-goers and Hamlet makes it clear that he would want actors to never play to the gallery but only to judicious, discriminating audience. Hamlet insists on a natural style and is not in favour of magniloquence and bombast. The play is full of references to the language of theatre. Words like 'play', 'perform', 'applaud', 'prologue', 'part', etc. are used time and again in the play. Hamlet says that the purpose of drama is

at the

first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the

*mirror up to nature; to show virtue her own feature,
scorn her own image, and the very age and body of
the time his form and pressure....*

Hamlet

Thus, the famous Aristotelian dictum is endorsed by Shakespeare through Hamlet's character.

12.3.1 Hamlet as a Tragic Hero

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defined the tragic hero as:

..... a man of a noble and high rank, pre-eminently good, who falls and meets his tragic doom because of certain inherent flaw in his character. The tragic hero is generally a man of historical, semi-historical or mythological importance so that with his fortunes are connected the fortunes of a whole people or nation. By exhibiting the downfall of such a hero, the tragic dramatist seeks to arouse the emotions of pity and fear and thereby affect Catharsis.

As a tragic hero, Hamlet is an enigma who has befuddled generations of critics and the amount of debate and scholarship he has generated is unmatched by any other character of Shakespeare. He is a bundle of contradictions – he is at the same time gentle and cruel, loving and vindictive, a deeply reflective introvert and a man capable of acting on impulse.

According to Ophelia, Hamlet has the attributes of an ideal man. He has:

*The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,
The expectancy rose of the fair state,
The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
The observed of all observers –*

But, in Ophelia's opinion, all of Hamlet's virtues are cancelled by his 'madness': 'What a mind is here o'erthrown!' It is almost as if Hamlet carried within him: '.....the stamp of one defect', a defect overshadowed his many virtues.

By nature, Hamlet is forthright and honest. Even Claudius praises this aspect of his character:

*He, being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contriving.*

He is a reasonably good judge of character and quickly realizes that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are in the pay of his uncle:

*But let me conjure you, by the rights of our fellowship, by the
constancy of your youth, by the obligation of our ever-preserved
love, and by what more dear a better proposer could charge you
withal, be even and direct with me, whether you were sent for, or no.*

NOTES

NOTES

Just as he can see the weaknesses in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, he is aware that Horatio is a friend of unequalled merit:

Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man

As e'er my conversation coped withal.

Hamlet is a man of courage. In the battle at sea he led the fight against the pirates:

*Finding ourselves too slow of sail, we put on a compelled valour,
and in the grapple I boarded them. On the instant they got clear of
our ship; so I alone became their prisoner.*

As he is well liked by the Danes, Claudius does not punish him for killing Polonius:

The other motive,

Why to public count I might not go,

Is the great love the general gender bear him;

When we first meet Hamlet, he is depressed and disillusioned. His father has been murdered and his mother has married his uncle within two month's of her husband's death:

That it should come to this!

But two months dead! – nay, not so much, not two.

.....Frailty, thy name is woman!—

A little month, or ere those shoes were old

With which she followed my poor father's body,

Like Niobe, all tears. Why she, even she—

O God, a beast that wants discourse of reason

Would have mourned longer!—married with my uncle,

My father's brother, but no more like my father

Than I to Hercules.

And he is oppressed by the hypocrisy of his uncle:

O villain, villain; smiling damned villain!

That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.

The actions of Claudius and Gertrude undermine his faith in people to such an extent that everyone and everything is, for him, tainted:

How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable

Seem to me all the uses of the world!

And the first person to suffer from Hamlet's disillusionment is Ophelia. His attitude to her is hard to explain. It is true that Hamlet's faith in women was shattered by his mother's marriage and his realization that Ophelia had probably been ordered

to seek him out. Yet, there is little excuse for the cruelty and the coarseness of his remarks:

Hamlet

*If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry.
Be thou as chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny.
Get thee to a nunnery, go. Farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry,
marry a fool, for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of
them.
To a nunnery, go, and quickly too. Farewell.*

When Hamlet comes to know that his father has been murdered, he asks the ghost for details so that:

*I, with wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,
May sweep to my revenge.*

Here, Hamlet shows his lack of self-knowledge. He cannot 'sweep' to his revenge. On the contrary, he broods over his father's death, his mother's faithlessness and his uncle's villainy. Even when he gets proof that Claudius murdered his father, he hesitates and continues to be doubtful. Hamlet alternates between the reasoned arguments of his soliloquies and the emotional impulses which cause him to kill Polonius and leap into Ophelia's grave.

Hamlet is capable of calculated cruelty. He refuses to kill Claudius when he is at prayer because he wants to punish Claudius both in this world and the next:

*Up, sword, and know thou a more horrid hent.
When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,
At game a-swearing, or about some act
That has no relish of salvation in 't—
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and black
As hell, whereto it goes.*

He shows a similar streak of premeditated harshness when he sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to certain death in England. His instructions to the English are that the two should be:

*.....put to sudden death,
Not shriving time allowed.*

Hamlet shows a certain amount of resentment that Claudius had become king. He tells Horatio that he will have no remorse when he kills Claudius because:

*He hath killed my king, and whored my mother:
Popped in between the election and my hopes;*

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Hamlet, however, is also capable of acknowledging his weaknesses and apologizing sincerely for them:

*Give me your pardon, sir. I've done you wrong.
But pardon 't, as you are a gentleman.
This presence knows,
And you must needs have heard, how I am punished
With a sore distraction. What I have done,
That might your nature, honor, and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was 't Hamlet wronged Laertes? Never Hamlet.*

This reference by Hamlet to his madness raises a crucial issue in the consideration of Hamlet's character. Critics have debated upon the question whether Hamlet was really mad or whether his madness was feigned. As Wilson Knight has pointed out, *Hamlet* is like Dostoevsky's Stavrogin who is feared by those around him. They are always trying in vain to find out what is wrong with him but cannot understand him. After talking to the ghost Hamlet determines to put up an act of madness to deceive everyone at court and establish Claudius's guilt. Claudius and Gertrude are unsure of the cause of Hamlet's madness although Gertrude believes that the reason for his unstable mind is his father's death and her hasty marriage. Hamlet seems to swing between the reasoned pathos of his soliloquies and sudden, unexpected attacks of excitement or fury. He is extremely depressed by his failure to avenge his father's murder:

*Yet I,
A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak,
Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of any cause,
And can say nothing – no, not for a king.*

He admits that he is afraid that the devil may be taking advantage of his depression to damn him:

*The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me:*

Hamlet's attitude to Ophelia suggests that he is not fully in control of his senses and actions. Even Ophelia concludes that he is certainly mad:

*Oh, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown!—
....Now see that noble and most sovereign reason
Like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh;*

And after her interview with Hamlet, Gertrude tells Claudius that *Hamlet* is
Mad as the sea and wind, when both contend
Which is the mightier.

Finally, Hamlet's behaviour at Ophelia's burial calls his sanity into question:

I loved Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers
Could not with all their quantity of love
Make up my sum. What wilt thou do for her?
.....Woo't weep? Woo't fight? Woo't fast? Woo't tear thyself?
Woo't drink up eisel, eat a crocodile?
I'll do 't. Dost thou come here to whine,
To outface me with leaping in her grave?
Be buried quick with her?—and so will I.

His words and actions are here more indicative of a lack of balance than of a deep-rooted affection. Later in the play, he apologizes to Laertes for his uncontrolled behaviour:

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not. Hamlet denies it.
Who does it, then? His madness.

Hamlet is sometimes cruel, sometimes sarcastic, and often he seems to show signs of hysteria. His vacillation between thoughtful gentleness and unbalanced frenzy is best summed up by Gertrude:

This is mere madness.
And thus a while the fit will work on him.
Anon, as patient as the female dove
When that her golden couplets are disclosed,
His silence will sit drooping.

Hamlet is one of the most complex and intriguing of Shakespeare's tragic heroes and his character has been differently interpreted by different critics over centuries. He has been compared with other tragic characters – Macbeth, Orestes, Electra and Clytemnestra. In his essay *The Morality of Hamlet*, Patrick Crutwell claims that *Hamlet* has become a figure of myth:

.....just as Odysseus is the myth character of the Traveller, Faust of the
Seeker, Quixote of the Knight, and Juan of the Lover; so Hamlet has been
made the myth-character of the doubting, self-contemplating Intellectual.

Most scholars agree that he is a thinker who is cast in the role of an avenger and that he is intelligent and sensitive, deeply disturbed by the evil and faithlessness with which he is surrounded. Philip Brockbank has duly observed that Shakespeare has a limited interest in Hamlet as an avenger and his deeper interest is in Hamlet

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as a tragic hero who takes upon himself the moral distress of the whole community. Hazlitt calls him 'the most amiable of misanthropes' while L. C. Knights, a well-known Shakespeare scholar, is severe in his judgment of Hamlet and says:

His attitudes of hatred, revulsion, self-complacence and self-reproach.....are, in their one-sided insistence, forms of escape from the difficult process of complex adjustment which normal living demands and which Hamlet finds beyond his powers.

Coleridge observes that Hamlet is brave but because he vacillates and procrastinates, he loses the energy of resolve. Comparing the tragedies of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, he points out that while the former proceeds with utmost slowness, the latter acts with 'breathless rapidity'.

