

# PONDICHERRY UNIVERSITY

*(A Central University)*

DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

## SHAKESPEARE

*(Paper Code: MAEG2006)*



**MA (English) – II Year**

***DDE – WHERE INNOVATION IS A WAY OF LIFE***

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# PONDICHERY UNIVERSITY

( A Central University)

**DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**In**

**ENGLISH**



**Second Year**

**Course Code:60**

**Paper Code: MAEG2006**

**Shakespeare**

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**Master of Arts in English**

**Shakespeare**

**Expert**

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**MASTER OF ARTS**  
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**Shakespeare**

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**Suggested Reading:**

Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama – ed. Richard Hosley – routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London

The Growth & Structure of Elizabethan Comedy – M.C. Bradbrook – Chatto & Windus, London

Shakespeare's imagery and what it tells us – Caroline Spurgeon – Cambridge, University Press

Shakespeare's in His Age – F.E.Halliday, Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd

Shakespeare's Comedies – Bertrand Evans – Oxford at thye Clarendon Press

Shakespeare's Festive Comedies – C.L.Barber – Princeton, Newjersy

The Development of Shakespeare's imagery – W.H.Clemen – University Paperbacks

Essays on Shakespeare and Elizabethan Drama – ed. Richard Hosley – Routledge and Kegan paul ltd, London

Nature in Shakespearean Tragedy – Robert Spearght – Collier Books, N.Y

Some Shakespearean Themes – L.C. Knight- Chatto & Windus, London

## UNIT I

### 1. The Great Tragedies

#### What is drama?

Drama can be defined in countless ways. However, a definition of drama that incorporates the three key terms-imitative action, stage and audience- is a convincing one. Drama is nothing but a factual/fictitious imitative action that could be enacted on stage before an audience. Drama is one of the earliest genres of literature. Every human being has an inherent impulse either to pretend he/she is someone or something else or to see such a pretention. For instance, in a classroom when the teacher asks the student why was he late to the class, the student pretends that he was late because of a seriously genuine reason. In some cases the teacher also pretends and excuses the student taking his reason for late coming seriously. Students of the entire class were enjoying these pretentions.

Quite often in our lives, we enact more dramas than encountering real life situations. That's why William Shakespeare calls life itself a 'tale'. Ultimately drama is nothing but a product of the instinctive pleasure in the imitative action. Drama is unique and different from the other literary genres because drama is a community art. Unlike the other literary genres which can be produced by an individual in solitude, drama involves and integrates the entire community. Drama is intended to be performed and not to be read as in the case of other literary genres. Aristotle says that the dramatic poets "represent people in action". John Marston wrote in 1606, "Dramas are writ to be spoken not read." Moliere puts it more effectively, "Dramas are made to be played, not to be read." Marjorie Boulton stresses further by saying that drama is "literature that walks and talks before our eyes."

#### Origins

As every classical and modern critic would invariable agree with, drama is founded in religion. In the West and the East, drama was strongly connected to religion. In the recorded history of world drama, we first hear of drama only in connection with the rustic festivals held in honour of Dionysius, the god of wine, otherwise called the Bacchic festivals of early Greece. Historians who traced the history of drama say that drama was born in Greece around 600 BCE. The Greeks were organizing drama contests as part of the rustic festivals.

## 1.1 Greek Theatre

In Greece, theatre activity was much regulated. Tickets for drama were distributed only through a local town council called *deme* to each citizen whose public record was good. Froma Zeitlin, a prof. of Greek Language and Literature, confirms this by saying, “theatre attendance was thus closely linked to citizenship.” On a single festival day, three plays which are thematically linked together were performed in subsequent order and these plays are called trilogy. Minimal costumes were used and no properties were used in a typical Greek theatre.

Masks were used to represent characters. Men were playing the role of women characters. Thespis, the earliest theatre person we hear of, defines theatre as an art of acting a part on stage. Our etymological hunt for the term ‘thespian’ leads us to this famous person. Almost all the Greek plays were performed in large hillside fan shaped theatres called amphi theatres. The first theatre arena in early Greece was Acropolis, a temple ground, beyond which Mount Hymettus made a distant background. It was only this structure of the temple ground with three-sided landscape and a hill/mountain as a backdrop that later formed the idea of the frame for a proscenium stage. The stage was called the *skene* and the spectators were called *theatrons*.

Of the hundreds of tragedies performed around 400 BCE in Acropolis temple ground which housed nearly 14000 to 20000 people as audience, only less than 35 plays survive. All these surviving tragedies are based on myths. An old man with a gusty voice would use masks and dramatize the whole content of the play on the stage. These performances were bare, stark, simple, and yet powerful. There was nothing new in these plays as the Greek dramas were based on the myths that were already familiar with the people. However, hundreds of people flocked to the theatre and watched these plays for the sheer truth that was demonstrated.

### Notable dramatists

Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are considered the great trio of the Greek theatre on whom the very pedestal of Greek drama stands. The essence of drama in its perfect and purest form bloomed in the plays of these tragedians in such an impressive way that even the forthcoming generations can enjoy its fragrance and revel in its beauty.

Aeschylus was born in Athens in the year 525 BCE. Several dramatic competitions were held at that time, and people used to participate with zest. The first competition of its kind was held in Athens in 534 BCE and Thespis won the first prize. Aeschylus too strove to participate in such competitions and won a prize. Some of his popular plays include *The Suppliants*, *Seven*

*against Thebes, Prometheus Bound, etc.* Aeschylus contributed a lot to the development of theatrical effects and laid the foundation on which Euripides and Sophocles could develop. Aeschylus, who is well known for his famous work *Oresteia*, introduced the concept of second actor on stage and also expanded the possibilities of a well knit plot.

Sophocles, the innovator of the third actor in Greek Drama, is considered the most accessible of the central trio of Greek tragedies. From his *Ode to Colonus*, critics wildly guess that Sophocles was probably born in 496 BCE at Colonus, near Athens. Of the 118 plays written by Sophocles, only seven plays survive. Being the apex of Greek tragedies, Sophocles left a legacy powerful enough to elevate him as one of the founding fathers of Western drama. Sophocles died in the year 406 BCE. Some of his works include, *Oedipus Rex, Ajax, and Women of Trachis, etc.*

Euripides was the youngest of the three tragedians. Though he was a contemporary of Sophocles, his ways, approaches and techniques were quite different. Some of his plays include *Orestes, Electra, Hecuba, Hippolyta, etc.* Euripides, known for his magnum opus *Medea*, created the ultimate form of drama by making the stage far more naturalistic.

### **Aristotle's *Poetics***

*Poetics*, the treatise on Drama, was widely considered one of Aristotle's most demanding and rewarding texts. The precise origins of *Poetics* are not known. And yet, researchers believe that it would have been written around 330 BCE and was preserved primarily through Aristotle's students' notes. Despite its vague beginnings, *Poetics* continues to be the central document for the study of aesthetics of drama for centuries. Standing in opposition to the theory of art propounded by Plato in *Republic*, *Poetics* offers profound returns to the diligent readers of drama. Aristotle holds tragedy in the highest position of all the genres. He regards tragedy as the noblest form of art. In *Poetics*, Aristotle recognizes six elements of tragedy-*plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle and song.* Of all these essential ingredients of drama, plot, according to Aristotle, is the soul of tragedy. Aristotle laid down certain precepts to be followed by a tragedian. He insisted on the three unities-*unity of action, unity of place and unity of time.* According to the three unities, a play should concentrate on a single action, should cover only events not exceeding 24 hours and should not have more than one locale. It is also believed that Aristotle insisted only on two unities and the unity of action was actually appended by renaissance critics.

A tragic hero, in Aristotle's view of drama, is not an eminently 'good man' nor is he necessarily a 'paragon of virtue'. For the fall of a virtuous man can only shock us and will not arouse pity and fear, but sympathy, and hence it is not suitable for tragedy. The fall of a completely villainous character is also not approvable as we can only feel satisfied and happy at his defeat, and tragedy will not serve its fundamental purpose. Therefore, an ideal tragic hero should be a noble man and his fall from eminence to disaster is due to some fault in his own character. Another important trait of the tragic hero is that he should be superior to the average man because he has to put his interests second and live for the greater good of the country. Despite his nobility, the hero should have an excessive pride in his character called *hubris*. Oedipus is, no doubt, a man of virtues but his arrogance that he would discover the truth and his undying curiosity to 'know the truth' are signs of his *hubris*. Irrespective of whatever the hero does-good or bad- a tragic fall would occur because of his fate, which is what Aristotle calls *hamartia*.

Oedipus has been a messiah of the masses in his kingdom and without a fault of his own, he suffers and falls miserably because of *hamartia* which means "an error of judgement" or "missing the mark". It is the tragic flaw/ some fault in the character of the hero, because of which, and not because of violating some law of god, he falls. The hero errs, either out of ignorance, or in hastiness, or may be voluntarily. Northrop Frye, the chief architect of archetypal criticism, sees the fall of the tragic hero as an affirmation of moral order. In any tragedy, there is a fusion of grief and joy towards the end of the play and the audience laments over the fall of the hero and rejoices in the resurrection of his spirit. The hero's struggle against hostile forces would end in defeat and ultimately in his fall/death. Such a fall from a greater height would evoke the twin emotions-pity and terror- in the minds of the audience resulting in *catharsis*.

Aristotle defines *catharsis* as the 'purgation' of the twin emotions of pity and fear. Tragedy rouses these emotions that lie latent within us, and which we bring with us. Once these emotions are purged, all the excesses and defects are removed. After identifying emotionally with the characters and scenes enacted on stage and shedding tears, audience would exit the theatre space relieved of all their anxieties about life. Aristotle also refers to two important mechanisms by which a play can be developed-reversal and recognition. *Anagnorisis* means discovery or recognition, which involves a change from ignorance to knowledge. The hero on the stage suddenly becomes aware of the situation in which he is caught and undergoes realization.

In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus' sudden exposure to the truth is a classic example. *Peripeteia* is interpreted as "reversal" in the fortunes of the hero. It is the fall of a noble man from a potentially good fortune to one of bad due to some fault in his own character. It is the ironic twist of fate due to which the main action becomes full circle. For example, in *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus curses the 'accursed polluter of the land' not knowing that he is the actual polluter and thus, he finally lands up in an abyss. Denouement is a 'resolution' or the final part of a play in which the strands/knots of the plot are drawn together and resolved. While weaving a plot, the dramatist should make sure that the denouement is effective and successful.

## **1.2 Renaissance Drama**

### **Beginnings of English Drama**

The period of medieval drama follows the fall of the Roman Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century C.E. and continues as the Renaissance movement in Europe in the middle of the 5th century. It is ironical that the church, the force that had worked most to suppress Roman drama completely, should have been the place where English drama had to take its birth. The church condemned ancient theatre because it was said to be ridiculing Christianity and even considered to be associated with paganism. The mime tradition was also under ban as it was considered to be coarse and vulgar. But, medieval drama is not a direct descendent of the Roman theatrical tradition. It is totally something new that took birth in the liturgy of the church, in its solemn services where this ancient art form was revived and given a very pious inclination, shape and turn, to represent this newly emerging religion called Christianity.

### **Mysteries and Miracles**

These religious plays had their beginnings in France. With the advent of the Norman King William, these plays made their way to England and came to be called Miracles and Mysteries. These plays dealt with the lives of saints, or narrated the lives of Christ and Virgin Mary. Some even dealt with the Old Testament and the coming of the saviour. With time, it steadily grew in number as well as in popularity. However, it was strictly under the control of the priests. Drama could not detach itself from the clutches of religion. But, by the year 1300, it succeeded in freeing itself from the ecclesiastical forces and went out to the market places and became independent. Wealthy trade guilds of the town took charge of the dramatic productions. Dramas were performed on large scaffolds called pageants that could be drawn by horses all around the town.

Some of the popular plays are *The Three Maries*, *Shepherd's Play* and *Noah's Deluge*. By the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, all these plays had combined to form cycles, starting with Creation of the world ending with the Last Judgement. Often it incorporated stories about the lives of saints and that of Christ. The famous cycles in England were the York plays, the Coventry plays, the Chester and the Wakefield plays. However, while still being a part of the church, the dramas were performed in Latin, it being the language of the liturgy. Services were conducted in Latin. With time, French was the first language to supplant it. This happened with the Norman Conquest. Finally the vernacular replaced it when dramas left the sacrosanct of the church.

### **Moralities**

The Mysteries and the Miracles advanced into the Moralities, another step in the evolution of English drama. As the name suggests, these plays were moralistic and were famous for their abstract and allegorical characterizations such as Virtue, Mercy, Gluttony, Wisdom, Peace or Hope. The most famous characters were the Devil and the Vice, who were the butt of every joke. Regarding morality plays, George Sampson remarks, "In following the progress of religious folk drama, with its happy air of improvisation, towards the end of moral contest, with its more formal argument, we gradually pass from anonymity to known authorship, and the time being fortunate, from manuscript to print." *Everyman in his Humour* is perhaps the best known morality play. The theme of the play is that everyman is summoned by Death. But it is only the virtue of honesty and faith in religion that can drive away the fear of this inevitable call. Some other popular plays include, *The Marriage of Wit and Wisdom*, *The Castle of Perseverance*, John Skelton's *Magnificence*, Sir David Lindsay's *The Poet of the Scotch Reformation* etc. The morality plays too enjoyed great popularity, but were often criticized for their crude and farcical elements. However, it is obvious that these plays had a great impact on the Renaissance plays, for even Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* depicts the God and the Bad Angels, and the Devil too, which are but characters straight from the Moralities.

### **Interludes**

The last predecessor of drama, i.e. the Interlude, flourished in the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was a short play with characters such as citizens or monks. There were no allegorical representations. It often combined farcical elements and there used to be songs too. These plays were usually performed in the courts for entertainment. John Heywood was perhaps the best

known writer of interludes and is known for his famous *The Four P's*. Some other well-known plays include *Johan Johan*, *The World and the Child* etc.

Here, the comment of W.J. Long is worth to be mentioned – “All these early plays were written, for the most part, in a mingling of prose and wretched doggerel, and add nothing to our literature. Their great work was to train actors to keep alive the dramatic spirit, and to prepare the way for the true drama” that flourished during the Renaissance or the Elizabethan Age.

## **English Renaissance**

The term Renaissance was first used by the French historian Jules Michelet in his book *Historie de France* in 1855. Scholars and historians immediately picked it up and used it to describe an age unique in history, but they weren't really able to define it. While people are still debating over its meaning, Abrams and Harpham describe it as “the birth of the modern world out of the ashes of the dark ages; as the discovery of the world and the discovery of man; as the era of untrammelled individualism in life, thought, religion and art.” Some scholars, finding that certain features pertaining to the renaissance could be found in various other people and places, argued that Renaissance as such never existed. On a closer examination, one can see that certain denominations, attitudes or temperaments that were nurtured at the time of Shakespeare, could not be found in the Chaucerian age. There were several events taking place in every field, new scientific discoveries, and emergence of new intellectual, religious and political thoughts that marked a character unique to this golden period.

Renaissance called for the effort of an individual to cry for freedom from rigid institutions like feudalism and the church. There was development in science and technology and people became skeptic about the existence of God. They learnt to live, think and express themselves freely. Individualism became the hallmark of this age. Humanism stood against religion. Questions were raised, and man struggled to emerge free without following the dogmas dictated by the church.

Renaissance spirit is, indeed, “a fabulous bird of paradise which cannot perch or rest ever since nature has denied it feet”.

Renaissance also had much to do with the development of English drama. Drama in this period became fully secular. In the words of Edward Albert, “the bold and critical attitude of the time was in keeping with the dramatic instinct, which is analytic and observant.” In this period,

“drama made a swift and wonderful leap into maturity. Yet it had still many early difficulties to overcome. The actors themselves were at variance, so much so that outrageous brawls were frequent.” Theatres were also closed down sometime in between.

### **The Pre-Shakespearean Period ( 1500-1579)**

The period of Marlowe is the Pre-Shakespearean age or the youth of Renaissance. The influence of the classical studies led to the production of the earliest dramas which came about the year 1500. Dramatists imitated the classical attitudes and English drama got its Five Act structure with set scenes, and several other features.

### **The First Tragedy**

The first English tragedy *Gorboduc* was written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton. The play later came to be known as *Ferrex and Porrex*. It was performed before Queen Elizabeth on January 18, 1561. The king of Britain Gorboduc divided his kingdom between his two sons Ferrex and Porrex, who later fell to dissension. To have it all, the younger brother killed the elder. Later he was murdered by the mother for she loved the elder son better. The enraged public rose in rebellion and slew both the king and the queen. This infuriated the nobility who most horribly destroyed the rebels. Later, for want of a successor, the people fell to civil war and the land remained wasted for a long period of time.

The play emphasizes the need for concord and unity in times of crisis. Its first show was spectacular enough to call for a second performance in the Queen’s presence. The play has five acts- three were by Norton, and the other two by Sackville. For the first time, blank verse was used and was a crude attempt of Sackville and Norton, but it subsequently refined and improved the manuscript. Its authorized version came out in the year 1571.

### **The First Comedy**

The first comedy which came out in the year 1541 is Ralph *Roister Doister*, written by Nicholas Udall. Dame Cunstance is a rich widow who is plighted to a merchant named Gawin Goodluck. Ralph Roister, a wealthy but foolish braggart, is fooled by a trickster Matthew Merygreek to believe that he is in love with Dame Cunstance. While the merchant is away on a voyage, Ralph tries to woo with words of flattery and tokens of love but in vain. He even attempts to take her by force from her home, but is defeated by her maid servants. The play happily ends with the return of Gawin Goodluck and reconciliations. This play was the first English comedy, and had some elements of both the moralities and the interludes. It has stereotype as that of a

Shakespearean comedy. What else can be the perfect plot of comedy other than love? The heroine plays the dominant role here, but is a victim of flattery.

### **The University Wits**

The year 1576 was a landmark year for it saw the rise of five important theatres that revolutionized drama. They were- the Rose, the Globe, the Swan, the Fortune, and the Blackfriars. During this period, there came up seven dramatists who were the real fashioners of drama, namely- Thomas Lodge, Robert Greene, Thomas Kyd, John Lyly, Thomas Nashe, George Peele, and the kingpin Christopher Marlowe. They were popularly called the 'University Wits' because they were associated with the universities of Cambridge or Oxford. All of them were both actors and dramatists. Hence they were fully aware of the needs of both the stage and the audience, which they fully utilized while writing their plays. They mostly worked together and had a common store house of materials from which they borrowed their plots. One can thus find quite a lot of repetition of names in their works.

All of them were Bohemians. They had some fascination with the Bohemian club of the Grub Street. They were careless, ungodly, heavy drinkers and maverick too. They were known for their high anti-establishment attitude (at that point of time, it meant anti-church). Marlowe was the pioneer of the group. He was a branded atheist and epicure and played with anagrams. But whatever they were in actual life, they laid a sure basis for the English theatre.

### **1.3 Shakespearean Theatre**

#### **Shakespearean period or the Elizabethan Age (1579-1602)**

Renaissance attained its maturity in this period in the hands of William Shakespeare. Shakespeare was a revolutionary in the sense that, following Marlowe, he violated all the tenets laid down by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. But he was a true classical master for he brought back the classical drama of the Greeks. With the rise of Christianity, drama had changed. It had become moralistic upholding the poetic justice that the virtue was rewarded and the vice was punished. It was not so in the Greek plays. With the emergence of Shakespeare, dramas went back to the classical. In his plays, the bad are punished; the good suffer too. He also brought back the psychological complexity which was there in the Greek plays. Shakespeare brought back everything- suppressed fear, diabolism, humans changing into animals, criminals, racists, Jews, cannibals...He has the canvas of life!

### **Theatre during the times of Shakespeare-**

Theatre during the times of Shakespeare was no longer under the control of the church or the trade guilds. For this reason, dramatists had to devise ways to attract audiences who were ready to pay for the stage performances. This resulted in certain important changes. For example, theatres then were enclosed spaces where only limited access was allowed. Moreover, the plays had to be written considering the tastes of the audience in order to hold their interest. Plays had to be regularly changed too so that they kept returning to the theatre. Shakespeare too followed these conventions. He always penned his plays for the audience, keeping their interests in view. But he smeared each of his plays with such genius that the audience not just saw the characters moving on the stage, but felt them living within/among them.

### **Identity of Shakespeare-**

There are several controversies regarding the identity of Shakespeare. No one really knows who he was. Some historians believe that Shakespeare was a fraud, and all the plays in his name were written by Ben Johnson. There are several other names too that have been proposed. Shakespeare died in 1616 and only nine of his plays were published in his name. So, what about the rest? A. D. Wright asserts that Marlowe did not die at Deptford in a drunken brawl. Four months after the supposed Deptford murder, Field published *Venus and Adonis* using the name of Shakespeare. Some believe that the plays published in this name were actually written by Marlowe. Calvin Hoffman discovered four hundred parallels between Marlowe and Shakespeare. Members of the “Declaration of Reasonable Doubt” including Mark Twain, Henry James, Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charlie Chaplin, Sigmund Freud, and John Galsworthy doubt the authenticity of Shakespeare. Henry James went to the extent of saying, “I am haunted by the conviction that the divine William is the biggest and most successful fraud ever practiced on a patient world.”

Whatever may be the case, despite all accusations, the man is still acclaimed to be one of the greatest dramatists who ever lived. Shakespeare even overshadowed Marlowe by his supreme genius. After Shakespeare, there was a complete vacuum. There was no strong activity in the field of drama. Many writers continued, but none of them was prominent. Shakespeare’s influence is heavy even today and has spread crossing geographical boundaries.

### **Features of Shakespearean Tragedies-**

1. Shakespeare’s tragic heroes fall from their good fortunes due to some fault in their character called *hamartia*. Macbeth fell due to his over-reaching ambition and King

Lear due to his excessive passions, Hamlet kept procrastinating and Othello's jealous nature led to his downfall.

2. The tragic heroes are neither saintly nor evil, but good and virtuous characters who fall due to some tragic flaw. This rouses the emotions of pity and fear among the audience.
3. The tragic heroes are mostly great in their stature, rank and wealth- kings, leaders or influential public figures. This makes their downfall even more tragic.
4. In Shakespearean tragedies, character is destiny, unlike the Greek tragedies where destiny is character. This can be proved by shifting the roles of Hamlet and Othello. If Othello plays the role of Hamlet, he would have killed his Uncle in the very first scene itself. The play would have ended in the first scene. Similarly if Hamlet plays the role of Othello, he would not have killed his wife Desdemona because he is a man of inaction and procrastination. The play would be endless.
5. This however doesn't reduce the role of the supernatural elements that often act as manipulative external agents in his plays, although the freedom of choice always rests with the heroes. For Example, the witches in Macbeth lead him to the dagger dripping with blood.
6. A Shakespearean tragedy begins with order, but ends in chaos.
7. Fate or Chance plays an important role on the Shakespearean stage. This brings dramatic irony into effect.
8. There is no poetic justice in the world of Shakespeare. The bad are punished, but the good suffer too. Sometimes this results in tragic waste. In *King Lear*, Edmund is mortally wounded by Edgar, Goneril poisons Regan and commits suicide, Cordelia is executed, and Lear dies too.
9. The wisest of men pass as fools or clowns in Shakespearean tragedies. In *King Lear*, the fool clearly expresses discontent with Lear's decision of disinheriting Cordelia and dividing the state between the two daughters.
10. Motif plays a vital role in the tragedies of Shakespeare. In Othello, the handkerchief motif is the pulse of the play.

## 1.4 HAMLET

*in my heart there was a kind of fighting*

*That would not let me sleep*-Hamlet (Act V Scene II).

### **Background**

Hamlet is one of the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare and remains universal even today. Hamlet by Shakespeare is a global text. It is universal even in the 21st century. It contests the sea of European texts. Though the precise origins of the original text *Hamlet* are not known, scholars agree that the play got published between 1601 and 1603. Set in Denmark, Hamlet, King Claudius, Queen Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes and Horatio play dominant roles in the play. The play has major thematic concerns like fate versus free will, individual morality, political volatility, mortality of man, incest and regicide etc. The play also gained popularity for its often quoted soliloquy of Hamlet expressing the existential predicament of human beings in this universe: "To be, or not to be? That is the question." In Shakespearean tragedies, the tragic hero possesses a tragic flaw which pulls him down from an elevated height. Hamlet too has a tragic flaw: procrastination- inability to do things promptly. As a common practice during those times, Shakespeare borrowed the raw materials for his plays from earlier literary sources. It is assumed that the material of Hamlet would have been borrowed from the Latin history of Denmark compiled by Saxo Grammaticus and *Histoires Tragiques*, a work by the French writer François de Belleforest.

Shakespeare had the tendency and talent to appropriate all the available materials to suit his own purpose. The story of a Danish prince whose uncle murders the prince's father, marries his mother, and claims the throne had also undergone several changes in the minds of the bard before it reached the audience as one of the best tragedies they ever watched. In Greek Drama, destiny is the character. In spite of his nobility, integrity and honesty, Oedipus suffered and faced humiliation not because of his conscious acts but of his fate. But, Shakespeare reverted this dictum into a totally different tenet: Character is the destiny. Hamlet falls not only because of his fate but also because of some inherent weaknesses. Similar way, all other tragic heroes of Shakespeare. For example, if we play a reversal of roles in the plays of Shakespeare, the framework of Shakespearean tragedies would crumble on its own. Let us keep Hamlet in the place of Othello and vice-versa and see what happens. Othello would have killed Claudius immediately after being directed by the ghost because he is a man of over hasty nature. And on the other hand, Hamlet would not have killed Desdemona because he is a man of inaction. He

would have kept on brooding over her immorality. The moment we change the roles, the plays would face a log jam. Here lies the greatness of the characterization of Shakespeare.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

The Play begins with the projection of Hamlet, the protagonist, in deep despair. Hamlet, who is in Germany, has been summoned to Denmark to attend his father's funeral. Surpassing his shock over his father's death, his mother Gertrude's remarriage with his uncle Claudius comes as a volcanic eruption. On a dark winter night, Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, is informed by the night-time guard about the appearance of a mysterious ghost resembling Senior Hamlet the former King of Denmark who has recently died. Horatio, a scholar friend of Hamlet was sent to see this apparition. Though Horatio was initially skeptical, he sees the ghost and reports its appearance to Hamlet. In the intervening time, Claudius, Old Hamlet's brother has been crowned as a new king of Denmark. As per the existing tradition, Claudius has married Old Hamlet's widow, Gertrude.

Though Hamlet is physically present at the wedding celebration, he is mentally upset over the wedding. He is thoroughly sickened by his mother's over hasty decision to marry Claudius so soon after his father's demise. Hamlet considered this marriage as "foul incest." He has a turbulent mind because Claudius has already crowned himself the King when Hamlet stands a legal chance as he is the actual heir to the throne. Hamlet is thoroughly confused about the state of affairs. As Horatio informs Hamlet of the appearance of the ghost, he has made up his mind to encounter the ghost himself. Meanwhile, Polonius, the court adviser, along with his son, Laertes coercively advises his daughter Ophelia about her relationship with Hamlet. As Ophelia says that Hamlet has been in love with her, Polonius warns her to avoid Hamlet and reject his romantic advances. On the same night, Hamlet accompanies the watchman to confirm whether the ghost really appears or just an illusory object. But, the ghost appears before him and signals Hamlet to come alone.

When Hamlet questions the reason for the repeated haunting of the spirit to the palace, the ghost replied gloomily that it is nothing but the spirit of his father, and that he was indeed murdered by none other than his uncle Claudius. It vanishes with the dawn of the day commanding Hamlet to seek revenge on his uncle Claudius who usurped his throne and married his wife. Hamlet is also informed that Claudius murdered his father in order to usurp his throne and to have his wife. The ghost manages persuading Hamlet to make a promise that he would

avenge his father's death. He, in turn, made Horatio and the guards promise not to reveal whatever happened between him and the ghost.

In Act Two, Hamlet dedicates all his time to avenge his father's death. Though he was thinking too much on the act of revenge he becomes a victim of the same- 'thinking too much'. He doubts the ghost's version of the murder and at times he even suspects whether the ghost is his father's or someone else's. As part of his meditative behavior, he delays what he has decided to do. His thoughts immobilize him from acting swiftly. He becomes a man of inaction. As a result of his continuous brooding over the ghost's interaction with him and also of his procrastination, he suffers a lot. He almost becomes a split personality and develops an inner conflict. The inner turmoil pushed him into a depressed state and even apparent madness.

Since Hamlet started behaving in the most unpredictable and distressing way, Claudius and Gertrude summon two of Hamlet's school friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, to explore the reasons for his madness. Meantime, Polonius suspects that Ophelia's rejection of Hamlet's love for her would have made him forsaken. In order to test whether Hamlet's madness is a result of unrequited love, Polonius and Claudius decide to spy on Hamlet in conversation with Ophelia. Contrary to their expectations, Hamlet exhibits a strange behavior by shouting at her to land up in a nunnery and even goes to the extent of expressing his earnest wish to ban marriages. Throughout the conversation, he seems mad and restless. Examining the circumstances, Claudius states that he doesn't think that Hamlet is mad because of his unreciprocated love for Ophelia. He further adds that Hamlet is distressed because of some other reason.

In this psychological crisis, Hamlet's only solace comes in the form of a drama troupe from England. It does not only come as a solace but also as a blessing in disguise for Hamlet. Keeping his plans in mind, Hamlet asks the troupe player's whether they could play a tragedy for him. It is obvious that Hamlet plans to perform a play that depicts the death of his father and wants to sense the reaction of Claudius on seeing the murder scene. If his facial expressions reveal that he is really guilty, then for Hamlet the ghost is really to be trusted. Hamlet uses this opportunity to test the validity of the ghost's testimony to the truth and also the integrity of his uncle Claudius.

In Act Three Hamlet is all prepared to perform his play "The Mouse Trap." Hamlet prepared the players to perform a scene which would be an exact replica of the murder of his father so that Claudius will react if he is really guilty. After giving clear stage directions to the actors in their respective parts, Hamlet moves to the audience arena, where Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, and Polonius have been seated, along with others. As the play progresses, both Gertrude and Claudius become extremely upset. Gertrude is ruffled because she identifies herself with the character on the stage. She feels that she has been accused of hypocrisy and inconsistency in her marrying Claudius immediately after the death of her husband.