His sudden swings from inactivity to impulsive rashness may not make him an easy character to classify but they make him one of the most perennially interesting characters in fiction. His fall arouses the emotions of pity and fear in the audience as they realize that he is a man upon whom an intolerable burden has been laid and the action of the tragedy is the result of his reluctant but dutiful shouldering of it. As Caroline Spurgeon says, Hamlet is not to be blamed for the condition he finds himself in, any more than a sick man is to be blamed for the infection that strikes and kills him. In fact, he falls a tragic victim to the discrepancy between his reasoning and his action. H. A. Taine has succinctly summed up Hamlet as a tragic hero:

You recognize in him a poet's soul, made not to act, but to dream, which is lost in contemplating the phantoms of its creation, which sees the imaginary world too clearly to play a part in the real world; an artist whom evil chance has made a prince, whom worse chance has made an avenger of crime, and who, destined by nature for genius, is condemned by fortune to madness and unhappiness.

Check Your Progress

1. What is hamartia?
2. What is the distinguishing feature in Shakespeare's conception of the tragic hero?
3. Who are involved in an external conflict?
4. Name the first play with revenge as the central theme.
5. What is the purpose of a soliloquy?
6. How many soliloquies are spoken by Hamlet in the play?

12.4 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. A latent flaw (Hamartia) in the character of the tragic hero forces him to commit an act of misjudgment and the tragic wheel is set into motion.

2. The distinguishing feature in Shakespeare's conception of the tragic hero is his representation of the effect of the tragic flaw which nails him in his coffin. Hence, all his tragic heroes fall because of their inherent weakness and they exemplify Heraclitus's dictum that character is destiny.
3. The external conflict is between the hero and the villain, between Macbeth and Banquo, Othello and Iago or *Hamlet* and Claudius but what is more important is the inner conflict within Macbeth, Othello or *Hamlet*.
4. Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* published perhaps in 1589 was the first Elizabethan play with revenge as the central theme and established the tradition of revenge plays.
5. The soliloquies in general are meant to serve two dramatic purposes: first, to inform the audience about the incidents which either have not been presented on the stage or will not be presented and secondly, to present an analysis of the inner mind of the speaker.
6. There are seven soliloquies spoken by Hamlet in the play and a few of them refer to the various reasons for the delay in taking revenge on the part of Hamlet.

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12.5 SUMMARY

- The full title of the play *The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, was meant to be self-explanatory. Tragedies deal with the death of a noble hero and *Hamlet* as Prince of Denmark had all the necessary qualities of a tragic hero.
- *Hamlet*, like the other plays of Shakespeare, is based on more than one source. In writing his plays, Shakespeare frequently made use of contemporary literature and this is certainly true of *Hamlet*.
- A story similar to that of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* is to be found in the folk literatures of several European countries but it first appeared in written form in the works of the Danish historian, Saxo Grammaticus in 1514.
- It is perhaps impossible to discuss tragedy without mentioning Aristotle who carefully studied the practice of contemporary Greek tragic dramatists and then noted his observations down with a mathematical exactness and precision.
- In the classical tragedies, fate or destiny plays a very important part. They show a man of high and noble birth who comes under the wrath of the gods and falls from good fortune and meets his tragic doom.
- A latent flaw (Hamartia) in the character of the tragic hero forces him to commit an act of misjudgment and the tragic wheel is set into motion.
- The Shakespearean tragic hero is a man of great social and historical importance and belongs to a very noble and respectable family.

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- Othello is a great military general; Macbeth is the Thane of Glamis, next in importance to the king; Lear is the king and *Hamlet* is the Prince of Denmark.
- *Hamlet* is, in fact, one of the most complex of Shakespeare's tragic heroes and it is not easy to pinpoint one specific flaw which brought about his untimely death.
- The distinguishing feature in Shakespeare's conception of the tragic hero is his representation of the effect of the tragic flaw which nails him in his coffin. Hence, all his tragic heroes fall because of their inherent weakness and they exemplify Heraclitus's dictum that character is destiny.
- Conflict is the most important part of Shakespearean tragedy—conflict between the outer and the inner world and within the inner world itself.
- The external conflict is between the hero and the villain, between Macbeth and Banquo, Othello and Iago or *Hamlet* and Claudius but what is more important is the inner conflict within Macbeth, Othello or *Hamlet*.
- Shakespearean tragedy does have a cathartic effect in the audience. Our emotions of pity and fear are aroused when we see Macbeth, Othello, King Lear and Hamlet caught in the snares of fate, circumstances and their own tragic flaws.
- *Hamlet* belongs to a genre of plays often called Revenge 'Tragedies'. They were very popular in Elizabethan England. In fact, revenge was an important part of the plot structure of many Renaissance tragedies.
- Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* published perhaps in 1589 was the first Elizabethan play with revenge as the central theme and established the tradition of revenge plays.
- The typical structure of the revenge play has five parts. The first part is the 'exposition' usually by a ghost.
- 'Delay' is a major structural device which allows the avenger to deliberately keep postponing taking action on account of moral scruples, a feeling of inadequacy regarding the intended task or for other reasons.
- The soliloquies in general are meant to serve two dramatic purposes: first, to inform the audience about the incidents which either have not been presented on the stage or will not be presented and secondly, to present an analysis of the inner mind of the speaker.
- There are seven soliloquies spoken by Hamlet in the play and a few of them refer to the various reasons for the delay in taking revenge on the part of Hamlet. If these soliloquies are removed from the play, the problem of delay would be automatically solved.
- Critics of Shakespeare have argued that the play-within-the-play does not help the dramatic action in any way, especially because even after confirming Claudius's guilt, Hamlet does not act and delays taking revenge on the king.

- Hamlet is one of the most complex and intriguing of Shakespeare's tragic heroes and his character has been differently interpreted by different critics over centuries.

Hamlet

12.6 KEY WORDS

- **Prologue:** It is a separate introductory section of a literary, dramatic, or musical work.
- **Criticism:** It is the expression of disapproval of someone or something on the basis of perceived faults or mistakes.
- **Soliloquy:** It is an act of speaking one's thoughts aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers, especially by a character in a play.

12.7 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Give a brief background of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*.
2. Explain the elements of Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* which are the most important for the structure of the play.
3. Elaborate on the soliloquies used in *Hamlet* and discuss their function.
4. Describe the qualities of a tragic hero.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Critically analyze Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* as a revenge tragedy. How is it different from or similar to classical tragedies?
2. Explain how theatre is used as an integral theme by Shakespeare in play *Hamlet*.
3. 'Hamlet is one of the most complex and intriguing of Shakespeare's tragic heroes.' Critically comment.

12.8 FURTHER READINGS

Wells, Stanley W. 2003. *Shakespeare: For All Time*. UK: Oxford University Press.

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UNIT 13 *OTHELLO*

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Structure

- 13.0 Introduction
- 13.1 Objectives
- 13.2 A Brief Introduction to the Play *Othello*
 - 13.2.1 The Character of Othello
- 13.3 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 13.4 Summary
- 13.5 Key Words
- 13.6 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 13.7 Further Readings

13.0 INTRODUCTION

Othello is a famous tragedy of William Shakespeare and is thought to be one of his greatest. It is primarily because of the complexities of the character of Othello that the play was and is so popular and has been read as a seminal text of the Elizabethan Era. Shakespeare through this play *Othello* not just tries to present the moral dilemmas of the age but also shows how a black is being treated amidst the white civilization. The racial mentality that exists in the western psyche finds representation on the play as well as the play presents a bold feminist statement through the character of Desdemona who through her own choices in life makes a statement for women how they need to stand up for their own cause. But the same Desdemona falls victim of the patriarchal biases as her husband could not get over the patriarchal mentality of the western mind who could believe that women cannot be duplicitous by nature. Othello falls in his own patriarchal trap – a trap made by Iago where he could not trust Desdemona and therefore kills her and brings about his own doom.

In this unit, you will study the character of Othello from different perspectives so as to figure out the reasons of his downfall. Therefore, in the beginning a short introduction to the play is provided where the plot of the play is discussed critically from the racial perspective and then a critical appraisal of the character of Othello has been done.

13.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Describe the character of *Othello*
- Critically analyze the background setting of the play *Othello*

13.2 A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY *OTHELLO*

"If you prick us, do we not bleed?

If you tickle us, do we not laugh?

If you poison us, do we not die?

If you wrong us, shall we not revenge?"

This is how Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare in Act III, Scene II reacts to the white civilization's oppression of the marginalized communities in Europe. Ruth Cowhig in the essays "Blacks in Renaissance Drama" writes –

"Black people are represented as satanic, sexual creatures, a threat to order and decency and a danger to white womanhood."

The perception of Desdemona and Othello's marriage as it is represented by William Shakespeare in the play is talked about by Othello himself in Act I Scene III when he says –

"I will a round unvarnished tale deliver

Of my whole course of love, what drugs, what charms,

What conjuration and what mighty magic

(for such proceeding I am charged withal -)

I won his daughter."

Othello is charged with all this as it was a widespread belief in the western legends and thoughts that "blacks" are descendants of Ham in the Genesis Story, punished for sexual excesses by their "blackness." Sexual potency was therefore one of the attributes of the prototype black; other qualities being courage, pride credulity and easily aroused passions – the qualities enumerated in John Leo's *The Geographical History of Africa*, a book written in the sixteenth century and translated into English in 1600.