Claudius is almost traumatized because he feels guilty of his brother's murder. Close to the murder scene of the play, Claudius springs up and leaves the theatre. Hamlet and Horatio decide that his abrupt exit proves his guilt. Confirming that Claudius is the real murderer of his father, Hamlet proceeds to slay Claudius but finds him in prayer. Here again, Hamlet misses an opportunity to kill his father's murderer as he believes that killing Claudius in prayer would be inappropriate. A belief is prevalent that if one is killed in prayer, he will be sent to heaven. He decides to wait for him to finish his prayer. Sensing the danger, Claudius decides that he must somehow get rid of Hamlet and is determined to send him to England.

After the play, Gertrude summons Hamlet to her chamber to rebuke him for his horrible insinuations through the play performed. Hamlet becomes wild accusing her of a most ludicrous lust and of insulting her father and herself by stooping to marry Claudius. Throughout the conversation, Polonius is hiding behind a tapestry. At a moment, fearing that Hamlet would attack Gertrude, Polonius cries for help. As a strange noise emanated from behind the tapestry, Hamlet mistakes that the king is hiding behind, draws his sword and stabs through the tapestry, killing Polonius. In a fit of rage, Hamlet then returns to his mother to kill her. Suddenly the ghost of Old Hamlet reappears and tells Hamlet not to behave so brutally to his mother, and orders him to execute revenge on Claudius. On seeing her son articulating with nothing but air, Gertrude is assured of his madness. But, Hamlet tells her that he is not in fact insane. He echoes his strongest message again that he detests her impetuous nature and she should genuinely regret her marriage to Claudius.

For killing Polonius, Claudius immediately dispatches Hamlet to England to be accompanied by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In addition to his plan to banish Hamlet, Claudius writes a letter to the King of England demanding him to put Hamlet to death immediately upon his

arrival. Back at the Danish palace, Ophelia has gone mad hearing about her father's death. Lamenting her father's death, Ophelia goes mad with woes and drowns in the river. Enraged by this, Laertes her brother who has been away in France, quickly comes back to Denmark, demanding an explanation for his father Polonius' death. Claudius cunningly convinces him that Hamlet is to be held responsible for the predicament of his sister and the death of his father.

In an unforeseen development, Hamlet's ship to England was attacked by pirates, who captured him and arranged for his return to Denmark demanding a ransom. Hamlet sends letters about his immediate return to Denmark after this untoward incident to Horatio and Claudius. Shocked by the imminent return of Hamlet, Claudius devises a plot to exploit Laertes' fury for revenge to get rid of Hamlet. Laertes is vulnerable enough to oblige Claudius and both of them decide that Hamlet should be eliminated at any cost. A sword fight between Laertes and Hamlet is arranged and the same is later announced by a foolish courtier by name Osric. Claudius very meticulously poisoned Laertes' sword so as to ensure Hamlet's immediate death if wounded in the dual. As a standby, Claudius keeps a cup of poisoned wine to be offered to Hamlet during the sword fight. The story has reached its climax and the stage is set for the final blood bath.

The Last Act is set in a graveyard. The grave digger scene is one of the most powerful scenes in literature as it exposes the absurdity of human existence. Hamlet is captivated by the way the gravediggers trivialize the funeral rites. He in fact starts befriending death and considered mortality as normal. The gravediggers actually mocks at their morbid profession of burying the dead and this is evident when the grave digger sends his fellow digger to have a cup of liquor, and then commences to dig, casually singing songs throughout. In *Hamlet*, the gravediggers' scene is a prominent junction where seriousness mingles with the comic element. It also serves as a comic relief in the rising tragic action of the play. Ophelia's funeral begins without any elaborate customary rites as there are misgivings about the nature of her death-accident or suicide? After a short tussle, Hamlet tells Laertes that he has equal grief at the loss of his beloved Ophelia. After sometime, Hamlet tells Horatio that he came to know about Claudius' vicious plans to kill in England and wrote a new letter ordering for the killing of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In the course of the conversation, Osric proposes the sword fight between Laertes and Hamlet.

In due course Hamlet agrees to take this fight. Hamlet's winning the first two passes leaves Claudius panic-stricken and Claudius had no other way except to proffer Hamlet the poisoned

wine. Suspecting some foul play, Hamlet refuses the drink. Unfortunately, Gertrude has a drink from the poisoned cup. As Hamlet wins the third pass also, Laertes indulges in a sneak attack and mortally wounds Hamlet. In an ensuing grapple between the two, Hamlet picks up Laertes' sword and injures him. By that time, Gertrude dies. Laertes, who is also dying, pleads guilty and confesses the entire sinister plot to Hamlet. With fuming anger, Hamlet finally attacks Claudius with the poisoned sword and then coerces him to consume the remaining poisoned drink. Appealing to Horatio that he should explain the bloodshed to all onlookers, Hamlet dies with the sense of satisfaction that he has avenged his father's death.

Just then, Fortinbras, the Norwegian Prince arrives at the court, accompanied by some English ambassadors who report the death of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. With no immediate royalty of Denmark alive, Fortinbras asserts his right to the throne. Fulfilling the last wish of Hamlet, Horatio narrates the tragic story of Hamlet to Fortinbras. Highly moved, Fortinbras orders a soldier's burial for Hamlet. The tragedy ends with a funeral with full honors for Hamlet. And Hamlet leaves us in utter despair about surviving in a heartless world and speaking sense in an insane world. His speeches are representative voices of renaissance humanists: "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving how express and admirable, in action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god—the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!" (Act II.Scene ii. Pg. 293–297)

## **Analysis of Major Characters**

### **Hamlet**

For the global audience, Hamlet continues to be a captivating character as he remains one of the most puzzling characters in drama. A tragic hero, in Aristotle's view of drama, is not an eminently 'good man' nor is he necessarily a 'paragon of virtue' because the fall of a virtuous man can only shock us and will not arouse pity and fear, but sympathy, and hence it is not suitable for tragedy. The fall of a completely villainous character is also not approvable as we can only feel satisfied and happy at his defeat, and tragedy will not serve its fundamental purpose. Therefore, an ideal tragic hero should be a noble man and his fall from eminence to disaster is due to some fault in his own character. Another important trait of the tragic hero is that he should be superior to the average man because he has to put his interests second and live for the greater good of the country. Despite his nobility, the hero should have an excessive pride in his character called hubris. Hamlet is, no doubt, a man of virtues but his inaction that he would do things later and doubting the ghost's version too much are signs of his hubris.

Irrespective of whatever the hero does-good or bad- a tragic fall would occur because of his fate, which is what Aristotle calls hamartia.

Hamlet has been a good person and without a fault of his own, he suffers and falls miserably because of hamartia which means 'an error of judgement' or 'missing the mark.' It is the tragic flaw/ some fault in the character of the hero, because of which, and not because of violating some law of god, he falls. The hero errs, either out of ignorance, or in hastiness, or may be voluntarily. Northrop Frye, the chief architect of archetypal criticism, sees the fall of the tragic hero as an affirmation of moral order. In any tragedy, there is a fusion of grief and joy towards the end of the play and the audience laments over the fall of the hero and rejoices in the resurrection of his spirit. The hero's struggle against hostile forces would end in defeat and ultimately in his fall/death. Such a fall from a greater height would evoke the twin emotions- pity and terror- in the minds of the audience resulting in catharsis.

In all the major Shakespearean tragedies the singular conflict that persists is the conflict between one's heart and one's responsibility, and Hamlet defines it best. Every audience interprets Hamlet not in a unanimous way but in multiple ways. Hamlet is an ambiguous entity that renders multiple readings and multiple results. In the postmodern parlance, Hamlet is so complex that every time when a reader encounters him he is not used to us but shocks us with his paradoxical nature. Hamlet's greatness does not lie in his suffering but in his endurance to suffer more. Here lies the secret of the ever fascinating character of Hamlet. None of us is really fed up with the character of Hamlet even after centuries of consistent reading/watching.

The paradoxical nature of Hamlet attracts audience across the globe as everyone feels that he/she is at times Hamlet-ian. Sometimes he is a well-read scholar who questions everything rationally. At times, he tends to believe in the existence of ghosts. The very next moment he doubts whether the ghost is his father's ghost or somebody else's. He is a bundle of contradictions. Hamlet is a rationalist and yet superstitious. He loves Ophelia but hates her when she turns down his amorous advances. He hates Ophelia's frigidity and at once his mother's sexual responsiveness. He is an angry young man with a lot of dejection and depression. When he asks the question, "To be... or not to be?" he tends to become an existentialist. He talks about the absurdity of human existence in most of the places. In the grave digger scene also, he talks about the meaninglessness of human life. He just feels that he has to make a futile journey from one point-birth to the last point-death. He approves the words

of Gloucester in *King Lear*, “As flies to wanton boys are we to th' gods. They kill us for their sport.” Despite his scholarship and rationality, he feels that he is just a puppet at the hands of fate.

As his fellow tragic heroes-Macbeth, Othello and Lear, Hamlet is also not ruined by failure of fortune but by an intrinsic error in his own character. He is known for his contemplative and vacillating nature, and hence he is torn apart. He could not perform his filial duty promptly because he has an inner conflict. Whenever he thinks about taking revenge upon his uncle Claudius, he is reminded of his social responsibility. He feels that if he himself takes law into his own hands, then what would be happen to the common man's belief in judiciary. He being the Prince wants to be a role model for his subjects which keeps him thinking too much choosing between barbaric punishment and legal punishment. One can find the incompatibility between his thoughts on revenge as a punishment and his views on morality and social expectations. Hamlet is torn between the filial duty to avenge the murder of his father and the social responsibility to uphold the existing moral and social values of the society. Being the prince of Denmark, he could not brush aside the brutal regicide, the most atrocious of all crimes and beyond that he could not accept the murderer to be the usurper of the Danish crown. Furthermore, as a loving son, he has the filial obligation to avenge his father's murder.

Hamlet's fury and the customs of his community demands revenge. The mandatory job to kill the kill is clearly assigned to him but his deep religious faith arrives as a deterrent as it forbids murder. Hamlet is held a captive in the whirlpool of his social position, the burdens of his conscience, societal demands, tenets of his faith, and his own thirst for justice. He is so popular among the audience because he is what he is. He has to move further but he could not move. Nobody stops him. He is stopped by himself. At a point when he contemplates suicide, even that does not offer him an escape because suicide again is a mortal sin. When Hamlet wrestles with the existential question, “To be or not to be--that is the question,” one can understand that he poses the question not to be answered.

Hamlet's dilemma is everyman's predicament. Quite often, we suffer because of our choices. After choosing a specific thing, we are not actually happy with the chosen thing rather we long for the thing that we left behind. In the words of Robert Frost, we human beings suffer more for the road not taken. In the case of Hamlet, it is immoral to allow Claudius to sit on the throne and it is also a sin to kill him. Killing Claudius may help Hamlet fulfil the psychological

demands of the ghost but corrupts his own soul. He is afraid of corrupting his soul for fulfilling the filial obligation. Now the million dollar question before Hamlet is how to kill the king without committing a sin.

Subsequently, Hamlet thinks too much that he does not act. He sits idle with memories of his beloved father and thoughts of his mother's speedy incestuous marriage. He understands that he is in an impasse and as a result he is in search of one reason or the other to postpone his action. When he does not know what exactly and how exactly to do, he starts postponing things. Postponement becomes a routine activity for Hamlet. Eventually, Hamlet's dilemma is resolved, not because of his careful thought or personal introspection but because of external forces. Hamlet's long postponement comes to an end abruptly only when he learns that his mother has died and understands Claudius's plot to kill him. He kills the wicked Claudius and then dies, as well.

Though Hamlet is a man of inaction, he is a man of words. Even when he could not attack his adversaries with weapons he orchestrates verbal assaults very swiftly. He counters his own thoughts with his soliloquies successfully. Quite often his words either contradict or transcend his own thoughts. At the same time, the same words that empower Hamlet immobilize him. In the words of Nietzsche, Hamlet becomes a "captive in the prison house of language."

When one interprets the character of Hamlet through a psychological approach, Sigmund Freud's theory that Hamlet suffers from Oedipal complex i.e., he has an unnatural love for his mother needs to be examined. Hamlet obviously is disgusted with his stepfather's marriage with his mother and even more he detests the incestuous relationship between them. One can also interpret whether Oedipal strains in Hamlet stimulate his revulsion for his mother, and whether mother-fixation prompts his failure to love Ophelia. Some critics brand Hamlet as a misogynist. Some others say that Hamlet is not really mad but suffers from psychosis. Whatever he is, audience all over the world love and identify themselves with Hamlet because he is every (wo)man.

### **Claudius**

Claudius, the murderer of Old Hamlet, the King, the second husband of Queen Gertrude and of course Hamlet's uncle. Claudius can be called Hamlet's Macbeth. His courage and confidence are compatible with his ambitious schemes to acquire the throne through illegal

means. He is a power-hungry man when he murders the king and usurps the throne. He is lustful when he marries his brother's wife. Claudius is a great debater and conspirator. With these qualities, he could convince everybody in the court to accept his over-hasty marriage to his brother's widow Gertrude. He is a man of action and an exact opposite of Hamlet. Sinister schemes-one after another-emerge naturally in the mind of Claudius to regain his power whenever there is any threat to it.

The moment he realizes that Hamlet is doubtful of his role in the murder of his father, he quickly packs him off to another place. When Hamlet takes a U-turn and comes back home, he rapidly decides to get him killed using the accumulated anger of Laertes. At times, he shows signs of feeling guilty for killing his brother, and his incestuous relationship with Gertrude. Occasionally his conscience pricks him with remorse, but then he overcomes it quickly not to repent.

Claudius is a perfect antagonist for Hamlet. He has all the qualities that Hamlet lacks. As any other Shakespearean villain, Claudius is also complex. Claudius is so proficient in his pretensions that none can discover his ulterior motives. Its only with his histrionic skills, he could exhibit extreme grief over his brother's death and could transform mourning into celebration by converting a funeral ceremony into wedding celebration. He just moves on whatsoever lies ahead. He has the power of mesmerizing people. This is evident from the fact that even the Queen defends her marriage to Claudius to Hamlet. Unlike Hamlet, Claudius takes full responsibility for all his actions. He never blames it on anybody else. In that sense, he understands fully well that power means responsibility. His evil nature is veiled because of his taking responsibility. Claudius's love for Gertrude cannot be genuine as he married her as part of his larger designs to acquire the throne. To summarize the character of Claudius, one can revisit the words of Hamlet: "O, villain, villain, smiling, damned villain!" (Act 1, scene 5 Pg.105)

### **Gertrude**

Hamlet's words "Frailty, thy name is woman!" (Act 1 Scene II Pg. 146) clearly illustrate the character of Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. Gertrude invites the hatred of his son with her sexuality. Hamlet angrily responds to the over hasty marriage of his mother in all possible terms: "She married. O, most wicked speed, to post; With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!" Quite contrary to the expectations of her son, Gertrude is sexually active and married his uncle in a lightning speed even before the mourning period is over. Gertrude is an antithesis of

Ophelia. Hamlet expects Ophelia to be sexually active and his mother to be sexually rigid. But Ophelia is very rigid and his mother is very active. In a way, Gertrude becomes the prime reason for Hamlet's frenzied thoughts. Though she is not predominantly present on the stage, she makes the audience feel her presence with her conspicuous absence.

In fact, Hamlet is much more tormented not by the regicide but by the incestuous relationship between his mother Gertrude and his uncle Claudius. Unlike Hamlet, Gertrude is a superficial character and she responds only to her bodily demands and external pleasures. Adding fuel to the fire within Hamlet, the Ghost supplies an offensive information about the Queen's sexual integrity, calling her an "incestuous, adulterate beast."