Shakespeare's *Othello* is sexually potent and has all the qualities that John Leo's book enumerates. Though in Act I, Scene III, Othello disclaims the heat of physical desire as he says –

"I therefore beg it not

To please the palate of my appetite,

Not to comply with heat." (261 – 263)

But at the same time Othello in his passion/ ambition to marry "white beauty, white culture and whiteness" realizes that when his restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity, as pointed out French scholar Frantz Fanon in the essay "The Man of Colour and the White Woman". Therefore, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the romantic poet, comments "it would be monstrous to

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conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling with a veritable negro” as Desdemona herself says –

*“I be left behind,
A moth of peace and he go to the war,
The rites for which I love him are bereft me,
And I a heavy interim shall support
By his dear absence. Let me go with him.” (Lines 256 – 260)*

Othello’s cultural status cannot be secured in the white civilization by means of his marriage. This earns him the right to remain in Venice but not to be seen as a rightful member of that society, much less a respected ruler within it. Though Othello is a “General” but to the whites, “the insiders” he is a degraded person because of his skin colour. Othello therefore tries to cement his identity for himself in order to fit in Venice. Since he cannot overcome the prejudices of his contemporaries, he can only try to flaunt his disregard by engaging in battles of status and power. In doing so, he starts concentrating more on the politics than the love he has for Desdemona. Effectively, he tries to put on a mask of whiteness in order to become “an insider” to the civilization which hates him for he is.

Iago is enraged by Othello’s attempt to fit in where he does not belong to. Ryan argues the destruction of Othello and Desdemona lays bare the barbarity of a culture whose preconceptions about race and gender cannot allow a love like theirs to survive and flourish. The significance of the play lies in the fact that Othello and Desdemona try to uphold the notions of racial equality and sexual freedom by the willful and independent temperament on the act of marriage, despite social censure.

Consequently, Iago is able to manipulate Othello through his base arguments and evoke irrational jealousy in him. In Act III, Scene III, often referred to as the Temptation Scene, Othello’s faith in Desdemona is gradually undermined by Iago’s insinuations and he is eventually reduced by jealousy to irrational madness. Iago’s cynical cunning plays upon Othello’s trustfulness –

*“The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so”
(Act I, Scene III, Lines 390 -391)*

The spectacle of Othello’s disintegration is perhaps the most painful in the whole of Shakespeare’s canon – Othello’s jealous madness is more terrifying as in the early scenes we see him to be proud of his self-control as he refuses to be roused to anger by Brabantio and Roderigo. Thus, in the early scenes, he contradicts the contemporary notion of a black man as one easily swayed by passion.’ (Ruth Cowhig). But Iago’s “motiveless malignity” and ‘diabolic intellect’ imbalances Othello’s self control and initiates him towards his own doom. But in the play *Othello*, there are enough reasons enumerated which causes Iago to play on

Othello's credulity – like Iago's jealousy over Cassio's "preferment" or the gnawing hatred because of arrogant racism. Iago harps mercilessly upon the unnaturalness of the marriage between Othello and Desdemona –

*"Not to affect many proposed matches,
Of her own clime, complexion and degree,
Whereto we see in all things nature tends;
Fie! We may smell in such a will most rank
Foul disproportion; thoughts unnatural."
(Act III, Scene III, Lines – 229 – 233)*

The exclamation of disgust ("Fie") and the words "smell", "foul" and "unnatural" reveal a phobia which makes Iago demolish Othello's defences. This racial contempt exposes Othello's basic insecurity as an alien in a white society. Othello's confidence in Desdemona expressed in "for her she eyes, and chose me" changes to the misery of

*"Haply for I am black
And have not those soft parts of conversation
That Chamberers have . . .'
(Act III, Scene iii, Lines 262 – 264)*

This is one of the most moving moments in the play. Given Iago's hatred and astuteness in exploiting other people's weaknesses, which we see in the plot he sets out for Cassio, the black Othello is an easy game. Thus, we are watching the baiting of an alien who cannot fight back on equal terms.

In *Othello* then, William Shakespeare presents his Elizabethan audience with a series of proposition which serve to reverse or disturb their settled notions of black people. A Christian African is pitted against a diabolical white, a startling reversal of the norm. Finally, a (im)mature male African of modest sexual inclination is yoked to a youthful white female who publicly reveals a bold sexual appetite –

*"... if I be left behind,
A moth of peace, and he go to the war,
The rites for which I love him are bereft me"
(Act I, Scene iii, Lines 256 – 258)*

It is this last contradiction of the norm which lies at the core of the play which makes Shakespeare's *Othello* a revolutionary play about the politics of racial discrimination and sexual freedom.

13.2.1 The Character of Othello

Othello is among one of the greatest tragic heroes of Shakespearean canon. He is such a creation of William Shakespeare that he has been a discussion of many critical debates and often the scholars, academicians and theatre goers were too baffled by the depth with which the character is portrayed by Shakespeare.

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Like all tragic heroes of William Shakespeare's time, Othello too hails from a royal family as he himself says before the Senate of Venice –

*"I fetched my life and being
From men of royal siege."*

Therefore from the very beginning of the play we come to know that he is a man of high rank and that there is no doubt about his royal lineage. However, Samuel Taylor Coleridge is of the opinion that the barbarous negro cannot be of any royal lineage which is nothing but white man's obsession with the white skin colour who cannot think in terms of a person from a royal lineage to be a man of colour. Othello is a black man – a negro with "thick lips" as he himself states – "Black as my own face."

Even though Othello is presented as a Negro, he is shown to be a romantic figure. This is not to say that Blacks cannot be romantic; but merely to mention the fact that Shakespeare's intention was to present the black man with his romantic inclinations. His romantic inclinations and passions are not only evident in his love for Desdemona, but also in his speeches which are extremely poetic in their tone and feeling, such as

*"... if I were not to die
'Twere now to be most happy; for I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute,
That not another comfort, like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate."
Or
"If she be false, O then Heaven mocks itself,
I'll not believe it;*

There are many such dialogues throughout the play in *Othello* which goes on to prove the romantic and the poetic quality of Othello. If we compare the poetic quality of Othello's speeches with Hamlet, we can easily come to the conclusion that Othello is no farther than Hamlet in poetic quality. It is his poetic quality which makes his tragedy so intense and the audience is so moved by it.

Othello is also a great adventurer at the same time. He has spent the major part of his life in wars, as he himself says –

*"For Since these arms of mine had seven years' pith,
Till now some nine moons wasted, they have us'd,
Their dearest action in the tented field,
And little of this great world can I speak,
More than pertains to feats of broil and battle."
(Act I, Sc. Iii, L. 83 -87)*

Apart from this, Othello throughout the play also shows some kind of a love for war, such as –

“O now for ever:

Farewell the tranquil mind, farewell content:

Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars

That makes ambition virtue: O farewell,

Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump

The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife;

The royal banner, and all quality,

Pride, pomp, and circumstances of glorious war!”

(Act III, Sc. Iii. L – 353 -360)

Thus throughout his life, Othello has proved that he is a great soldier and an adventurer who has always loved the ways of the war and had proven himself to be a superior in all that is related to the war. It can be said that his life has been –

“Of moving accidents by flood and field;

Of hair-breadth scapes i’ th’ imminent deadly breach;

Of being taken by the insolent foe;

And sold to slavery, and my redemption thence,

And with it all my travel’s history;”

(Act I, Sc. Iii, L – 135 – 139)

Thus, if he is a master of adventure and war; and had proved himself time and again as is suggested in the play, then on the other hand he is also a person who can love profoundly as is seen in his love for Desdemona. It is not the love of a young boy, but of a mature person who finds in Desdemona some kind of a soul mate. It is as if there is some kind of a spiritual exaltation in his love for Desdemona. Therefore, many scholars like to believe that Othello is one of the greatest lovers in the whole of Shakespearean canon.

Othello is a man of vehement passion and therefore it is perceived that his temper once excited becomes uncontrollable. It can be said that Othello is a straightforward man who thinks all men are what they present themselves to be. His simplicity and straightforwardness is apparent from the beginning of the play when he takes everyone around him for granted. Iago in the beginning of the play describes him as

“The Moor a free and open nature too,

That thinks men honest that but seems to be so:

And will as tenderly be led by the nose ...

As asses are.”

(Act I, Sc. Iii, Lines – 397 – 400)

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It is his open nature which makes people take him “by the nose as asses are” as he has an unsuspecting mind which does not look beyond the apparent. It is because of this That Iago could very well trap himself with the handkerchief and make him suspect Desdemona.

It is to be kept in mind here that the recent critics point out that Othello is not just unsuspecting but more so a suspecting patriarchal man who thinks women to be transgressive by nature. When Iago sets to trap him, he feels that Desdemona has once proven her infidelity to her father by running away with him and therefore she is very much prone to also ditch him. It is his basic insecurity which is the cause of his doom.

In this context, it is necessary that we have a little discussion on the status of women in the Renaissance society. Catherine Belsey in the essay “Disrupting Sexual Difference” says – “Women, then as now, were defined in relation to men and in terms of their relations with men.” The Elizabethan stage, many a times presented theatres which unsettles or questions the patriarchal set up which resulted in the denigration of Elizabethan stage itself. The Puritans were of the belief that theatre carries opportunities for illicit sexual encounter and encouraging flouting of the sumptuary laws. William Shakespeare’s *Othello* disturbs the settled notion of the Renaissance society about the racial contempt and gender prejudice. In Desdemona, Shakespeare presents a youthful white female who publicly reveals a bold sexual appetite –

“... if I be left behind,
A moth of peace, and he go to the war;
The rites for which I love him are bereft me”
(Act I, Scene iii, Lines 256 – 258)

Jean E. Howard in the essay “Renaissance Antitheatricity” points out how women in Renaissance stage are presented as “duplicitous, inherently theatrical sex ... prone to change and inconstancy.” Women are often seen as transgressive creatures who requires constant surveillance as the Puritan Pamphleteer of Elizabethan Age, Stephen Gosson thinks women are a threat to the larger patriarchal economy because of their transgressive nature and therefore requires a highly structured process involving her passage from the house and surveillance of the father to the house and surveillance of the husband. Desdemona in the beginning of the play shows her willful nature by choosing a Black Moor as her life partner which is a transgression according to the Elizabethan Patriarchal norms.

For Othello, at this moment Desdemona is not only a wife, but also a ticket to legitimize him in the political world of Venice – Frantz Fanon is of the view that Othello in his ambition to marry “white beauty, whit culture, white whiteness” marries Desdemona as he thinks when his restless hands caress Desdemona, they grasp the white civilization and dignity. Othello is proud at this moment and says –

“For she had eyes and chose me.” But it is the same Othello who says to Iago in Act III, Scene iii, Lines 159 – 160 –

*“Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore,
Be sure of it, give me the ocular proof”*

When Othello is asking for an “ocular proof” it already shows that he had already in his mind a particular belief that Desdemona can also show her infidelity one day. It is this idea that Othello too is a patriarchal mind is something on which Iago plays on and takes Othello to his own doom when he goes to the extent of killing Desdemona for it is said that he loved too well that he could not bear the thought of his wife trying to transgress him.

So, if on the one hand, we see that Othello is a sound soldier and a straightforward and simple man who believes in everything that the society has to say to him, it is also true about him that he could not get above the patriarchal prejudices of the Renaissance times and therefore in some ways brings about his own downfall.

Check Your Progress

1. Mention some of the attributes of the prototype black.
2. What happens in the temptation scene of the play?
3. Who is Othello?
4. What are Othello’s feelings towards war?

13.3 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. Sexual potency was one of the attributes of the prototype black; other qualities being courage, pride credulity and easily aroused passions.
2. In Act III, Scene III, often referred to as the Temptation Scene, Othello’s faith in Desdemona is gradually undermined by Iago’s insinuations and he is eventually reduced by jealousy to irrational madness.
3. Othello is among one of the greatest tragic heroes of Shakespearean canon.
4. Othello throughout the play shows some kind of love for war.

13.4 SUMMARY

- *Othello* is a famous tragedy of William Shakespeare and is thought to be one of his greatest.

Othello

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- It is primarily because of the complexities of the character of Othello that the play was and is so popular and has been read as a seminal text of the Elizabethan Era.
- Othello in his passion/ ambition to marry “white beauty, white culture and whiteness” realizes that when his restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity, as pointed out French scholar Frantz Fanon in the essay “The Man of Colour and the White Woman”.
- Othello’s cultural status cannot be secured in the white civilization by means of his marriage. This earns him the right to remain in Venice but not to be seen as a rightful member of that society, much less a respected ruler within it.
- Though Othello is a “General” but to the whites, “the insiders” he is a degraded person because of his skin colour. Othello therefore tries to cement his identity for himself in order to fit in Venice.
- If he is a master of adventure and war; and had proved himself time and again as is suggested in the play, then on the other hand he is also a person who can love profoundly as is seen in his love for Desdemona.
- Othello is a man of vehement passion and therefore it is perceived that his temper once excited becomes uncontrollable.
- It can be said that Othello is a straightforward man who thinks all men are what they present themselves to be.
- His simplicity and straightforwardness are apparent from the beginning of the play when he takes everyone around him for granted.
- Othello is a sound soldier and a straightforward and simple man who believes in everything that the society has to say to him, it is also true about him that he could not get above the patriarchal prejudices of the Renaissance times and therefore in some ways brings about his own downfall.

13.5 KEY WORDS

- **Patriarchal:** It refers to a system of society or government controlled by men.
- **Renaissance:** It is the revival of European art and literature under the influence of classical models in the 14th–16th centuries.
- **Dialogue:** It is a conversation between two or more people as a feature of a book, play, or film.
- **Spectacle:** It refers to an unusual or unexpected event or situation that attracts attention, interest, or disapproval.

13.6 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. Write a character sketch of Othello.
2. Give a brief background of Shakespeare's play *Othello*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. Do you agree to the statement that Othello loved too well? Give reasons for your answer.
2. As a tragic protagonist, Othello manufactures his own downfall. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.

NOTES

13.7 FURTHER READINGS

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NOTES

UNIT 14 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE TEMPEST*

Structure

- 14.0 Introduction
- 14.1 Objectives
- 14.2 Element of Magic in *The Tempest*
- 14.3 Themes in *The Tempest*
- 14.4 *The Tempest* as a Tragi-Comedy
- 14.5 The Supernatural in *The Tempest*
- 14.6 Masque in *The Tempest*
- 14.7 Answers to Check Your Progress Questions
- 14.8 Summary
- 14.9 Key Words
- 14.10 Self Assessment Questions and Exercises
- 14.11 Further Readings

14.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the finest works of Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, is the story of Prospero's revenge on his enemies through exercising his magic powers. The play is evidently connected to the stories of colonization and adventures of the English sea-men. An event that created a great sensation at the time is supposed to be alluded to in *The Tempest*.

Shakespeare introduces the supernatural element in many of his plays, but in *The Tempest*, the supernatural powers are under the control of human will. In this play, Prospero is credited with the powers of a medieval magician (such as Faustus in Marlowe's drama). The supernatural machinery is an integral part of *The Tempest* as all the main events in the play are brought about by magic. The supernatural element is often introduced by Shakespeare to serve a dramatic purpose. In this play, it is the very basis of the play, the foundation on which the action of the play stands. This unit explains the details of the play.

14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Assess one of Shakespeare's most popular plays, *The Tempest*
- Discuss some of the central themes in *The Tempest*
- Analyze *The Tempest* as a tragi-comedy

- Explain the significance of the supernatural elements in *The Tempest*
- Discuss *The Tempest* as a masque

William Shakespeare's
The Tempest

14.2 ELEMENT OF MAGIC IN *THE TEMPEST*

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The Tempest belongs to the group of plays often referred to as 'The Last Plays' or 'The Romances' of Shakespeare. In this phase, Shakespeare seems more religious, and in plays like *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, he has rendered a mystical conception of the universe. After the soul-stirring tragedies, and the gaiety and festivity of the comedies, we come to the last plays where he explores life with its grandeur, mystery and triviality. He writes of great voyages, adventures, new worlds, mysterious isles and enchantment. The action takes place in enchanted places, far from the peering eyes of the 'madding crowd'. The plots are improbable, incredibly fantastic, full of magic, marvel and surprises. Here, Shakespeare explores the Renaissance ideals of the passion for power.

Dame Frances Amelia Yates, a renowned Shakespeare critic, referring to 'the magic of Shakespeare', says that these plays bring the seemingly irreconcilable to reconciliation through forgiveness and pave the way for happiness, peace and prosperity for all concerned in the plays. Thus, the note of tragic gloom has passed and appears a rainbow in the sky, indicating hope for the characters. Kenneth Muir has succinctly put the essence of the Romances as:

It is impossible to doubt that the form of the last plays was determined by the new vision which Shakespeare wished to express. The center of this vision was a belief in the necessity for forgiveness, the conviction that the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance.

Shakespeare, being the most representative dramatist of his age, was alert to perceive changes in the public taste and quick to adapt himself to the changed conditions. All the plays of this last phase were written to satisfy the new fashion, encouraged by the staging facilities for spectacle and romance of the indoor theater at the Blackfriars. The candle lights and the dreamy calm in the indoor theater favoured masque, pageant and music. He entertained the theater audience with what they wanted to see—tales of adventure, masque and magic. Realizing the reason for the popularity of Beaumont and Fletcher, Shakespeare changed his verse accordingly, and these last plays are characterized by the mellifluousness of verse and sweetness of style.

The Tempest is a supreme expression of the magical philosophy. It was written towards the end of 1610 and the beginning of 1611, to be performed by the King's men before Princess Elizabeth and her betrothed in 1612. Its earlier version was revised for this performance. According to Frank Kermode, the masque was later added to make the play suitable for the married pair, just as, within the

NOTES

play, it is performed before Ferdinand and Miranda. In this masque, Shakespeare emphasizes on chastity before marriage; Ferdinand will be cursed if he broke the tradition and he replies suitably that he will not act, even under the most tempting provocations.