Gertrude, from the feminist point of view, is a helpless victim of phallogocentric social set up. She remarries Claudius not of her will but has no say. In those traditions, women were not asked about their choice of having their husbands. In spite of the verbal wounds Hamlet inflicts upon her, Gertrude continues to protect her son throughout the play. Even when she has the moral responsibility to inform Claudius about the killing of Polonius, she helps Hamlet indirectly telling the king that Hamlet "weeps for what is done." But Hamlet in deed does not regret.

Gertrude, as any other mother, loves Hamlet but could not understand the reason for Hamlet's verbal aberrations against her. She realizes everything only when Hamlet tells her the truth: "O Hamlet, speak no more... these words like daggers enter my ears; No more, sweet Hamlet!" (Act III. Scene iv. Pg.94-96) Gertrude remains loyal to her new husband, Claudius. She has to love both Hamlet and Claudius without hurting them knowing that both hate each other. Throughout the play, Gertrude never tries to appease Hamlet or anybody else with her words. She never concocts anything. She is very genuine in her relationship either with Claudius or with Hamlet. She is nowhere portrayed as cunning or evil. At every given opportunity, Hamlet tortures her mentally with his multiple accusations. Still, Gertrude remains composed and continues to be an anchorage for Hamlet in his crisis. Even towards the end of the play, she is faithful to him by protecting him from the King. It is miserable yet appropriate that Gertrude meets her end sipping the poisoned drink.

### **Ophelia**

Ophelia is the submissive daughter of Polonius, one of the closest friends of King Claudius. She is portrayed as a beautiful young woman and fittingly Hamlet's ladylove. She is torn

between her genuine love for Hamlet and her loyalty to her father. It is Ophelia's sexual frigidity that forces Hamlet to hurl verbal abuses at his mother's sexual inclination. In the entire play, Ophelia remains blameless and righteous but is snubbed at by Hamlet, who carries an impression that women pretend to be rigid but are actually driven by sexual desire. Given an opportunity, Hamlet tends to behave violently and cruelly with Ophelia. Unable to come over the fatal end of her father, Ophelia is driven to insanity and subsequently she drowns herself. She has been cornered and kept at bay by her repressive father and brother through their insistence on her chastity. She could not bid for feminine happiness and could not show disregard for the coercive advices of her father and brother. At no point of the play, she shows any disruptive behavior or a reversal of her expected role in the family or society. She is totally powerless in the family. She is not free to choose her partner as she is subject to family, society and rank. She does not regret or resent the fact that she is denied the right to choose her love. She does not have the fortitude to endure the consequences of her bid for feminine happiness and hence a caged bird curtailed of freedom. She is used as a puppet by her father. As and when Polonius wants to help Claudius discover the causes for Hamlet's madness, he requests Ophelia to use her relationship with Hamlet to diagnose Hamlet's actual problem. Ophelia's readiness to have her relationship with Hamlet used for her father's purpose frustrates Hamlet.

Contrary to Hamlet's view of her, Ophelia is exceptionally good. She is an immature girl who wants to satisfy both her father's wish and her lover Hamlet. She never uses her feminine nature to betray or control a man as Hamlet doubts. Ophelia is loyal to her father and brother who brought her up. She believes that whatever her father and brother do is only out of concern for her. For Polonius and Laertes, Ophelia is the angel and she should uphold her virginity. And for Hamlet, she is an object of sexual gratification, a deceiving lover. As she does not have her mother to streamline her sexual behaviour, she is perfectly caught in a web of the contradictory expectations. To sum up, Ophelia is an epitome of innocence.

## **Thematic Analysis**

### **Revenge as responsibility**

The predominant theme that runs riot in most of the Shakespearean tragedies is the theme of revenge. The whole plot/narrative of Hamlet revolves around the theme of revenge. As revenge is a recurrent theme found in many tragedies, Hamlet, the eponymous hero encounters some situations that propel him to go for revenge. The whole process and the consequences of the act of revenge are often acrimonious. During the Elizabethan era the theme of revenge was

well acclaimed. *Hamlet* deals with the theme of regicide. When there is regicide, the son of the slain king is bestowed with the duty to take revenge on the guilty and is empowered to kill the killer of the king. The pedestal of the plot of *Hamlet* is constructed on the perennial conflict between Hamlet and Claudius. Nothing but the revenge motif shapes the plot of the play with all the necessary exposition, development, the suspense, climax and the catastrophe of the play. The play rotates around the theme of revenge in two ways. Hamlet has a bounden duty to take revenge upon his father's murderer and Laertes has the same duty to revenge Hamlet for harming his sister and killing his father.

As the 'other' of *Deus ex Machina*, the ghost of the dead appears in *Hamlet* to reveal the identity of the murderer to Hamlet. As part of drama convention, the ghost is an indispensable part of the revenge play. The projection of the ghost as an ethereal figure shows the dexterity of Shakespeare in handling the supernatural elements.

In Shakespearean tragedies, there are impediments in the way of revenge and one such hurdle is the protagonist's inner conflict. Hamlet too suffers a lot due to inner conflict. It is this inner conflict that causes delay in taking revenge. The first instance of inner conflict is visible when Hamlet thinks about suicide. When Hamlet learns from his father's ghost that he was murdered by his own brother, he is indebted to avenge his father's death. Understandably, he is facing a severe moral dilemma and he considers suicide as a panacea for all his problems. But his religious fervor stops him from opting for suicide as it is anti-religion. If taking revenge upon Claudius is disturbing Hamlet on one side, what torments him more is his inner conflict about the incestuous relationship of his mother and Claudius. As a tragedy with revenge as its skeleton, *Hamlet* like the Jacobian tragedies has all the essential ingredients like murder, bloodshed, adultery and treachery. In *Hamlet*, the impact of revenge is serious and stark on both the avenger and avenged.

The last scene of *Hamlet* is a visual representation of the horror of revenge. It was almost a bloodbath which is an exact replica of a melodrama. With a probable exception of a few, all are lying dead on the stage. The queen dies after consuming the poisoned wine. Claudius dies after being stabbed with a poisoned sword by Hamlet, Laertes also dies being attacked with the same. Lastly, Hamlet dies with the mortal wound of the same sword that swallowed the lives of the other two. It is ironical that a sword fight that was arranged to kill Hamlet killed all the four resulting in utter chaos. An interesting aspect of *Hamlet* is that the hero delays his act to

avenge till he is avenged by the other. The play cannot be prolonged if the act of revenge is so sudden and fast. Hamlet, with the help of the drama troupe, performs the murder of his father to establish Claudius' role in the murder of his father. Then, he got a chance of killing Claudius but fails to slay him as he was seen in his prayers. He delays his revenge but acts swiftly when he stabs Polonius who was hiding behind the tapestry mistaking him for Claudius. The psychological ambivalence in the hero is another important aspect of a revenge tragedy.

### **Existentialism**

Hamlet comes out with his own skepticism about human life. In his famous soliloquy in Act I, scene ii, Hamlet feels that the world is "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable," and views suicide as a panacea for all the ailments of this sordid world. Still, he could not choose the path of suicide as God's canon against suicide is well marked.

"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 mourn'd longer..."

In this soliloquy, he regrets how his mother grows "with such dexterity to incestuous sheets." He compares his mother's over hasty marriage bypassing the mourning period with that of the animals. He says very clearly that even beasts with no common sense would have mourned for a longer period than the period mourned by his sensual mother. The liability of man's mortality and the intricacies of human life preoccupy the mind of Hamlet from the beginning to the end of the play.

The unexpected death of his father came as an irreparable loss to Hamlet diverting his placid mind to the existential predicament of human beings. He continues to ruminate about this transient life and the life after death. Hamlet's skepticism gets impetus in the graveyard scene in Act V. Hamlet, who has been hitherto disgusted and sickened by the moral corruption of human beings, realizes that death eliminates the differences between people irrespective of family, class or creed. At a point, Hamlet prefers suicide but then he could not decide upon it as it is forbidden by religion. Throughout the play, he has been fully aware of the futility of living. In his apparent madness, he reveals his words of wisdom.

## **Fate versus Free will**

Since time immemorial, the theme of fate versus free will has been a perpetual part of classical tragedies. The paradoxical question whether human beings are responsible for their actions has bewildered humanity throughout history. Over the centuries, man has contemplated the influence of freewill on an individual in making choices. On the other hand, people accepted the role of fate in shaping and determining human life. After the advent of science and technology, there has been a continuous conflict between the power of fate and the free will.

The core of every tragic play discusses the universal conflict between man's inclination to accept fate and his inherent will to control his destiny. The Greek playwrights and the Elizabethan Playwrights continued to project a medium in which fate and free will incessantly fight for control of human life. For Sophocles, fate overpowers human will; the more Oedipus struggles to avert the impending disaster-his fate, the more he is pushed into that very fate. Oedipus, like his fellow tragic heroes, eventually yields and surrenders before the power of his destiny. But, for Shakespeare man's freewill is unconquerable. Irrespective of the fact that fate will ultimately win at the end, a man must fight it to the death.

Everyman, according to Shakespeare, should remain the principal architect of his own destiny. Though fate makes Hamlet to succumb at the end, he exercises his freewill throughout the play. In Hamlet, his father's ghost which guides him to avenge upon Claudius is actually the fate. Hamlet has the freewill to make a choice of either obeying his fate or ignoring it. He is not impotent in times of crisis and dares to face the consequences of not obliging the ghost. As an intellectual, Hamlet does not accept anything without a cautious analysis. Even his inaction is his own choice not thrust upon him by fate. So, there has been a continuous struggle between fate and freewill in Hamlet.

## **1.5 Macbeth**

### **Background**

*Macbeth by Shakespeare continues to haunt the audience even today after umpteen number of performances across the world. Like all the other major tragedies, Macbeth is a powerfully rendered text. The play is considered one of the most intense in its treatment of the theme of human relationships. Macbeth the lead character and his counterpart Lady Macbeth played the*

negative roles very effectively. Audience were almost awe-struck seeing the villainy of both of them. Shakespeare's characterization gained wide critical acclaim because of the psychological appeal of Macbeth and his wife. Shakespeare would have borrowed the blueprint for *Macbeth* from the usual source Holinshed's Chronicles which talks about the story of Macbeth a real king of eleventh-century Scotland. Though the plot has been borrowed from Holinshed, the play becomes typical Shakespearean. He gives prominence to Lady Macbeth in the killing of the King which was missing in the source.

In the original source, Macbeth, along with Banquo mixes sleeping potion whereas in Shakespeare, Lady Macbeth is portrayed as the comploter of the deed of mixing sleeping potion. Like this, there are many variations and deviations from the original source to suit the convenience of the playwright and also to cater to the requirements of the contemporary audience. Moving far ahead of the original source, Shakespeare scrutinizes the sensitive associations *between* characters in a lifelike manner. *Macbeth* has dominant themes like overvaulting ambition, mutual accusation, fear, grief, anger, and madness. Shakespeare's brilliance lies in the humane characterization. Last but the most important aspect of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is the use of soliloquys which enables the audience to explore deep into the minds of the characters and to read their intentions, worries and wishes. The play would have been probably written in 1605-1606 and was first performed for King James I of England even less than a year after the notorious Gunpowder tragedy happened. A quick glance at the plot of *Macbeth* says that the three Witches prophesy Macbeth's elevation to King of Scotland and append that future kings will descend from Banquo. Being an ambitious man by himself, Macbeth is further incited by Lady Macbeth, an over-ambitious wife. Consequently, he, with his wife, murders King Duncan and becomes the king. In order to make the second prophesy fail, he arranges mercenaries to kill Banquo and his sons. As his efforts become futile, Macduff kills Macbeth, and Malcolm, Duncan's son becomes the next king.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

The Play *Macbeth* has five acts and is set in medieval Scotland. The play is based on a gory episode of the rise and fall of the brave warrior Macbeth. He gained the confidence and goodwill of the King as he has been a successful warrior in the Army of King Duncan. As part of the Shakespearean superstitious network, three witches appear in the very first scene of *Macbeth*. The two valiant Generals of King Duncan-Macbeth and Banquo have a fierce battle

with the Irish invaders and the Norwegian enemy forces and defeated the forces. The news of military victory has been passed on to King Duncan. On their way back to the Kingdom, both Macbeth and Banquo encounter the three witches. After a brief interaction, the witches foretell Macbeth that he has a prospective career and he would become a Thane of Cawdor and subsequently the King of Scotland. As an appendix, the three witches also said that the future inheritors of the throne will be descended not from Macbeth, but from Banquo, Macbeth's fellow soldier.

Propheying these high profile matters, the witches disappear instantaneously. Both Macbeth and Banquo consider these predictions as mere tales as they are cynical regarding the superstitious beliefs. In the case of *Hamlet* also, Hamlet was very much skeptical about the existence of ghosts but then when he was visited by ghosts, he had no other option except to believe in their presence. But then, he doubts the veracity of the version of the ghost regarding his father's murder. Circumstances prompt anybody- be it a religious man or a rational human being- to believe in all these superstitious stuff. Similar way, Macbeth too starts believing in the words of the witches as the first segment of prophesy becomes a reality. His pessimism about the predictions of the three witches shattered to pieces only to give him a ray of hope that he may become the King in the near future. King Duncan's attendants informed Macbeth that he has been named the Thane of Cawdor as a reward for his massive victories in the battle. It is clear that Macbeth's loyalty to the King harvested positive results and he is rightly honoured with the position. Soon after this, Macbeth, though positive about the witches' voice, does not intend to reach the throne through improper means. He is in fact willing to wait for the fate to take its course and is ready to accept fortunes as it comes. He does not want to do anything in order to reach fortune. Till this moment in the play, Macbeth remains a very patient, composed man. But he is baffled when King Duncan nominates his son Malcolm as his legal heir. The very nomination of Malcolm as the heir plays havoc in the life of Macbeth. His dreams about becoming the next King get devastated and he lost his patience and self-control. Here starts the journey of Macbeth- from a courageous, loyal soldier to a self-centered, treacherous, ruthless murderer. As Hamlet falls for his procrastination, King Lear for his hideous rashness and Othello for his suspicion and rapid action, Macbeth falls for his over vaulting ambition.

Highly traumatized by the recent developments and the seemingly remote possibility of his becoming the King, Macbeth becomes restless in his castle. He narrates everything that has happened to his wife Lady Macbeth. Lady Macbeth is a woman of ambitions. She starts coaxing

her husband to do anything that keeps Macbeth in the throne. Ultimately she influenced Macbeth to murder King Duncan so that he can ascend the throne without any barrier. Without any inhibition or the womanly qualities (in the male parlance), she has reached a conclusion that there is only one quicker way to acquire the crown, that is regicide. As far as the first revelation is concerned, it becomes true on its own. Seeing the first prediction coming true, Macbeth is mad after fulfilling the other predictions as if it is his duty to accomplish the prophecies of the three witches. He becomes the victim of over expectations.