As far as the sources of the play are concerned, *The Tempest* is associated with incidents which filled the thoughts of the nation at that time. The idea of colonial expansion and a narrative by the name of *A Discovery of the Bermudas* about shipwreck and the adventures of the crew on the island seem to have been the inspiration for this play. Similarities have been found between the plots of *The Tempest* and an old German play called *The Fair Sidea* written by Jakob Ayren, a notary from Nuremberg. *The Tempest* also shows traces of influence of Jonson's *Hymenaei*, or *The Masque of Hymen* (1606).

The Tempest is the supreme expression of the mood of the final period. Prospero, occupying the central position in the play, is a man who is as omniscient and almighty as destiny. The unities of time and place are observed in this play. The love of Ferdinand and Miranda, the machinations of Antonio and Sebastian, the aspirations of Caliban, the agonies of the shipwrecked crew are all brought to life by the supreme artist that is Shakespeare.

All characters are symbols of some emotion or idea. In Miranda, Shakespeare portrays the quintessential innocence of a woman who has been taught by a wise teacher, but has not been sophisticated by experience. Ariel is a spirit of the air, invisible to all except Prospero. He does what Prospero bids him. Caliban is a much more complex character, whose physical deformity is an indication of his mental abnormality. Of Antonio and Sebastian, the former is the greater villain with a more intuitive brain, but the latter has a shrewder sense of humour.

The most amusing of these minor characters are Stephano and Trinculo, who supply the play with an episode of their own. The older generation of characters—Prospero, Gonzalo, Antonio, Alonso and Sebastian—are divided by bitter wrongs and quarrels but brought together at the end in the magical atmosphere of reconciliation by the younger generation.

In the variety of its characters, in the mingling of episodes, and in the interweaving of different types of techniques, *The Tempest*, though one of Shakespeare's shorter plays, displays all the profusion and multifariousness that marks his greatest achievements.

Check Your Progress

1. In which year was *The Tempest* written?
2. What emotion or idea does Miranda symbolize?
3. Who is Ariel in *The Tempest*?

14.3 THEMES IN *THE TEMPEST*

William Shakespeare's
The Tempest

Critics of Shakespeare have given a wide variety of opinions regarding the themes in *The Tempest*. Some refer to Shakespeare's state of mind and say that the play is an expression of the calm and serene condition of his mind and heart. This is closely associated with the theme of repentance and forgiveness, justice and mercy. Others have attempted an allegorical interpretation of the play. According to them, Ariel and Caliban are the imaginative and physical aspects of Prospero, respectively. A closer reading of the play reveals some other themes—nature vs nurture, fall and redemption, order vs disorder, illusion vs reality. However, the various themes of the play do not contradict one another and can be seen at different levels.

Dowden and Furnivall have at length discussed repentance and forgiveness as the themes of *The Tempest*. Shakespeare had realized that 'since we are forgiven, it would be strange not to forgive'. With forgiveness must come love, mercy, reconciliation of the estranged, restoration of the lost and regeneration of the sinful. In keeping with the moral preoccupations of his last plays, the theme of *The Tempest* revolves around reconciliation, with pardon and atonement for the sins of the offenders.

The past wrongdoings and injustice that Prospero has to endure are forgiven and a reunion of the estranged is brought about by the younger generation represented by Ferdinand and Miranda. In the play, the words 'virtue' and 'noble' are recurrently used, revealing the dramatist's concern with the nature of true nobility and generosity of soul. The power of Prospero's wisdom and the purity of Ferdinand and Miranda are set against the treachery of Antonio and the malice of Caliban. In the end, the evil characters repent, and they are forgiven by the (morally) good ones. Even Prospero, the pardoner, implores for pardon.

However, Hallett Smith, in his introduction of the *Twentieth Century Interpretation of The Tempest*, has observed that Prospero's action of forgiving his enemies is to be understood in the light of Seneca's essay on anger rather than in the light of the mercy of Jesus, and that Shakespeare's bent of mind was more stoic than Christian. Bonamy Dobrée has also pointed out that in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare was using not so much the moral ideas of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation as the metaphysical notions of providence and freedom, of appearance and reality.

Appearance and reality constitute a major theme of *The Tempest*. The play seems to be an illusion like a dream but is full of reality. The storm at the beginning of the play and the subsequent shipwreck, the enchanted island, the feast and the masque are all illusory in nature, but Prospero, Stephano, Trinculo, Antonio, Sebastian, the ship's crew, and all the other characters strike us as equally real. E. M. W. Tillyard has pointed out that when under the stress of war, love, or

NOTES

NOTES

disappointment, our scale of reality is disturbed and the things that seem solid appear remote.

Similar things happen in *The Tempest*. What seems illusory at first, like the magic and the music, becomes real, while what initially seems real, like the conspiracy of Antonio and Sebastian, becomes illusory. When Antonio and Sebastian remain awake, plotting murder, they show that they are the real dreamers, sunk in the hallucinations of greed.

There are many variations of the reality/illusion theme in the play. Some are comic, as when Caliban and Stephan are mistaken by Stephano for a four-legged monster, while others seem more ironic, as when the offenders are deceived by the magic feast.

The Tempest begins with a mystification of the characters. On being shipwrecked and scattered over the enchanted island, Alonso and his men are bewildered. Gonzalo sighs: 'Here is a maze trod!' They are then confronted with the magic feast, the fairies, and the disappearing of the feast. Sebastian calls it 'a living drollery'.

The play-within-the-play bewilders the already bewildered men. It further complicates an already baffling island, full of noises and apparitions, where it is hard to tell a sleep-state apart from a walking one, and nothing stays the same from one moment to the next. Anne Barton described this aspect in *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play*:

The world of The Tempest is a little like some of the last paintings of Turner, those images of ships lost in the snow, in which the atmosphere, the phantasms and monstrous shapes of the storm confused with the sea itself, breaking into white foam, and has so obscured the ordinary aspect of things that it is impossible to distinguish the vessel from the elements which surround it, to separate the solid from the impalpable, the illusory from the real.

The audience, however, are better placed than the courtiers. They are aware that behind all this is Prospero, the magician pulling the strings. For the courtiers, the feast is an unexplained wonder, while for the audience, it is simply a masque. But, as Anne Barton says, there is a sense in which even the audience is confounded and baffled with the play-within-the-play. In Shakespeare's other works, such as *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the division between the illusory and the real world was clearly stated in the play-within-the-play.

In the last plays, Shakespeare has broken down this distinction. When Prospero points out that 'we are such stuff as dreams are made on' and that there is no difference between the 'insubstantial pageant faded' and reality itself, he completely shatters the distinction between illusion and reality. The reality of life beyond the island and the theater has been equated with the 'insubstantial pageant faded'.

NOTES

R. A. Zimbardo has pointed out that the theme of *The Tempest* is not regeneration through suffering, but the central conflict between order and chaos, the attempt of art to impose form upon the formless and the chaotic and the limitations art faces in this endeavour. Tillyard has also discussed the notion of order and said that though Shakespeare was concerned with this theme in almost all of his plays, it is in *The Tempest* that he considers the chain of being most closely. As he points out:

Prospero is at the apex of humanity with his magical power and his decision to spend what remains of his life in contemplation. Caliban is largely bestial, a better log-carrier than a man and perhaps of cruder appetites, strong too in fancy in which according to one Renaissance theory, beast excelled man.

Prospero is the center of order, and Ferdinand and Miranda the agents. With the help of music, the symbol of order, Prospero struggles to impose order on his enemies who symbolize disorder. He places the travelers on an enchanted island, which he controls almost entirely through order and harmony—almost because he does not have complete command over Caliban, the incarnation of disorder. He takes Alonso and his company out of the flux of life into a kind of permanence, a change which Ariel describes:

*Full fathom five thy father lies
Into something rich and strange*

Prospero knows the limitations of his art; he cannot transcend the terms of his humanity and impose order on Antonio, Sebastian and Caliban. In the end, he acknowledges Caliban, 'this thing of darkness, mine', i.e., no matter how much man aspires to be an angel, he can never quit the bestial within him. Hence, his art should finally be abandoned, and Prospero breaks his magic staff and sues for grace.

Other critics like A. W. Verity have also talked extensively about the themes of freedom and service in the play. Ariel's request for liberty in Act I, Scene (ii) introduces the theme of freedom. He is freed from the pine tree only to serve Prospero. He longs for the freedom of the clouds and waves, to hover about like the butterflies. At the end of the play, Prospero frees him from his service. Caliban, on the other hand, was once the lord of the island, but is now a slave. He wants freedom as a license to indulge in carnal pleasures. Ferdinand is a willing bondsman. He is first made captive by music, and then by Miranda's love:

*All corners else 'O' th' earth
Let liberty make use of space enough
Have I in such a prison.*

He exchanges his freedom for the bondage of love and is ready to live in prison, if from there he can see Miranda once a day.

NOTES

Associated with the idea of freedom is the theme of service. The thought that runs throughout *The Tempest* is that true freedom consists in the service of man. To Caliban, all service is slavery, to Ariel, it is a torment. While Caliban hates to serve Prospero, Ariel remains unconcerned with human emotions. Man alone finds pleasure in the service of man. Ferdinand patiently carries logs for the love of Miranda, who replies:

*I am your wife, if you will marry me,
... but I'll be your servant
Whether you will or no.*

For Prospero, freedom consists in breaking the magic staff and returning to the life of the court only to serve the people of Milan.