Macbeth is not in a wilful state to oblige his wife. Like Hamlet, he thinks too much about the divine judgement if not the earthly punishment for committing a murder. But, in the case of Macbeth, fate plays a conniving role by helping him propel his free will. It is not free will versus fate in *Macbeth*, but free will and fate conspiring together for bringing destiny. It is fatal that when Macbeth is contemplating the regicide, King Duncan plans to visit Macbeth's castle for a feast. Lady Macbeth finds the visit of the King to their castle a life time opportunity to usurp the throne by killing the king. Lady Macbeth, playing the contrast of an ideal wife who advises the husband not to indulge in sinful acts, helps her husband to plan the murder even more precisely. It is she who supplies sleeping potion to the guards of the King and when they are found slept, she pesters Macbeth to kill the king. Macbeth, even at this point of time, is not prepared to murder the King as his mind is inundated with a lot of uncertainties. Lady Macbeth fuels him viciously to use the rarest opportunity where the King is all alone with all his guards drunk. Macbeth, with a little moral fear in the corner of his mind, musters the required audacity to murder King Duncan while he is sleeping. For King Duncan, life is over and for Macbeth problem begins.

In *Hamlet*, even when Hamlet has enough just reasons to murder his uncle Claudius, he brooded over and again to avoid it as he feels that revenge is not morally sanctioned. But here in the case of Macbeth, there is no reason or even sudden provocation to murder the King. Hence, the murder of King Duncan is a pre-meditated, meticulously planned regicide. Macbeth executed the commands of his concealed cravings to become the King, drawing support from his proactive wife. Like Doctor Faustus, who suffered after executing the bond with Satan, Macbeth starts thinking too much about the burden of carrying this weighty crime throughout his life. The cold-blooded murder which he committed starts haunting him and as a result he grows melancholic. The moment he commits the gruesome murder and thereafter as and when he thinks about it, Macbeth loses his inner strength. But, Lady Macbeth's inner strength gets

fortified when she thinks about the same dastardly act. Whenever Macbeth is submerged in the memories of the murder, Lady Macbeth helps him override such gloomy thoughts.

After sometime, Macduff, another loyalist of King Duncan comes there and asks for the King because he has to wake him up to embark on the return journey. Macbeth cunningly sends him to the chamber where the King is murdered and Macduff sees the dead body of the King. Pretending that the murder of King Duncan is a news to him, Macbeth draws his sword and kills the drowsy guards speedily to erase the existing witnesses from the scene of action. The message that Macbeth out of rage killed the guards as a sign of retaliation for the King's murder gets spread across the Kingdom. To consolidate his support base, Macbeth vows to take revenge upon the murderers of the deceased King Duncan in the presence of the assembled lords of Scotland. Anticipating imminent attack on them, the king's sons Donalbain and Malcolm flee to Ireland and England respectively.

The second prophesy does not come true on its own but it is made to come true artificially. Macbeth asserts himself as the new king of Scotland. Having ascended the throne, he feels that he is safe and settled. But his feeling proves to be a fleeting moment or a wandering cloud as he is reminded of the witches' next prophesy that Banquo's heirs will pose a serious threat to his kingship. Fearing the foretelling about Banquo, Macbeth employs a group of mercenaries to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. In a surprise attack, the hired hoodlums managed to kill Banquo but mistakenly let Fleance flee from the spot.

Knowing this, Macbeth behaves frantically and fears that his position as King is not stable as long as his enemy is alive. The following evening starts pleasant and a feast is arranged. In the feast, Macbeth is visited by the ghost of Banquo. In the Elizabethan drama, the appearance of ghosts or spirits is an externalized representations of the inner fear or thoughts. In *Doctor Faustus*, the appearance of Old Man, the Good angel and the Bad angel are nothing but externalized representations of the inner turmoil of Faustus. Similarly, Macbeth's own fear psychosis or his obsession with the crimes he committed exhibits itself through the appearance of the ghosts.

The appearance of ghosts and supernatural elements is also a characteristic feature of the Shakespearean plays which actually caters to the rustic demands of his audience. On seeing the ghost, Macbeth When he sees the ghost, Macbeth babbles frightfully, shocking the Scottish

nobles who are part of his guests. Here again, Lady Macbeth jumps to the rescue of Macbeth in his crisis. Despite her several attempts to suppress the sporadic aberrations of Macbeth, Macbeth with his eccentricity earned the wrath of his nobles and citizens. On the whole, there was a resistance against the rule of Macbeth.

Worried about the unpleasant developments in his regime, Macbeth decides to meet the three witches again to collect some clues to continue in the crown without any further turbulence. Three apparitions with newer prophesies await for Macbeth. Of those, three important prophesies are of concern for Macbeth. First and foremost, Macbeth should be cautious with Macduff, a Scottish noble who was against Macbeth's succession to the throne. Secondly, Macbeth cannot be endangered by any man who is born of a woman, and lastly, Macbeth would face serious life threatening problems only if Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane Castle. Hearing these three prophesies, Macbeth heaved a sigh of relief and feels confident because all men are born of women and certainly woods cannot move to other places. So if at all there is a threat to the reign of Macbeth, it should be Macduff. Macbeth decides to get rid of Macduff who has fled to England to join Malcolm against Macbeth and he orders that Macduff's castle be detained. Worse still, he orders the killing of Lady Macduff and her children.

In England, Macduff convinces Malcolm that he is loyal to Scotland and both plan for a strategic joint operation against Macbeth. Meantime Macbeth successfully eliminated Lady Macduff and her children. Hearing this Macduff's revenge attitude gets reinforced and Malcolm too induces him more that he should avenge for the brutal murder of his wife and children. In the intervening time, Lady Macbeth has fallen ill in Scotland. According to the physician's observation, she develops symptoms of somnambulism-walking while sleeping, and as an outcome of this she unconsciously divulges her guilt. Memories of Duncan's assassination start assailing her mentally and she could not escape from such disturbing thoughts. She voices her remorseful thoughts that her hands cannot be washed of bloodstains.

A chain of interchanging scenes follow the madness of Lady Macbeth. In the climax of the play, the progressing forces of Malcolm and the defensive measures of Macbeth are very interestingly juxtaposed. The juxtaposition of these two intense actions is intended to keep the audience fascinated as the play marches towards the end. Since Macbeth is busy with the preparations for the battle, he could not pay attention to the deteriorating health of Lady Macbeth. Even when the doctor says that her disease is beyond cure, he doesn't actually

sympathize with her condition but spurts out his anger. As the English forces under the leadership of Malcolm and Macduff approach the castle of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth dies.

Feeling aghast by her death, Macbeth finds life meaningless. Like Hamlet in the grave digger scene, he muses about the futility of human life. Unassailed by the arrival of the invading English Army led by Macduff and Malcolm, Macbeth remains composed as he has enormous faith in the words of the witches that no man who is born of a woman can kill him. As a misfortune for Macbeth, Malcolm followed a military strategy that every soldier should camouflage himself with the tree branch from Birnam Wood. Seeing the camouflaged soldiers moving forward, Macbeth mistakes them that the Birnam Wood forest seems to be moving toward his Dunsinane forte.

In the fierce fighting, Macduff challenges Macbeth. In the midst of their fighting, Macduff discloses the biological fact that he was not “of woman born” but was “untimely ripped” (cesarean) from his mother's womb. Hearing this, Macbeth’s heart starts thumping fast. At the same time, he does not want to lose his confidence in himself. Ultimately Macduff kills Macbeth in the fight and truncates him. The play ends with Malcolm being crowned as the new king of Scotland.

## **Analysis of Major Characters**

### **Macbeth**

Macbeth is one of the most celebrated tragic heroes in the theatre world. From the earlier times to the present, Macbeth has been a fertile ground for drama researchers as he is a multifaceted character. In the beginning of the play, Macbeth is introduced to the audience as a trustworthy general in the army of King Duncan. After he exhibited his loyalty to the King by winning a battle, he is rewarded appropriately with the Thane of Cawdor. Till he meets the three witches, Macbeth remains good. He does not actually possess the evil within him.

Even at the time of killing the King with the dagger, he is nervous and after committing the heinous crime, he is trembling with the bloody dagger. He is not a hardcore villain like Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi*, or Iago in *Othello*. He is not inherently evil but tempted by external forces to be evil. His life can be easily termed as a journey of misfortunes because there is a negative transformation in Macbeth’s character-from a loyal guardian angel to a bloodthirsty

traitor. His mind gets polluted for the first time when he is informed by the three witches that he would become the King. He would have waited for his chance to come had there been no prospects for others. But when the heir for the throne is known, Macbeth's mind is completely infected with nothing but evil thoughts.

His mind and thoughts turn negative only as a byproduct of the predictions made by the three witches. His own inherent weakness-over vaulting ambition and the witches' prophecies combine to corrupt the oscillating mind of Macbeth. If these two keep Macbeth adulterated, Lady Macbeth is the actual propeller of the actions that Macbeth unfolds. In the entire plot, Macbeth commits a single murder perhaps with a serious gravity. After that, to cover up the single murder, he starts committing murder after murder. His duty becomes two-fold. Firstly, he has to protect his power only by suppressing the murder of Duncan for which he has to indulge in too many murders. Secondly, he has to confront the third prophecy of the witches that the heir for the throne would emerge from Banquo after Macbeth. Macbeth's continuous crimes prove the maxim of George Orwell's maxim, "power corrupts... absolute power corrupts absolutely." Macbeth's innate goodness leaks out unconsciously when he cries that even the great Neptune's ocean cannot wash his hands off as the guilt he committed is too grave to be absolved.

Like Hamlet and King Lear, Macbeth too has inner conflict. His guilt feeling exhibits itself as hallucinations. Just as Eve polluted Adam by supplying the forbidden fruit, Lady Macbeth corrupts him whenever he tries to withdraw himself from committing crimes. So, Lady Macbeth plays a pivotal role in converting a loyal soldier into a tyrant who turned everything into a hell. Macbeth becomes a victim of his ambition and his wife's over ambition. Macbeth, if approached psychologically, frequently demands justifications for his own actions but is also propelled to repeat the same crimes in order to conceal his earlier offences. Since he is not a determined character, he is easily manipulated by his wife. Macbeth develops dreadful pangs of conscience whenever he commits a crime.

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red."

Macbeth's famous soliloquy in Act 2, scene 2 brings out the guilt consciousness within himself immediately after the killing of Duncan. The terrible nature of Macbeth's crime has stirred in him a guilty consciousness that chases him day in and day out. When Macbeth tries washing his hands with water, he is afraid that the blood stains cannot be just cleaned by the ocean's water but the entire ocean would turn into blood if he dips his hands into it. He symbolically conveys the idea that his guilt is of such a serious magnitude. Macbeth's soliloquy in Act 5, scene 5, bears testimony to the nihilistic attitude of Macbeth just after his wife's death.

“Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing.”

From this philosophical passage, one can sense how Macbeth's mind succumbs to the pessimistic world that implies insignificance. Like Hamlet, he too suffers from contradictory personality traits. He does not want to commit a murder but commits. Macbeth's *hubris* is his split personality.

### **Lady Macbeth**

Macbeth's wife is considered as one of the most dominant women characters in Shakespearean theatre. Unlike her male counterpart, she is not afraid of committing a murder. If Macbeth is known for his ambition, Lady Macbeth is notorious for her overvaulting ambition. In the male centric literary discourses, it is propagated that behind everyman's fall, there is a woman. Like Eve behind the fall of Adam in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Lady Macbeth is behind the fall of Macbeth. Macbeth is portrayed in such a way that he is polluted only by his wife Lady Macbeth.

Lady Macbeth ridicules her husband for his lack of courage and cunningness to murder the King. His manliness is often questioned by Lady Macbeth. She teases him in such a way that he surrenders his will to fulfil her designs. She is projected as an aggressive wife who goes to the extent of extending all kinds of criminal assistance to her husband. It is she who gives a sleeping potion to the guards and set the stage perfect for the killing of Duncan. She successfully converts her husband into a murderer by provoking him the most. When Macbeth tries washing his hands with water, he is afraid that the blood stains cannot be just cleaned by

the ocean's water but the entire ocean would turn into blood if he dips his hands into it. He symbolically conveys the idea that his guilt is of such a serious magnitude.

In this juncture, Macbeth is in deep psychological crisis but Lady Macbeth responded very curtly, "A little water clears us of this deed." Anyhow, only towards the end of the play, Lady Macbeth shares Macbeth's sensibility that Duncan's murder has immortally tarnished them with blood stain. Following her husband's hallucinations, she also becomes mentally ill and starts revealing her role in the murder of King Duncan. Towards the end of the play, she becomes a mere scarecrow. Even though she remains very cruel and aggressive to everyone there, she remains a very loyal wife to Macbeth. Macbeth realizes the futility of life only when Lady Macbeth dies. Despite her ruthlessness and cunningness, she draws everybody's sympathy when she dies. She contributes all negative attributes to her husband but does one good thing through her death that is Macbeth's realization of the barrenness of human life.

What leads Lady Macbeth to her tragic fate is her unhealthy focus on the world of man, valuing it above all other things. Feminine other is expected to be in a world of women accepting the qualities of love, fertility and family. She devotes herself as her husband's collaborator rather than loving with her own self interests. She conceives herself as having manly qualities and hinders Macbeth from coming out of men's world. It is what drives her to persuade Macbeth to kill the king. Macbeth simply shrinks off the suicide of Lady Macbeth, though he loved her from his deeper heart, because she never succeeded in offering feminine strength to her husband, Macbeth. Whereas the death of Lady Macbeth impels Macduff to take revenge because she could offer her husband what is needed to provide. In a nutshell, Lady Macbeth is an empty and failure as a women.

Another possible interpretation is Shakespeare's characterization of evils or devils are not strictly feminine. So these bad qualities can't be over poured upon women as the patriarchal society does. I dare to say Shakespeare never defamed or degraded women. If he has done these characteristics in a confusing and bewildering manner. Lady Macbeth is a lady in look and physic but in strength and thought she is manly. So she can be called only an androgyne. And in Macbeth what persuades Macbeth is the strange witches who had beard, which implies they were not women but having the characteristics of androgynes.

In his plays Shakespeare portrays good woman and bad woman and he never labels women as bad of devils. In Macbeth, Lady Macduff is an example, who uses her intellect for the benefit

of her children and family whereas Lady Macbeth uses it for vice. Though she persuaded her husband to kill the king, she feels repentance towards the end. Her last words have become a quote “All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hands”. And she dies with a broken heart, being sleepless and having nightmares. She indulges in soliloquy with a sense of remorse. So the pure feminine qualities are given only to good characters on the Shakespearian plays and evils are not purely feminine but a mixture of both so they are only androgynes and it's the patriarchal society which depicts these as feminine.

### **Thematic Analysis**

*Macbeth* is a typical Shakespearean tragedy and has many themes including the theme of corruption and the subsequent fall of man. *Macbeth*'s plot becomes archetypal as it has some patterns which match with the story of Adam and Eve. As Adam being tempted by Eve to pluck the forbidden fruit and fall, Macbeth too is tempted by his wife Lady Macbeth to usurp the throne and fall. The essential difference between fate and fortune is exquisitely assembled in Macbeth. Fortune is flexible and fate is fixed. In the wheel of fortune, a beggar can become a billionaire and the same billionaire can be a beggar overnight. But fate is unchanging. In a world with deep-rooted belief in fate, the span and consequence of one's life is programmed by peripheral forces. In *Macbeth*, the three witches represent the fate. In his encounter with the three witches, he is informed that he would become the King but not instructed how to become the king. Throughout the play, there is an uninterrupted swapping of the gender roles.

The theme of gender role swapping is persistent throughout the play. Macbeth actually plays a feminine role and Lady Macbeth tends to play the opposite. As Lady Macbeth influences her husband to commit the murder, she proves that she holds masculine characteristics. With his timidity and reluctance to murder the King, Macbeth shows that he has feminine features. The swapping of designated gender roles is evident from Lady Macbeth's aggressive behavior and destructive role in the life of Macbeth. She almost rules her life partner and dictates his activities. Macbeth is a very balanced man with ethical values. He thinks too much before committing the murder because he does not want to infringe upon the enormous trust Duncan has in him. But, Lady Macbeth is a woman of discrepancies. She never thinks about the ethical/moral/social questions involved in the murder of Duncan. She responds to her ambitions coldly and ruffles her husband to commit the murder. Whenever Macbeth tries to respond to his reason, he is distracted to react not to his emotions but to hers in a rather hostile way.

Another predominant theme of *Macbeth* is ambition driven devastation. The play focusses on how over vaulting ambition ruins the lives of people. The moment over ambition derails the moral values of an individual, he/she becomes a victim of their own aspirations. Macbeth is a daring soldier who does not have an appetite to commit misdeeds. But the prophecies make him develop a deep desire for power. His ambition combined with his wife's over ambition overpower him to kill Duncan and acquire the throne. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth collaborate to commit regicide. Later, they realize that their act is beyond redemption. They suffer from paranoia and ultimately fall. The fall of Macbeth and perhaps his wife was brought by ambitions not controlled by morality. Ambitions of unscrupulous people would bring them only fall. The idea that Macbeth's pursuit for power cannot be attained through violent means is artistically revealed to the audience with the powerful portrayal of Macbeth.

### **TEMPTATION OF MACBETH**

The greatness of Shakespeare as one critic stated rests in his "comprehensive soul" that can be considered as one of the most poetic explanation of the most dramatic genius that has never been equaled. Hence, Shakespeare is regarded as the father of English drama. The idea of tragedy as an outcome of life or dramatic art came from the ancient to the modern world or from Greek to Europe with the help of renaissance. Shakespearean plays can be divided in to history plays, comedies tragicomedies, problem plays and tragedies. Shakespearean tragedy in simple terms can be stated as a story of exceptional sorrow mostly lead to the death of the hero and many other characters. Macbeth is one of the tragedies by Shakespeare which deals with the tragedy of ambition that is, Over Vaulting ambition that eventually leads to the tragic end and downfall of the protagonist.

Macbeth is tempted and prompted by supernatural and natural agents. Supernatural agents of temptation are the witches, the Hecate and the apparitions; the natural agent is his wife, Lady Macbeth. But all the three including Macbeth form an unholy alliance of evil. The Weird Sisters greet him with three prophecies, two of which are fulfilled as a happy prologue to the swelling act of the imperial theme. This fulfillment comes as a natural consequence of events. The third prophecy requires the concentrated action of all powers of evilness to reach success.

Though the sudden fulfillment of the first two prophecies awakens Macbeth to the terrible prospect of murdering old king Duncan, many other considerations prevent him from a single-

mindful action after his aim. He has a great respect for Duncan and he himself wanted his own image and honour to be kept untarnished. Moreover he has no other reason to kill Duncan rather than his Over Vaulting ambition. Thus it is natural that he hesitates to put his thoughts into actions and thus decides to leave his future to chance. In the initial part of the play even though he wants to become the king he never allows his evil thoughts to overpower his actions and decides to leave everything upon the hands of the fate. Macbeth says:

“If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me  
Without my stir” (I.iii.143-144)

Now we are introduced to the natural agent of temptation, Lady Macbeth. In her all-out attack to subdue Macbeth with her powerful personality, Lady Macbeth confronts him with the lavish greeting. Lady Macbeth says:

“Great Glamis ! Worthy Cawdor !  
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter !” (I.v.53)

She announces that his letter has transported her beyond the ignorant present and now she can feel their future in the instant. She now only dream about their future which is going to be splendid, marvelous and joyful in every aspect. Before any mention of plan from her husband she almost accuses him with the harboring of the thought of murder and scolds him to hide his thoughts from his face. She asks him to be in a bear welcome in his eyes, hand and tongue.

Lady Macbeth says:

“look like the innocent flower  
But be the serpent under it” (I.v.63-64)

She confronts him with the promise of taking the entire responsibility in to her hand.

Macbeth falls into the mood of great disturbance and indecision as he thinks the consequences of the murder. Judgment is certain and inescapable. Moreover he has no cause against Duncan and Duncan’s virtues will speak to the world as winged angles. Thus he concludes

“I have no spur  
To prick the sides of my intent, but only  
Vaulting ambition which o’erleaps itself  
And falls on the other”. (I.vii.25-28)

So when Lady Macbeth enters he tells her that they will no longer proceed in the bloody business. She makes recrimination against him that he is subdued and tamed to obey her at the

end. She would treat his love worthless if he is not willing to get what he desired. It is the crown. He is like a coward cat that wants to catch the fish but is unwilling to wet its hand. When he wanted to make himself king, time or place did not adhere yet he would make them. Now they have made themselves but their fitness seems to unmake him. This ends in the most terrible utterance that if she had taken a vow like him she would have even dashed the brain of her own child.

Yet Macbeth doubts a possible failure. But she rules it out asking him to screw his courage up to the sticking point so that they won't undergo any kind of failure. They decide to kill the king in sleep. They must accuse the guards and make them suffer from guilt and they were sure that no one will be bold enough to question them. Macbeth praises Lady Macbeth for her intelligence and indomitable courage:

“Bring forth men-children only;  
For thy undaunted mettle should compose  
Nothing but males.” (I.vii.72-74)

They are now in thought. When he suggests smearing the grooms with blood to prove their crime, she concludes that they must weep loudly at Duncan's death which will make all convinced of their innocence. Thus the temptation is complete.

## **1.6 Othello**

### **Background**

William Shakespeare has written the play *Othello: The Moor of Venice* in the year 1603. Shortly titled as *Othello*, the tragedy is one of the four major tragedies of Shakespeare. Like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, *Othello* also is a tale of tragic fall. The eponymous hero, Othello, is depicted as a hero despite his race. But then, modern critics and African Rights Activists assault Shakespeare for his racist remarks especially in *Othello*. However, in a period of stereotypes, where moors were portrayed as negative characters and in villain roles, Othello is given a prime role in this play. The framework of Shakespeare's *Othello* is borrowed from Giraldi Cinthio's *Gli Hecatommithi*, a story which deals with human emotions like love, anger, jealousy, and betrayal. Yet, Shakespeare has kept the outline of the story and redesigned the characters and themes to suit his own purpose treating it in a psychological level.

As a prelude for the analysis of the plot, a brief summary of the play can be of great help. In the beginning of the play, Othello, the Moor elopes with Desdemona, Senator Brabantio's

daughter. He leaves Venice to command the Venetian armies in Cyprus. When Desdemona wishes to accompany Othello, he arranges for her trip in another ship with Cassio enabling them to join him in Cyprus. The most deceitful villain Iago poisons Othello that Desdemona has been unfaithful to him by developing an affair with Cassio. As a man of blind action, Othello kills Desdemona in anger neither examining the version of Iago nor providing a chance for Desdemona to prove her innocence. Later Emilia, Iago's wife, discloses that Desdemona's illicit affair with Cassio is a concocted venomous story of Iago. Iago kills Emilia and Othello feeling repentant kills himself.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

*Othello*, one of the influential tragedies of Shakespeare, begins with an attempt of Iago to spoil the fortunes of his superior Othello. The expository scene is set in the street of Venice. In the opening scene, Roderigo, a young man is in love with Desdemona, Senator Brabantio's daughter. He believes that he is helped by Iago, an ensign of Othello to win the love of Desdemona. To his utter dismay, there comes a fresh rumour that Desdemona has eloped with Othello, the Moor. Hence, Roderigo and Iago inform Senator Brabantio about the elopement of his daughter with the moor. Leaving the job of confirming the story with Roderigo, Iago vanishes immediately and tells Othello of Brabantio's reaction to his elopement with Desdemona. Iago does not want Othello to sense his hatred for him. Inwardly Iago detests Othello because he passed him over for the position of lieutenant. The fraudulent and malicious Iago starts his vicious game of informing Othello's elopement to Brabantio and also Brabantio's reaction to Othello. He tries pitting them against each other. Meantime, Cassio brings an urgent message for Othello that the Duke expects Othello's immediate help as there is an impending Turkish invasion of Cyprus.

In the Senators' meet, Brabantio points his fingers at Othello and complains. Desdemona, along with Othello, appears before the Duke of Venice. All the three come out with their own justifications. Brabantio indicts Othello of seducing his daughter; Othello states that he won the love of Desdemona by narrating his adventures and war escapades; Desdemona confesses that she loves Othello and has gone with him willfully. Learning the truth, the Duke favours Othello and appoints him as general of the defense forces against the Turks.

As Othello has to leave for Cyprus straightaway, Desdemona wishes that she should accompany him to Cyprus. Othello, with the approval of the Duke, accepts Desdemona to

accompany him but only in another ship that follows his ship. Here he does a grave mistake of trusting the untrustworthy Iago and asks him to accompany Desdemona. Iago reinstalls confidence in Roderigo saying that Desdemona would soon be fed up with Othello and asks Roderigo to come with him so that he can make use of his proximity with Desdemona in the ship positively. So, all the four-Desdemona, Roderigo, Iago and his wife Emilia are in the ship. Deceiving everybody, Iago chooses Cassio to be exploited as a weapon to destroy Othello.

After some time, a messenger informs that the Turkish fleet gets wrecked in a storm at sea and hence Cyprus is rescued from the Turkish threat. Cassio who escapes the storm arrives and greets Desdemona. Seeing a trivial thing like Cassio's handshake with Desdemona, Othello conceives a scheme to trap Cassio. Othello arrives and announces a revelry in the evening to celebrate the happy news. Watching the proximity of Othello and Desdemona, Roderigo laments to Iago that there is no possibility of Desdemona to be fed up with Othello. Iago reassures Roderigo that Desdemona will certainly lose interest in Othello but Cassio may stand a better chance if Desdemona seeks sexual favour elsewhere. Iago further guides Roderigo to keep Cassio in humiliation by fighting with him in the evening celebrations. Iago, in his soliloquy, keeps the audience well informed that killing Cassio will be a prelude for his plot to destroy Othello. In the triumphant night, Iago makes Cassio drunk and as planned sends Roderigo to fight with him.

Enraged by the taunts of Roderigo, Cassio starts chasing Roderigo on the stage. When Governor Montano tries to pacify Cassio, he stabs Montano. When Othello enquires about this disorder, Iago with a pretentious reluctance tells him that Cassio is behind everything. As a man of hasty decisions, Othello without further enquiries punishes Cassio by stripping him of his lieutenant rank. Cassio expresses his wish to retrieve his lost rank to Iago. Iago advises Cassio that he can reconcile with Othello only with the mercy of Desdemona. In his next soliloquy, Iago reveals his inner mind to the audience that he would fabricate an affair between Cassio and Desdemona to make Othello envious.

When Cassio struggles gaining access to Desdemona, Iago helps him by taking Othello out for some time so that Cassio can talk to her about his wish to be put back in the lieutenant rank. Quite concerned about Cassio's appeal, Desdemona assures him that she would do her best to make Othello forgive him. As Cassio is about to leave happily carrying the assurances of Desdemona, Othello and Iago return. Feeling embarrassed on seeing Othello, Cassio leaves

without talking to him. Othello is hurt by the odd behavior of his former lieutenant. Using this opportunity, Iago unknots his villainy telling Othello that Cassio and Desdemona have an affair. Without knowing the chaotic schemes of Iago, Desdemona requests Othello to reinstate Cassio as lieutenant. Her appeal strengthens Othello's hasty verdict that his most loved Desdemona is adulterous.

In Shakespeare, it is an archetypal pattern that the heroes hurriedly detest and disown their loved ones and later regret for their over hasty decisions. In *King Lear*, Lear curses his most loved daughter Cordelia and disowns her. Towards the end of the play, he regrets too late only to carry the dead body of his daughter. Similarly Othello too suspects his ladylove on trivial grounds and dares to kill her. Later he realizes his error only after the death of Desdemona. After that, Desdemona finds Othello indisposed and tries comforting him by giving her handkerchief to wrap around his head. In a distressed mood, he lets the handkerchief to drop to the floor. As Iago has been asking her to steal the handkerchief for him, Emilia cleverly takes the handkerchief and hands over it to Iago. Among the various motifs used in Shakespearean tragedies, the Handkerchief motif is the most popular as this is going to be considered as the only material proof for the infidelity of Desdemona. The Handkerchief gains a special status because it is the very first gift of love presented to Desdemona by Othello.

Iago is delighted getting Desdemona's handkerchief and he surreptitiously keeps it in Cassio's bedchamber as a proof of his affair with Desdemona. Though grown suspicious of his wife's loyalty, Othello demands a concrete evidence to confirm her adultery. Iago convinces him that he has seen Cassio wiping his beard with Desdemona's handkerchief- their symbol of love. Othello swears to wreak vengeance on his disloyal wife and on Cassio, the betrayer. Sensing the fulfillment of his darker purpose, Iago promises his help for Othello in his act of vengeance.

Later, Othello asks for the handkerchief, and Desdemona tells him that it is not with her and continues with her requests for Cassio's reinstatement. Upset over this and through Iago's Machiavellian plots, Othello suffers from nervous breakdown. He goes to the extent of calling Desdemona a whore. He turns a deaf ear to the defense of Desdemona and Emilia's supportive statements that she is innocent. Meantime, Iago instigates Roderigo to kill Cassio so that things will move in the expected direction. As per the directions of Iago, Roderigo tries to attack Cassio in vain but Cassio wounds him. Known for his cunningness to use even commotion and crisis to his convenience, Iago stabs Cassio and leaves. Hearing Cassio's scream, Othello thinks

that Iago would have killed Cassio as promised. Lodovico and Graziano enter to find out causes for the commotion.

The play proceeds to an end as Othello is all prepared to kill Desdemona in their bedchamber. Desdemona pleads innocence with Othello, but Othello stifles her. At this crucial point, Emilia comes and announces the death of Roderigo. Before her death, Desdemona says that she has committed suicide in order to save Othello from the charge of murder. Montano, Graziano, and Iago enter the room. Othello tells Emilia that he has killed Desdemona for her infidelity, and his accusation is substantiated by Iago who provided the handkerchief as proof. Though Iago signals Emilia not to speak, Emilia overwhelmed by sentiments tells Othello everything happened. Othello is devastated and breaks into tears. He tries to kill Iago but Iago advances and kills Emilia and runs away only to be caught by Lodovico and Montano. They also bring Cassio who is wounded. Othello wounds Iago. Lastly, Othello stabs himself and falls beside the dead body of Desdemona and dies.

## **Analysis of Major Characters**

### **Othello**

Othello is a typical Shakespearean tragic hero. He is not an Aristotelian hero because there is no dignity in his tragic end. His inherent weakness is his over hasty nature. Basically he is a strong character with a lot of positive attributes. He is a courageous, trustworthy general. He is a master story teller. In fact, he draws the attention of Desdemona only with his narratives of his valorous deeds in the war. Desdemona is captivated by his escapades and falls in love with Othello. Though an alien by nationality, he rises to the level of a general purely because of his mastery in warfare and his loyalty to the Venetian defense forces. He has good command over all his subordinates. He has enormous respect for the land and the ruler. Given an opportunity, he delivers inspiring speeches. When he was accused by Desdemona's father of elopement, he puts forth the facts in such a way that the Duke and the senators turn in support of Othello's love. His love for Desdemona is true. But later it is tainted by the poisonous schemes of Iago. When there is a threat to the security of Cyprus, the only choice of the Duke and the Senators is Othello. He is highly regarded for his bravery and loyalty.