Frank Kermode has discussed the theme of nature and art in *The Tempest*. According to him, the main opposition in the play is between Prospero's art and Caliban's nature. On the one hand there is the world of nature symbolized by the natural, unsophisticated man in far-off places where civilization has not reached, and on the other, there is the world of art or civilization symbolized by the sophisticated courtiers and the court.

In the play, Caliban represents nature devoid of nurture. He is an ugly monster who doesn't know the restraints of temperance. However, he might be incapable of love and civilized graces, but at the same time, he is also incapable of the calculated criminality of Antonio and Sebastian. As Kermode says:

There are points in the play at which Shakespeare uses Caliban to indicate how much baser the corruption of the civilized can be than the bestiality of the natural, and in these places he is using his natural man as a criterion of civilized corruption, as Montague had done.

In the character of Caliban, Shakespeare has shown that if he does not possess the graces of civilization, he does not suffer from the corruption of civilization too.

A. C. Ward has observed that in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare discusses the theme of action and contemplation. Prospero was a duke and had the responsibility of his state on his shoulders. But, he was so given to thought and contemplation that he ignored his duties and withdrew himself into the world of studies. He himself admits:

*I, thus neglecting worldly ends, all dedicated
To closeness and the bettering of my mind ...
The effect on Antonio was that Prospero's trust:
... did beget of him
A falsehood ...
and incited ambition in him.*

But, Prospero is contemplative only before the play begins. In the play, he is a man of action. He punishes the wrongdoers and then forgives them. He strikes a balance at the end of the play. He says that his every third thought will be his grave. Naturally, his first and second thoughts will be the management of his state and the welfare of Miranda. Thus, Prospero was contemplative in the past, is active in the present, and will be active as well as contemplative in future.

William Shakespeare's
The Tempest

NOTES

Check Your Progress

4. What role does Ariel's request for liberty play?
5. What according to R. A. Zimbardo is the major theme of *The Tempest*?
6. What do the words 'virtue' and 'noble' signify in the play?

14.4 THE TEMPEST AS A TRAGI-COMEDY

Critics have observed that the last plays of Shakespeare can be called tragi-comedies rather than romances. With age and experience, the mood of Shakespeare seems to have altered and in these plays, he takes a kindlier view of human nature, dwelling on the necessity of forgiveness and reconciliation. At the same time, he clings to the old tragic mood—the characters of these plays are more threatening and dangerous than those of the comedies. Bonamy Dobrée has rightly said: 'Woven into the Romances is the ineradicable evil in life, which shocks us into realizing how perilous the human condition is.' Undoubtedly, Shakespeare deals with evil its extent, but what is most notable is that he now treats the restoration of order more fully than he had done in his tragedies.

The last comedies are, therefore, serious and solemn and lack the high-spirited gaiety and sunshine of the romantic comedies. They possess the elements of both tragedy and comedy, thus prompting critics to call them 'tragi-comedies'. G. I. Duthie has beautifully expressed this idea in his *Shakespeare*:

In the tragedies we feel that Shakespeare's attention is predominantly fixed on the terrible fact of disintegration—at the end, there is regeneration, certainly, but at a dreadful cost. In the three 'tragic-comedies', we feel the fact of disintegration, or near disintegration, and we feel that it is certainly a serious matter; but most of the times, we find ourselves watching a process of regeneration which takes place before the disintegration, serious enough, has become complete and in the end all is really rescued. Villainy dies, but not the suffering innocent.

Like the tragedies of Shakespeare, the last plays portray dark conspiracies, revolt, violence and the struggle for power. They are full of the dark crimes of Iachimo, Cloten and Cymbeline's Queen, and the murderous jealousy of Posthumus, Leontes, Antonio and Sebastian. In these plays, we do not have the character of the fool like

NOTES

Touchstone. Miranda and Perdita are merely pale shadows of the witty, brilliant and vivacious heroines like Portia and Rosalind. The world of these plays are hostile to its innocent heroines, a dark world of crimes where the devilish Caliban tries to molest the naive and unsuspecting Miranda, and there prevails murderous treachery of Antonio and Sebastian. In this connection, Bertrand Evans writes:

Despite what has been said of the romances as reflecting serenity after the storm of tragedy, the fact is that the worlds of the first three are the worst of Shakespeare's non-tragic worlds and at last no better than the tragic one, and, as for the world of the fourth, The Tempest, a proof that it is potentially the worst of all is the indispensability of its Prospero. Prospero is indispensable for the play because without his magic, the world of The Tempest cannot be imagined.

Shakespearean critics have pointed out that the guiding principles of *The Tempest* are not loss, restoration, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation. Shakespeare is, here, more concerned with the themes of freedom, appearance and reality, and the tempest as a symbol of turmoil, with music as the healing and harmonizing influence. The themes of loss and restoration, of penitence, forgiveness and reconciliation were more convincingly displayed in other last plays.

Prospero does not himself feel pity. It is Ariel who reminds him of the feelings of pity and tenderness. Moreover, forgiveness is meaningful only when the evil-doers feel repentant. No doubt, Prospero forgives the offenders but there is a nasty taste about the quality of his forgiveness. He forgives Antonio, but does not feel the emotion of forgiveness and there is something disturbing about his speech to his brother:

*For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault-all of them; and require
My dukedom, which perforce, I know,
Thou must restore.*

This is neither the forgiveness of a Christian nor the benevolence of a truly forgiving man. This emotion is Senecan in spirit, rather than Christian.

Sebastian and Antonio also do not feel repentant, and, till the end, are determined to fight 'one fiend at a time'. They refuse to be absorbed into final harmony and do not speak a single word about the reunion between Alonso and his son, the reconciliation of Naples and Milan and the blessings on Ferdinand and Miranda. As Anne Barton points out, their silence comes to press upon the happiness of others like an increasing and ominous weight. They are unfinished business of the play. Bonamy Dobrée has rightly commented that repentance and forgiveness remain as fossils in the play, rather than active principles.

The Tempest offers the audience only half knowledge, while, in earlier comedies, Shakespeare had offered a full knowledge. Alonso is not allowed to know about the treachery of his brother Sebastian. This lack of awareness runs counter to the spirit of comedy. Anne Barton has put this succinctly: 'The coming together of all the characters at the end, a meeting so long expected, only serves to stress the essential lack of relationship in ways that have an overtone of tragedy.'

The emotional reaction aroused by *The Tempest* is similar to the emotions generated by a tragedy. The characters of Caliban, Antonio and Sebastian refuse to be reformed till the end. Superficially, the ending of the play seems to be happy—Prospero wins back the throne of Milan; Alonso finds his son; Ariel is liberated and Caliban regrets that he had taken a drunkard for a god. Ferdinand and Miranda have been blessed and the ship, which has been saved from ruins, awaits them in a quiet bay.

But it is not quite so. The play, in fact, exposes the Renaissance passion for power and the evil within man. It is full of crimes, usurpation, murder, revolt and violence. Hence, the emotions called forth in the audience are akin to that of the great tragedies.

After all has been said about *The Tempest*, we cannot but agree that Shakespeare has made us feel, throughout the play, that we are not really in the realm of tragedy. He reassures us of a happy ending when all loose ends will be tied. The first hint of this comes from Gonzalo:

*I have great comfort from this fellow: methinks he hath no
Drowning mark upon him, his complexion is perfect gallows.*

The second hint comes from Prospero himself when, just after the tempest, he tells Miranda:

*Be collected;
No more amazement. Tell your piteous heart
There's no harm done.*

There is a sense of relief when we come to know that the storm has been raised by Prospero's magic. In the process, Prospero assures not only Miranda but also the audience of a possible reconciliation. There might not be true repentance or genuine forgiveness on the part of the principal characters, but there is a sort of compromise. Shakespeare seems to have compromised with evil, realizing that it cannot be uprooted completely from the human heart. Hence, it would not be wrong to conclude that *The Tempest* rightly falls in the category of tragicomedies, for here the elements of tragedy as well as comedy are to be found.

NOTES

NOTES

Check Your Progress

7. Name the scholar who wrote the following lines about Shakespeare: 'Woven into the Romances is the ineradicable evil in life, which shocks us into realizing how perilous the human condition is.'
8. Why is *The Tempest* considered to be a tragi-comedy?
9. What themes does Shakespeare seem concerned with in this play?

14.5 THE SUPERNATURAL IN *THE TEMPEST*

Shakespeare introduced the supernatural element in his plays to satisfy the fascination of the Elizabethan audiences for magic, their desire to see the strange and unnatural on the stage. The Elizabethans, who believed in the supernatural and were hungry for excitement, keenly enjoyed the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the witches in *Macbeth* and the ghosts in *Hamlet* and *Julius Caesar*. The coming of James I to London stimulated popular interest in the occult and magic, James having himself written a book on the subject, entitled *Daemonologie*.

'It may be', says J. R. Sutherland, 'that in Prospero and his magic, we have a dramatic study undertaken with at least one eye on the known interest of the learned Scottish king.' In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare has vividly described the supernatural world. We have in the play, fairies like Ariel and his ministers, a witch like Sycorax, a deformed monster, Caliban, the goddesses Ceres and Iris, and the greatest of them all, Prospero, a magician, the symbol of providence. The play is full of magic and enchantment, baffling noises, sounds and sweet airs, shifting haze of illusions and the bewildering confusions.