Possessing all these good qualities, Othello falls because of an inherent weaknesses-suspicious mind and over hasty action. His own strength becomes a weakness that brings him downfall.

Iago devises all these cunning designs to eliminate Othello only because he has become his superior in the military rank. Iago's jealousy is due to the valour of Othello. Such a heroic Othello becomes a victim of his suspicious nature. Since he is a moor, he develops a sense of inferiority and insecurity when the beautiful and fair Desdemona falls in love with him. He believes Iago who betrays him and betrays Desdemona who believes him the most. In the Greek drama, Oedipus after knowing that he killed his father and married his mother, he blinds himself but does not choose the path of suicide. He wants to prove to the world that he is not afraid of his fate. His suffering is not important in the play but his endurance to suffer even more with dignity is much more important. Oedipus stands dignified with his act. But Othello stabs himself and dies by the side of his wife. There is nothing tragic in the death of Othello but only pathetic to view the death scene of Othello. So, Othello is a pathetic figure and not a tragic hero. Othello is an odd man out in the Venetian army as he is the only black in the midst of white faces.

With Othello's moor identity, Shakespeare seems to have constructed/ reinforced unconsciously the dubious assumptions of the West that white is good, black is evil; white is innocence, black is guilt. Despite his racial inferiority, Othello is triumphant in war and in love. With unexpected prospects of marrying a fair Desdemona, Othello's own inferiority complex destabilizes his self-assurance. Using this weakness, Iago succeeds in trapping Othello to fall a prey to jealousy and suspicion. Othello's inferiority complex is so intense that even trivial acts and concocted details can shatter the confidence of Othello. Iago's words drive him to terminate his rationality and force him to violence. He is a man of action. He is an opposite of Hamlet. Hamlet delays and gets killed. Othello acts swiftly and kills Desdemona. Had he delayed like Hamlet, Desdemona would have convinced him of her innocence or Emilia would have revealed the cunning designs of Iago. The pattern of Shakespearean tragedies are tailored perfectly to suit the Elizabethan Audience. One cannot swap the roles of the tragic heroes. If done, it will sabotage the plot of the plays. His loyalty to Venice, his love for Desdemona, and his realization make him a good human being. As every man, Othello too does not have full control over his life because fate overpowers his free will. Othello ends his life by expressing his last wish that he should be remembered in the following ways: "Then must you speak  
Of one that loved not wisely but too well,  
Of one not easily jealous but, being wrought,  
Perplexed in the extreme."

## **Iago**

Shakespeare, with all his innate creative talents put together, created Iago as the most enigmatic villain of his theatre. Iago cannot be described in the usual ways of describing a villain's character. He is a bundle of contradictions and every word that he utters carries myriad meanings. He is a white washed creature. In fact he is every man who wants to cover the real face by wearing a convenient mask to show off the superficial face. Every man tries to construct a clean public image by wearing a mask of 'good man' and suppress the real qualities fearing public disgrace. Iago also covers his real face by wearing a mask. He has a reputation for honesty and integrity. Othello is full of praises for Iago referring to him only as "honest Iago." The seriousness of the character of Iago lies in the fact that he is not what he is. He looks gentle but indeed the most venomous man. He is talented in a negative way that he could invent serious scandals with the available insignificant data.

With little stuff, he would manipulate anybody for anything to any extent. That is the greatness of Iago. He befools everybody he encounters and loves nobody genuinely. He even kills his wife when she turns truthful and reveals the truth to Othello. He devotes his lifetime to take revenge upon his friends and never wasted a single minute to care for any. No tender emotions; only terrible commotions. Though projected as a Machiavellian villain, Shakespeare stuffed some mindboggling words into the mouth of Iago. Iago is capable of identifying the weakness of people around him and is manipulating it for his vested interests. He harms people not to gain anything for him but only to taste the evil. He never goes in search of anybody to trap but ironically they fall as victims for his villainy. Whoever befriends Iago and trusts him are naturally destroyed. To sum up the character of Iago, one can say that he is just a devil in disguise. William Hazlitt writes: "Iago is an extreme instance . . . of diseased intellectual activity, with the most perfect indifference to moral good or evil, [...] He is quite or nearly indifferent to his own fate as to that of others; he runs all risks for a trifling and doubtful advantage, and is himself the dupe and victim of ruling passion — an insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous kind."

## **Desdemona**

Desdemona is an admirable character among the women characters of Shakespeare. She is a woman of good spirit and an intellectual. She is not given enough space in the play compared to her male counterparts. She is the opposite of Iago. Whatever she speaks exhibits her truthfulness. When she was asked to explain her elopement with Othello before the Duke, she

says she is love with Othello and has gone with him on her own will. She exercises her free will to openly declare her allegiance to Othello. She does not have an oscillating mind. She remains loyal to Othello and her love for him remains unchanged till the end. She loves him, lives for him, and dies for him. In spite of her being designed as a typical female character, she is an impressive character who differentiates her love for Othello from her affection for Cassio.

Like a child, she is drawn towards Othello for his exciting narratives of his wartime escapades. As a girl who is craving for genuine love, she is impressed by Othello's valour and adventurous attitude. She falls in love with Othello and continues to love him contrary to what Iago expected. For her genuineness and integrity, she should not have been suspected of infidelity. Othello's accusation is a grave injustice done to the gracious truthful Desdemona. The moment he doubts her, she is dead. Still to withhold the genuineness of her love for him, she struggles to defend her. But she could not convince him of her innocence because he is blinded by the words and misdeeds of Iago. Even in the dinner, she offers the handkerchief only to Othello to wrap around his head. She could prove his truthfulness and the greatness of her love only after being killed. Before her death, she tells a lie that she has committed suicide. Her constant love for Othello is proved with the way she defends her husband even she was killed by him. In the conventional way, she tends to become a typical sacrificial woman character who lives only for her 'other' and not for her.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The very pedestal of *Othello* lies in the universal human emotion called love. Love becomes the base for the plot and serves as a connecting chain between scenes. In the expository scene, Desdemona's love for Othello triggered fresh gossip. Without gossip there cannot be any love affair. The gossip about the elopement of Desdemona with Othello is contained only through a session of arguments and counter arguments in the Duke's presence. Desdemona asserts her love for Othello by taking on the responsibility fully saying that she willfully goes with Othello and her father's claim that Othello bewitched her using witchcraft is a tale. Her love for Othello is so intense that she has even humiliated her father in the presence of the Duke and senators. But her love could only win the heart of Othello but not his confidence.

The love of Desdemona which survived her father's opposition weakens over trivial issues. Othello's love for Desdemona is also strong and the problem lies on a different level. Othello starts suspecting Desdemona not just after Iago's Machiavellian tricks, but always, as he has a

possessive quality. Due to his racial inferiority, he always has a possessive instinct. Othello goes to the extent of killing his most loved Desdemona not being carried away by the deceits of Iago. He has suspicion within himself and Iago just exploited the hidden negative traits of Othello by kindling it with invented stories. Othello suffers from two important vices-the tragic flaws in his otherwise noble character. Suspicion and hastiness are the tragic flaws that bring Othello his tragic fall. He suspects not only Desdemona but all trustworthy characters in the play like Cassio. And ironically, he never doubts the integrity of Iago or Roderigo.

In Shakespeare, vulnerability actually propels the plot to move further. If we assume that the heroes don't have any flaws in their characters, the play cannot move a single act. It is only the hero's vulnerability that drags the hero into five acts with a few scene divisions. Unless Othello is suspicious and over hasty, Iago has no business in the play. Despite his nobility, Othello has an inherently attained negative trait which he cannot just escape. The journey of Othello is his continuous fight against the undesirable qualities he possesses. He struggles to fight the negative assets out but succumbs to his suspicion.

The very concept of Love is also exploited by Iago. Desdemona's friendship/attachment for Cassio has been tailored by Iago as an illicit affair. Roderigo loves Desdemona and is prepared to launch any attack on anybody for getting her. But then his love is not real love but only a cloud. For Iago, love is just a ploy to harm any number of people. His love for Cassio or Roderigo is not real as he betrays them to the extreme. He makes everyone feel that he has love for them but what lies inside Iago is nothing but filth.

Throughout the play, all human relationships- be it love or friendship or filial attachment-are either mistaken or fake. Except Desdemona's love for Othello and Emilia's friendship with Desdemona, all other human relationships turn into a mirage. After all every relationship is illusory. Shakespeare could successfully portray the widening gap between one's appearance and reality. The appearance versus reality theme is also present in this play. Most of the people, in the play and also in their real lives, are seemingly good but evil inside. Iago is not a strange alienated character created by Shakespeare. Iago is everyman.

Everyman wants to have a public image and a private character. One cannot judge someone's character by seeing his public behavior but only by watching how he/she behaves within the four walls. Jealousy and bias also play a vital role in Othello. Iago longs to harm Othello and

Cassio only because of his jealousy and Othello retorts badly because of his biased attitude. Nobody treats him as an outsider in Venice. But he has a feeling that he is differently treated.

### **Study Questions**

#### **Hamlet**

1. Write an essay on the role of women in Hamlet?
2. Comment on the idea of madness in Hamlet.
3. Explain the function and nature of Hamlet's soliloquies.
4. Explain the theme of revenge in Hamlet.
5. Sketch the character of Claudius.
6. Consider Hamlet as a typical Shakespearean tragedy.

#### **Macbeth**

1. Discuss the various roles of the witches in Macbeth.
2. Assess the importance of the supernatural in Macbeth.
3. "Macbeth is neither a loathsome nor a heroic character, but a mixture"-Comment.
4. Comment on the character of Lady Macbeth.
5. Explain the importance of Lady Macbeth's 'Sleepwalking Scene' of Act V.
6. Write an essay on theme of the destruction of the natural order in Macbeth.

#### **Othello**

1. "Iago's passion for destruction is the only creative passion in the play."(Harold Bloom)-Comment.
2. "Othello's foolishness, rather than Iago's cleverness, leads to the tragedy of Shakespeare's Othello"-Analyze.
3. Explain the theme of jealousy in Othello.
4. Critically analyze the character of Desdemona.
5. Trace the gender and racial stereotypes in Othello.
6. Consider Othello as a perfect Shakespearean tragedy.

## UNIT-II

### 2.0 Shakespearean Comedies

#### Background

For more than four hundred years of Shakespeare's existence in this world, it has become quite a collective choice to bifurcate his major plays into tragedies and comedies. Shakespeare's great works like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Othello* are considered as Tragedies. Some believe that his plays that are light-hearted are pushed to a subservient position and are classified as comedies. They also believe that these comic pieces were staged just to satisfy the sensibilities of the lower sections of the society who frequented the theatres, while the tragedies were performed to edify a more sophisticated section of the audience. It is surmised that Shakespearean Comedies are to entertain and his tragedies are to educate the audience. But then, strictly speaking, his tragedies are meant for passionate appeal and comedies are meant for intellectual appeal. This opinion has given rise to several interesting interpretations among the critics, but has placed Shakespearean plays in a disproportionate position.

In the past few years, several of his works have been re-evaluated, without subordinating the comedies to the tragedies. This has resulted in the proposal of two significant viewpoints. Firstly, Feminist critics are of the opinion that this differentiation between the tragedies and the comedies has a gender bias. Most of the tragedies are male-centered, where the women have little role to play. Whereas, the comedies are the world of Shakespeare's women, but, even there, they have to play the role of men by disguising themselves. Secondly, Some other critics are of the opinion that the reason why the tragedies are often placed above the comedies is that the tragedies have a high poetic diction which is related to greater moralities. The comedies, on the other hand, have witty dialogues, and have very little of the powerful soliloquies and high poetics of the tragedies.

When "Shakespearean Comedy" is spoken of, the words are used not as they were in the past. A comedy is usually differentiated from a tragedy depending upon its ending- the comedies have happy endings and often end in marriages, while the tragedies end in misery or in death. A viewpoint from the author's pen would turn *Romeo and Juliet* into a comedy, and *Twelfth Night* into a tragedy. Shakespeare has manipulated this convention at a wide range. For him, a play that ends in marriage cannot be termed as a comedy. In *Love's Labour's Lost*, he teases

us and the characters until the end, and the most awaited marriage is delayed for a year. On the other hand, his two comedies *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well* end with marriages that are often seen as punishment for most of the characters. Shakespeare never intended to classify and write comedies as such. These genre classifications were done later by critics and theater historians.

Some of Shakespeare's tragedies which end in death, seem to have better endings than many of his well known comedies. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the characters appear to be united in death. Thus, the endings of most of his plays are tentative and open to interpretations. His comedies call for a reading beyond the fairy-tale context and the notion of 'happy ending'. For example in *Twelfth Night*, the world of the characters that is presented is more important than the question whether the play has a happy ending or not.

There are certain characteristics common to comedies that differentiate them from the greater hold of the tragedies-

In a comedy, the plot is of greater importance, while in a tragedy, the character is.

A comedy connects to our thoughts, while a tragedy is more concerned with feelings.

The names of the central characters in the tragedies form the title of the plays. It is not the case with comedies.

Tragedies deal with the problematic and the world of men. Women play leading positions only in comedies.

Comedies are known for their witty dialogues and satiric statements. Tragedies, on the other hand, deal with high poetics and long, powerful speeches.

## **2.1 Characteristics of Shakespearean Comedies**

The chief characteristics of a typical Shakespearean Comedy are as follows:

Portrayal of young lovers struggling to get through their difficulties, usually the result of the intervention of the elders. The case here could be that of Jessica and Lorenzo in *The Merchant of Venice*. In the play, the lovers elope due to the interference of Jessica's father Shylock, a Jew, who doesn't want a Christian as husband for his daughter.

Characters often tend to mistake each others' identities. This creates confusion in the play and drives the action. Some characters deliberately disguise themselves owing to the plot.

Often, the women can be seen masquerading as men. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia is seen disguised as a lawyer, delivering the famous lines on Mercy. In *Twelfth Night*, Viola is disguised as a young boy Cesario, who is employed in the court of Orsino.

The secondary characters, usually the servants or the fools, are the wisest ones. They are often seen commenting on the follies of others or making worldly-wise statements. Nerissa, Launcelot and Maria are some such characters.

The plot is complex and inter-woven with several twists and turns.

The plot also involves separation, and reunion of friends and lovers at the end. In *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, the lovers, Hermia and Lysander, and Helena and Demetrius are separated in the beginning, but happily united in the end.

The language used is light and witty. Shakespeare plays with puns and metaphors to convey the comic elements. He was a master in word-play. Dr. Johnson points out in his *Preface* that this is one of the defects of Shakespeare. But he also acknowledges that the genius of Shakespeare cannot be complete, even without these deficiencies.

Love pervades in the world of every Shakespearean comedy. Romance is always an important theme. There are always sets of lovers presented to us. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has four sets of couples, *Twelfth Night* has three love pairs, and *As You Like It* has four.

Shakespeare always had certain stock characters for his plays, as the classical masters had—the lovers, the fool, the witty servant, the drunkard etc. These characters were stereotypical to the Elizabethan stage and kept reappearing in his works.

All these plays end happily with festivities and celebrations. All the obstacles and doubts are finally resolved and the lovers are united.