Strange things like the storm, the magic feast, the whisking away of the feast by the Harpy, the dance of the fairies and the masque take place in the play.

As Anne Barton says, '*The Tempest* is very much a drama of strange states of consciousness.' On such an enchanted island, it is natural that the mental condition of the characters should become abnormal. Characters fall helplessly into an enchanted sleep, as Miranda does in Act I, and Alonso and his company in Act II. Ferdinand has been captivated by the music of Ariel. Strangely enough, he forgets the sorrow of his father's death as soon as he sees Miranda, whom he mistakes for a goddess. When he challenges Prospero, he cannot raise his sword. He is all bound up in a dream. Alonso enters the play locked up in a lonely, intensely personal world of grief. He is only minimally aware of his followers when they try to assuage his troubled heart. The three sinful men, Antonio, Sebastian and Alonso, are driven into frenzy at the end of the banquet scene.

The world of the play is thus suffused with the supernatural element. In fact, the play derives its tone and colour from the fairies and the magician. It was necessary that the place where the supernatural is displayed should be far from the madding crowd so that its spell may not be destroyed. On the island, the atmosphere is electric with enchantment. As the story moves on, our sense of reality remains suspended.

The most important thing about the supernatural element in the play is that it does not serve only as a background, but also moves the action of the play. It is through magic that Prospero moulds the action of the play—the rising of the storm, scattering and confounding Alonso and his company on the island, punishing the guilty persons, liberating them from enchantment and finally, bringing them together. The terrors he raises on board the ship is to effect the separation of the royal company from one another—Ferdinand is to be separated from the others and is hence cast alone on the shore so that he meets Miranda, he falls in love with her.

It is to cement the relationship with ex-enemy Alonso (who plotted against Prospero's life). The storm is raised by Prospero by his magic with a view to bring them all onto the shore so that they could be taught a moral and he could get reconciled to them, for after all, all will 'dissolved' and 'leave not a rack behind'.

We are such stuff

As dreams are made on; and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.

Hence, in his 'little life', Prospero desires to be happy, for it will soon be 'rounded with a sleep'. Except Gonzalo and Prospero, none in the royal group understand this simple philosophy of life, based upon human love and affection. He finds men plotting against each others' lives for material gains. So, naturally, he is vexed with life: 'Bear with my weakness; my old brain is troubled.' Prospero is indeed a heroic soul, who alone can bear the vexations of life caused by the people around him and who can seek reconciliation with the worst of souls.

This is his powerful magic—he offers forgiveness without their asking for it, for then, there is greater nobility in it. His power over spirits and natural elements is poor compared with his magic of love and true affection for his erstwhile enemies and trustworthy friends. Trusting this magic, he breaks the staff, buries the books and moves away from them to Milan unaided by magic and weapons, wherein lies the true greatness of Prospero.

Man is no longer at the mercy of and controlled by destiny, but he himself personifies destiny in the play. Prospero is the symbol of providence and plays the role of God. He controls the supernatural world—the fairies and monsters may not be ready to serve him, but they are bound to carry out his commands. He is the supreme ruler on the island and exclaims:

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves

And ye that on the sands with printless foot

NOTES

NOTES

*Do chase the ebbing Neptune...
... by whose aid,
Weak masters though ye be I have bedimm'd,
The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,
And 'twixt the green sea and the azure vault
Set roaring war: to the dread-rattling thunder
Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak
With his own boat: the strong-based promontory
Have I made shake; and by the spurs pluck'd up
The pine and cedar: graves at my command
Have waked their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth
By my so potent art.*

Prospero describes many marvels he has produced with his magic. He has realized the ambition of Faust. He is the sound magician who, by virtue of his art, is a mighty God. In his actions, we see Shakespeare's conception of a divine being with mortals under his sway. It was Frank Kermode who first pointed out that Prospero (or Shakespeare) has closely followed the discipline of virtuous knowledge:

*His art is the achievement of an intellect, pure and conjoined
with the powers of the gods without which we shall never happily
ascend to the scrutiny of secret things and to the power of
wonderful workings.*

Prospero and Marlowe's Faustus are both reflections of the boundless possibilities offered by the Renaissance. But Prospero symbolizes the Puritan instinct of the Renaissance, the Renaissance of Lyly and Sidney, and not the one of Machiavelli or Marlowe. Prospero's magic is white magic, not black. He summons up no evil spirits, makes no pact with the devil and does not jeopardize his soul. Faustus studies magic because it is a forbidden knowledge, Prospero, because it is philosophical research. Faustus sells his soul to gratify his senses, Prospero uses his magic for his deliverance from evil persons.

The magic that Faustus studies is black art, Prospero's art is not diabolic and malignant, not even mischievously good. The forces he commands are those of nature. His magic comes from his book, from astronomy and cabalistic studies. It is an art external to himself, depending on calculations and spells, on the paraphernalia of magic—book, wand and mantle. Without these, he is powerless. His soul is clear of all dealings with evil. He is a benevolent magician. When he breaks his wand and buries his book, he is merely a learned prince.

The supernatural element in the play is used as the instrument of man's moral generation. The enchanted island is like the training centre of man's spiritual nature. A. W. Verity has pointed out that *The Tempest* does not play upon the superstitions of the Elizabethans more than the action requires. The supernatural element is treated strictly as the agency by which the plot is worked out. Thus, the mishaps that happen in the play are merely described, not enacted on the stage to please the groundlings.

The supernatural element in *The Tempest* can also be compared to that of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ariel and Puck are both small winged creatures with powers of extremely swift motion, and a love of mischievous tricks. But, the resemblances are superficial. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the fairies are superior to human beings. In *The Tempest*, man at his highest is represented by Prospero who is superior to the fairies. He controls the supernatural world completely. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon and Titania are the old world king and queen of fairyland, as they appear in poetry and romance from the days of Chaucer. While Puck is merely mischievous, Ariel is deeply touched by the sight of the misery of human beings. Like Puck, he cannot say, 'What fools these mortals be' and feels the stirrings of human emotion. It is he who suggests to Prospero that he should show mercy to the offenders. He says:

*Your charm so strongly works 'em,
That if you now beheld them, your affections
Would become tender.*

Check Your Progress

10. What is the prime reason of using 'the supernatural element' in Shakespeare's plays?
11. Name some of the supernatural creatures in the play *The Tempest*.

14.6 MASQUE IN *THE TEMPEST*

The masque is a form of private pageantry which flourished in England during the Renaissance. It was characterized by song, dance, lavish costume and extraordinary spectacle. Introduced in England from Italy, the masque flourished in the later part of Queen Elizabeth's reign and continued at the court of James I to reach its highest development in the time of Charles I. It dealt largely with mythological and pastoral figures. The action served as a vehicle for spectacle and for the appearance of marked dancers who joined the actors. Except for the dancers of the anti-masque, all performers were from the nobility and the royalty.

NOTES

NOTES

The masque was, therefore, a type of spectacular court entertainment. Originally, it was not a dramatic form but a diversion for courtiers in masks and costly costumes, usually representing gods and goddesses who acted out a very simple scene with dance and mimicry while a 'presenter' introduced each character. At the end of the masque, the performers, all amateurs, mingled with the audience in a grand masque ball.

A favourite time for masques was a wedding or similar festivity. The masques had only slight dramatic interest. Since they were essentially court amusements, they were usually performed in a large court building such as a banqueting hall. But, gradually, the masque spread beyond the court and dramatists followed the new fashion by incorporating elements from the masque in their plays, forming a play-within-play. Ben Jonson was the greatest among the writers of masques. In the masques, poetry was more prominent than the affairs of the human characters.

In Act IV of *The Tempest*, Prospero provides a masque for Ferdinand and Miranda. In this masque, mythological and pastoral figures appear, accompanied with song and dance and the celebration of a marriage. There is a traditional masque pattern of a blessing by classical goddesses. The giving of Miranda's hand to the young prince Ferdinand by the noble Prospero is the natural occasion for a masque within the play. Likewise, it was most appropriate when the play was performed at the wedding of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Frederick.

Masques often introduced mythological characters who were better suited to please an audience educated in the classical literature of ancient Greece and Rome. The masque in *The Tempest* brings in Iris, the Greek goddess of the rainbow, Ceres, the Roman goddess of earth's fruitfulness, Juno, the Roman queen of the sky with a particular concern for the welfare of women, and certain nymphs called naiads who were Greek fairies representing spring, rivers and lakes. The reapers, who are summoned by the nymphs, link the purely literary masque with the pastoral play of country life, though here they do no more than bring the masque to its conventional end in 'a graceful dance'.

The masque is one of the dramatic centers of the play. First we see Iris enter. She summons Ceres, then Juno descends. Juno and Ceres sing. Ferdinand wonders and exclaims:

*This is most majestic vision, and
Harmonious charmingly.*

Juno and Ceres whisper and send Iris on an errand. The nymphs and the reapers enter, appropriately dressed. The reapers join with the nymphs in a graceful dance. Towards the end of the dance, Prospero speaks and suddenly, the mythological characters vanish gloomily amidst a confusion of noises:

*These our actors
(As I foretold you) were all spirits, and*

Are melted into air, into thin air ...

... Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff

As dreams are made on, and our little life

Is rounded with a sleep.

William Shakespeare's
The Tempest

NOTES

The island becomes, for the moment, a place of imagined vision. Shakespeare accepts the philosophy of moral existence.

A customary part of the masque, following the solemn part, was the anti-masque in which the courtiers dressed as animals such as apes and bears and pursued the dancers. In *The Tempest*, the pursuit of the dukedom trio by Prospero's hounds serves as an anti-masque.

Some critics think that the play as a whole is a masque. Hallet Smith writes: 'There are situations, spectacle, music, contrasts of character and rich poetry in the play which make us overlook the fact that there is no significant dramatic struggle and that actually very little happens.'

Smith, finding music, spectacle, rich poetry and lack of action in the play thinks that the play is a masque.

But it is wrong to think that *The Tempest* as a whole is a masque, just as it would be wrong to say that there is no action in the play. The play opens with a storm at sea. In the first act, Ferdinand meets Miranda. He is enslaved by Prospero. We have here Ariel's fit of rebelliousness, Caliban's snarling and cursing and Prospero's stern handling of them. The second act shows the arrival of Alonso (and his company), Trinculo and Stephano.

In Act III, there are three conspiracies. Miranda defies her father's instructions and visits Ferdinand. Caliban plots against Prospero. Antonio and Sebastian plot against the life of Alonso. Two of these intrigues are disposed of in Act IV as Prospero releases Ferdinand from toil and consents to his betrothal with his daughter and then employs Ariel and the dog-spirits to chase and chasten Caliban and his allies. Then there is the famous cloud-capped towers speech. The last act gives us the end of the conspiracies. Many events take place—usurpation of kingdoms, conspiracies, storms, shipwreck, struggle for power, magic, art, masque, music, romance, rebellions, all are presented adequately in the play.

Nor would it be correct to say that the play is characterized by song, dance, costume and spectacle. The elements are there, especially in the masque in Act IV. But, it is wrong to say that they are the key-notes of the play. *The Tempest* is a bitter comedy, not a masque to be performed on the occasion of marriage. In this play, Shakespeare shows the inability of men to live together, in however small numbers, in however remote places, without making attempts to conspire against each others' lives and properties. The ending of the play is far more disturbing than that of other Shakespearean plays—it is serious and severe, lyrical and grotesque. It is a passionate reckoning of the real world. Before the play opens, there has

NOTES

been a rebellion, and the play further shows two more as it progresses. Prospero's account of the play is a summary of Machiavelli's *The Prince*. *The Tempest* is a Renaissance play of lost illusions and the struggle for power. Surely, it is not a masque but rather, a bitter comedy, or as most critics have said, a tragicomedy.

Check Your Progress

12. What do you understand by the term masque?
13. Give an example of a masque in *The Tempest*.
14. Prospero's account of the play can be seen as the summary of which work?

14.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS QUESTIONS

1. *The Tempest* was written towards the end of 1610 and the beginning of 1611.
2. In Miranda, Shakespeare portrays the quintessential innocence of a woman who has been taught by a wise teacher, but has not been sophisticated by experience.
3. In the play, Ariel is a spirit of the air, invisible to all except Prospero.
4. Ariel's request for liberty introduces the theme of freedom in the play.
5. R. A. Zimbardo has pointed out that the theme of *The Tempest* is the central conflict between order and chaos, the attempt of art to impose form upon the formless and the chaotic and the limitations of art in this endeavour.
6. In the play, the words 'virtue' and 'noble' are recurrently used, revealing the dramatist's concern with the nature of true nobility and generosity of soul.
7. The given lines were written by the critic Bonamy Dobrée.
8. *The Tempest* is considered to be a tragi-comedy as the elements of tragedy as well as comedy is found in the play.
9. In this play, Shakespeare is more concerned with the themes of freedom, appearance and reality, and the tempest as a symbol of turmoil, with music as the healing and harmonizing influence.
10. Shakespeare introduced the supernatural element in his plays to satisfy the fascination of the Elizabethan audiences for magic, their desire to see the strange and unnatural on the stage.

11. Some of the supernatural creatures from the play are—Ariel, a fairy; Sycorax, a witch; Caliban, a deformed monster; and Ceres, a goddess.
12. The masque is a form of private pageantry characterized by song, dance, lavish costume and extraordinary spectacle.
13. In *The Tempest*, Prospero provides a masque for Ferdinand and Miranda where mythological and pastoral figures appear accompanied with song and dance and the celebration of a marriage. There is a traditional masque pattern of a blessing by classical goddesses.
14. Prospero's account of the play is a summary of Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

William Shakespeare's
The Tempest

NOTES

14.8 SUMMARY

- *The Tempest* belongs to the group of plays often referred to as 'The Last Plays' of Shakespeare, or 'The Romances'.
- The plots in this category of Shakespeare plays are improbable, incredibly fantastic, full of magic, marvel and surprises. Here, Shakespeare explores the Renaissance ideals of the passion for power.
- Shakespeare, being the most representative dramatist of his age, was alert to perceive changes in the public taste and quick to adapt himself to the changed conditions. All the plays of this last phase were written to satisfy the new fashion, encouraged by the staging facilities for spectacle and romance of the indoor theater at the Blackfriars.
- *The Tempest* is a supreme expression of magical philosophy. It was written towards the end of 1610 and the beginning of 1611, to be performed by the king's men before Princess Elizabeth and her betrothed in 1612.
- As far as the sources of the play are concerned, *The Tempest* is associated with incidents which filled the thoughts of the nation at that time.
- *The Tempest* is the supreme expression of the mood of the final period. Prospero occupies the central position in the play.
- The older generation of characters—Prospero, Gonzalo, Antonio, Alonso and Sebastian—are divided by bitter wrongs and quarrels but brought together at the end in the magical atmosphere of reconciliation by the younger generation.
- Critics of Shakespeare have given a wide variety of opinions regarding the themes in *The Tempest*. Some refer to Shakespeare's state of mind and say that the play is an expression of the calm and serene condition of his mind and heart.

NOTES

- A closer reading of the play reveals some other themes—nature vs. nurture, fall and redemption, order vs. disorder, illusion vs. reality.
- Dowden and Furnivall have, at length, discussed repentance and forgiveness as the themes of *The Tempest*. In keeping with the moral preoccupations of his last plays, the theme of *The Tempest* revolves around reconciliation, with pardon and atonement for the sins of the offenders.
- Some critics have seen Prospero's action of forgiving his enemies in the light of Seneca's essay on anger rather than in the light of the mercy of Jesus, emphasizing a Shakespeare's a more stoic bent of mind of the playwright.
- *The Tempest* begins with a mystification of the characters. The play seems to be an illusion like a dream, but is full of reality.
- Prospero is the center of order, and Ferdinand and Miranda the agents. With the help of music, the symbol of order, Prospero struggles to impose order on his enemies, who symbolize disorder.
- Frank Kermode has discussed the theme of nature and art in *The Tempest*. According to him, the main opposition in the play is between Prospero's art and Caliban's nature.
- Critics have observed that the last plays of Shakespeare could be called tragicomedies rather than romances. With age and experience, the mood of Shakespeare seems to have altered and in these plays—he takes a kindlier view of human nature and dwells on the necessity of forgiveness and reconciliation.
- The most important thing about the supernatural element in *The Tempest* is that it does not serve only as a background but also moves the action of the play.
- Prospero and Marlowe's Faustus are both reflections of the boundless possibilities offered by the Renaissance.
- The supernatural element in the play is used as the instrument of man's moral generation. The enchanted island is like the training centre of man's spiritual nature.
- The masque was, therefore, a type of spectacular court entertainment. Originally, it was not a dramatic form but a diversion for courtiers in masks and costly costumes. In the masques, poetry was more prominent than the affairs of the human characters.
- A customary part of the masque, following the solemn part, was the anti-masque in which the courtiers dressed as animals such as apes and bears and pursued the dancers.

- *The Tempest* is a Renaissance play of lost illusions and the struggle for power. Surely, it is not a masque, but rather, a bitter comedy or as most critics have said a tragicomedy.

William Shakespeare's
The Tempest

14.9 KEY WORDS

- **Tragi-comedy:** It is a literary genre which showcases aspects of both tragic and comic forms.
- **Stoic:** It refers to someone who is not affected by worldly emotions, such as pleasure, pain or joy.
- **Nymph:** It refers to a minor female deity who personify features of nature.
- **Masque:** It was a form of amateur dramatic entertainment consisting of dancing and acting performed by masked players, popular among the nobility in 16th and 17th century England.
- **Usurpation:** It means taking someone's power or property by force.

NOTES

14.10 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What are the sources of the incidents in *The Tempest*?
2. Discuss the various themes present in *The Tempest*.
3. Write a short note on Prospero as the central character of the play.
4. Discuss the significance of the 'supernatural' element in *The Tempest*.

Long-Answer Questions

1. '*The Tempest* is the supreme expression of the magical philosophy.' Analyze the statement.
2. *The Tempest* showcases both 'tragedy' and 'comedy' elements of drama. Give an example of each.
3. How is the supernatural element in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* different from that of *The Tempest*?
4. Discuss the similarities (or differences) between Shakespeare's Prospero and Marlowe's Faustus.
5. Do you agree that *The Tempest* as a whole is a masque? Support your assertion with examples.

NOTES

14.11 FURTHER READINGS

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