Music plays a very important role in the Shakespearean comedies. Commenting on this note, a critic mentions, “The use of singing and dancing in Shakespeare’s comedies in particular, signal two important insights. Firstly, his astounding understanding of the humanity and a deepening understanding of love and how this can lead to, and mature in, marriage.”

*Twelfth Night* embeds most of these features in itself, but the way they play upon and about the characters is a totally different matter. It invites our sympathy for the characters, and we tend to laugh along with them, and not at them, unlike in another play, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where we see the characters through the mischievous eyes of the fairy Puck who laughs at the follies and foibles of the other characters, making it difficult for us to sympathize with them. *Twelfth Night* has more realistic elements in it. It is also more akin to the tragedy for tragedy is associated with feelings. This does not lead to the conclusion that the play has a darker side, but maintains a proper balance between the lighter and the darker elements.

## **2.2 *As you like it***

*"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..." Act II Scene VII*

### ***Background***

*As you like it*, one of the popular comedies of Shakespeare was written probably between 1598 and 1600. It was almost the fag end of Queen Elizabeth's regime. The play has its place in the popular literary tradition called *pastoral comedy*. As a vibrant literary genre, pastoral comedies deal with the lives of people who run away from the urban set up or courtly life and find refuge in the country side. Quite often, these newly ruralized people disguise themselves as rustics and interact with the rustic people on diverse topics including the marked difference between the urban life and the rustic life. More importantly, these pastoral mode of literature talks about the merits of the pristine form of human life at the country side comparing it with the man-made artificial urban life filled with rigid social hierarchies. Therefore, pastoral literature serves as a bridge between human experiences in urban space and that of the rural setting. It also comes out with rigorous social criticism thereby doing a social reform.

Swallowing the technical features and thematic concerns of pastoral tradition, Shakespeare's *As You Like It* critiques the wickedness and deceitfulness of courtly life and humorously handles the conventions of romantic love. The play covers a wide spectrum of themes like urban versus rural, illusion versus reality, reason versus passion, nature versus culture, youth versus old, and the noble versus the humble etc. In these rivalries, *As You Like*

*It* like a Marxian critique keeps everything threadbare and allows the audience/readers to make a choice. Through this comedy, Shakespeare creates a new world of numerous options and boundless potentials. The simultaneous experience of desires and discomforts of being human beings is brought out so effectively in the text.

Shakespeare borrowed the source for the plot of *As You Like It* from Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde, a romance in prose*. As he does with every source, he modified this source also to suit his purpose. He gave importance to the feud between the brothers over inheritance of property. *The Tale of Gamelyn*, another English story in which a younger brother has vengeance on his elder brother who ill-treats him, is the source for the story of Orlando and Oliver. The setting of the play *As You Like It* is the rustic forest of Ardenne which serves as a relief camp for people who are fed up with their urban or courtly issues.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

*As you like it* has two intertwined main plots. The first plot deals with the complications arise from the conflict between Orlando and his elder brother Oliver over inheriting the property. According to primogeniture, Oliver acquired the vast majority of the estates into his possession after the passing away of his father Sir Rowland de Bois. Primogeniture is the right, by law or custom, of the legitimate, firstborn son to inherit his parent's entire or main estate, in preference to elder illegitimate sons, younger sons, daughters and collateral relatives. The second plot deals with the conflict between Duke Frederick and his brother Duke Senior over inheriting the Ducal throne. Duke Frederick deceived his brother Duke Senior and usurped the ducal throne. As a result Duke Senior leads a hermit's life in the Forest of Arden. As the play opens, we find Orlando in ill temper complaining to the family's longtime caretaker Adam about his brother Oliver. The crux of his complaint is that Oliver, instead of sharing proportionate property their father Sir Rowland De Bois who is no more, inherited the entire property thus depriving Orlando of his share. As the eldest brother Oliver inherited the property but is burdened with the responsibility of bringing up his two younger brothers. In the complimentary plot, Duke Frederick, the younger brother betrays his brother Duke Senior and usurps the throne. So in the principal plot, the elder brother usurps the property of the younger and in the supplementary plot, the younger usurps the throne of the elder.

Duke Frederick, after usurping the throne, banishes his elder brother Duke Senior. The banished Duke Senior lives in the Forest of Arden with some nobles. They get used to the rustic

life and keep hunting the animals for food. Though Duke Senior is banished, his daughter Rosalind is still in the ducal palace due to the fact that Duke Frederick's daughter Celia is very much attached to Rosalind. The bond between Celia and Rosalind is so strong that Rosalind still stays in the ducal palace leading a courtly life. Orlando complains to Adam that he is not even offended by Oliver's grabbing the property meant for him but by his refusal to help him to be a gentleman. Meantime, Oliver comes there and a verbal fight erupted between him and Orlando. Shortly after they start exchanging blows and Adam interfered to mollify them. Immediately after Orlando's exit, Oliver encounters Charles, the Duke's wrestler, and asks him to fatally harm Orlando if he happens to contend him in the wrestling contest the next day. Charles promises Oliver that he will harm Orlando seriously.

In the wrestling contest, Rosalind and Celia are witnessing the matches. Rosalind could not watch the wrestling matches cheerfully as she is disheartened by her father's banishment. However, Celia consoles her and persuades her to be jovial. Meantime, Touchstone, a court jester comes and entertains them with his witty speeches. Both Celia and Rosalind are informed by a courtier that Charles has already won three consecutive wrestling matches and he will face the next match in the place where they are sitting.

Duke Frederick arrives and discourages Orlando from challenging Charles in the duel. He also indirectly advises Orlando not to be the next victim of Charles. Disappointing the Duke, Orlando refuses to withdraw and insists on facing Charles in the match. Impressed by the looks of Orlando, Rosalind also with the permission of the Duke tries convincing Orlando not to fight with Charles. Orlando is so determined that none could stop him. Orlando wins over Charles in the match and also Rosalind's heart. Appreciating the victory of Orlando, Rosalind presented him with a necklace. Seeing the response of Rosalind, Orlando becomes speechless. Without words, both of them exchanged their love through their expression of feelings.

Back home, Orlando is warned by his well-wisher Adam to leave the place immediately because Oliver has vowed to kill him. Fearing Oliver's nefarious plans to kill him, Orlando, along with Adam flees for the Forest of Arden. Simultaneously, Duke Frederick has banished Rosalind being afraid of her influence over Celia. Celia is upset by this hysteric reaction of her father and chooses to accompany Rosalind into banishment. So, Duke Frederick's intention to detach Celia from Rosalind does not yield fruits as the friendship between Rosalind and Celia is very strong. Rosalind disguised herself as a young man and named herself Ganymede in

order to escape recognition. Celia renamed herself Aliena and pretends as if she is Ganymede's sister. Another reason for Rosalind disguising as a man is for security. Now the best friends Rosalind and Celia are brother Ganymede and his sister Aliena.

Rosalind and Celia convince Touchstone also to join them and all the three reach the forest almost famished. In the forest, they encounter Corin, a shepherd and asks him for food but he refuses to help them as he cannot feed strangers as per his master's orders. But, Corin says that his master is trying to sell his land. Rosalind disguised as Ganymede offers to buy the land and they move on to a hovel led by Corin. On the other side, we are introduced to an interesting character named Jaques. Jaques is philosophical in his speeches and gloomy in thoughts. He does not agree with the killing of the deer when Duke Senior's men are hunting and playing games. He is a recluse spending his time alone, thinking about the surprises of life. Duke Senior searches for Jaques desperately because he feels that he is entertained by the melancholic friend's fun. Ultimately, Jaques reaches the Duke's place and informs him that he met Touchstone, the fool in the same forest.

Orlando and Adam reach the same forest almost completely worn out. Adam could not even walk any further and Orlando has to carry him on his back. Orlando finally drops Adam in a place and goes in search of food. He comes across Duke Senior and asks for the food. As Duke Senior offers him food, he brings Adam also to share the food. In the intervening time, Duke Frederick discovers that Celia and Rosalind escaped together and mistakes that both have gone with Orlando. He strongly believes that both the girls are infatuated with Orlando and would have run off with him. Frederick orders Oliver to get hold of his brother Orlando and confiscates all his property until Orlando is produced before him. Pressurized by Duke Frederick, Oliver also embarks on a trip to the forest searching for Orlando.

In the company of Duke Senior's men, Orlando now kills his time writing poems to his sweetheart Rosalind, carving her name in the trees, and hanging the poems in the branches of the trees. Growing nostalgic about the past, he is indulging in these activities. Rosalind who is also in the same forest sees these poems and her names scribbled on trees and wants to know the person behind it. Feeling embarrassed, Rosalind asks Celia to find out the person who is doing these things. Celia says it is the handiwork of the love sick Orlando.

The moment they are conversing about Orlando, he and Jaques enter the place. On seeing Orlando again after banishment, Rosalind could not control her feelings, rises up and greets him. Since she is in disguise, Orlando could not recognize her. As Jaques requests Orlando not to hang the poems on trees, Rosalind expresses her willingness to cure the love sickness of Orlando. However, Orlando does not want his love sickness to be cured as it is a pleasure in pain. After some initial hesitation, he accepts the idea of Rosalind that he should pretend to love Ganymede imagining that she is Rosalind. Ironically Ganymede is Rosalind in disguise. In the midst of all these, Touchstone also reads the poems hanging on the tree and teases its poor poetic style. Touchstone has also fallen in love with a shepherd girl named Audrey. Both Touchstone and Audrey decide to marry and when they are about to get married, Jaques enters and tries to convince him not to marry.

Rosalind and Celia reach a place where Orlando agrees to meet them. As they wait there, Rosalind sees Silvius trying to entice Phoebe, a young shepherdess who does not reciprocate. Rosalind scolds Phoebe for making a lot of fuss over the love proposed by Silvius. Phoebe instantly falls in love with Ganymede despite her harsh words. Now, Phoebe suffers because she loves a person who cannot love her as he is she in disguise. Silvius too suffers because he loves a girl who loves someone else. This kind of triangular love is a pattern in Shakespeare. Unrequited love becomes the soul of Shakespearean comedies.

Rosalind and Celia wait for long and Orlando arrives there. Both Rosalind as Ganymede and Orlando have their pretentious romances. In their games, Rosalind makes him realize that he should love a person knowing their strengths and weakness. Accepting a person with his weakness is a great thing. If lovers love their counterparts accepting their weakness then there is no problem. Later the same day, Rosalind and Celia come to the same place and wait for Orlando. Again he is late and in the meantime Silvius reaches. He gifts Ganymede with a poem from Phoebe without knowing that it is a love letter to Ganymede. He realizes that he is fooled by Phoebe and leaves the place.

At that point of time, Oliver comes and tells both Celia and Rosalind that he was about to be harmed by a snake when he was sleeping under a tree but fortunately saved by Orlando. Again he was about to be assaulted by a lion and Orlando struggled with the lion to save his life. In his fight with the lion, Orlando kills the lion but gets hurt and could not come to meet Rosalind. As a proof of this and also as an excuse for his not coming to meet Rosalind, Orlando sent a

bloody Handkerchief. Oliver now realized that in spite of his ungenerous attitude towards his younger brother, he saved his life in danger.

Without any delay in thought, he renounced his hatred for Orlando and starts loving him more. On seeing the bloody handkerchief, Rosalind swoons. After some time, Rosalind has an informal meeting with Orlando, Silvius, and Phoebe. The play reaches its climax now with a lot of complicated relationships to be untangled. Orlando is in love with Rosalind disguised as Ganymede, Phoebe is in love with Ganymede, and Silvius is in love with Phoebe. Understanding the complexity of the issue, Rosalind finally wants to resolve the entire crisis and directs them to meet her the next day. She makes a promise to Orlando that he will marry Rosalind and to Silvius that he will marry Phoebe. She also assures Phoebe that she is ready to marry her if Phoebe is willing to marry him at the time of marriage. She also gets a promise that if she cannot then she should marry Silvius.

Next day, everyone in the forest including Duke Senior and his men gather. Rosalind reaches and makes all of the lover's re-endorse their promises. She and Celia then leave and come back as women. Rosalind comes back as Rosalind and Celia as Celia. Orlando's joys know no limits but Phoebe realizes that she should now marry Silvius. Meanwhile, Celia and Oliver fall in love with each other and plan to get married. Last of all, Touchstone and Audrey arrive.

All the four marriage ceremonies are conducted in the presence of Hymen, the marriage goddess. Jaques, the dejected character in the play, remarks about the reunion of the couples that it seems the couples are led into Noah's ark two-by-two. Towards the last moments of the play, the brother of both Orlando and Oliver comes and informs them that Duke Frederick meets a holy man and transforms his way of living. As a result, Duke Frederick repents, renounces his position, and returns the dukedom to his brother Duke Senior. As a dominant feature of Shakespearean comedies, this play also ends with a happy note that Orlando becomes the heir to the Dukedom, Oliver retains his estate, and Duke Senior returns to his former position. Rosalind ends the play by asking the audience to favor the performers with an ovation.

## **Analysis of Major Characters**

### **Rosalind**

As a common characteristic, women characters do dominate the Comedies of Shakespeare. In this play also, the lead role is taken by Rosalind. The stereotype that two men falling in love with one girl or two girls falling in love with one man forms the basis for many Shakespearean comedies. Triangular love is another recurring pattern in the comedies. The plot of this play revolves around the same triangular love affairs and the subsequent complications. Rosalind becomes the key player in making the plot move in the right direction. Rosalind falls in love with Orlando when he wins the wrestling contest with Charles. This can be viewed as a deliberate act because she would have got some grudge against Duke Frederick as he has usurped the Ducal throne of her father. Since Orlando defeats Charles who is the Duke's man, she expresses her love for him and gifts him with a necklace. Besides, her love for him comes as an impression she formed after seeing the style with which Orlando wins over Charles.

Rosalind is a girl of wit and intellect. She continues to live in the ducal palace because of her love for Celia her best friend. Rosalind values the friendship of Celia and of course Celia too reciprocates. That is why when Rosalind is banished, Celia also accompanies her to the Forest of Arden. The way she expresses her love for Orlando shocks the Duke and thinking that she will have a negative impact on his daughter Celia, he banishes Rosalind. Rosalind does not keep her feelings concealed. When she is banished, she chooses to move to the forest and Celia accompanies her. She uses her presence of mind and disguises herself as a man Ganymede and converted Celia into Ganymede's sister. She does this in order to gain security for both of them in the forest. In the forest when she happens to see love poems about her hanging from the trees and her names being carved in the branches everywhere, she feels embarrassed and tries to find out the reason/person behind it. Here she exhibits her feelings as a typical unmarried young girl and also the anxiety to find out the person responsible for it.

Though she comes out with a tirade against the assigned roles for both male and female, she herself fits into such assigned roles in most of the scenes. When she knows that it is Orlando who is doing all these things out of love sickness, she does not reveal her identity. Rather she makes a plan to play with him. She suggests that Orlando should imagine Ganymede as his ladylove Rosalind and love her. She also teaches him how to express his love for Rosalind. She also finds fault with his concept of divine love and his love sickness. She advises him that he

should love Rosalind only with her weakness. Otherwise, if he comes to know her weakness in the future, he may not love her as the way he loves her now. She insists that one should accept a person only with his/her weakness. She also scolds Phoebe for not reciprocating the love of Silvius. Later Phoebe falls in love with Rosalind who is in disguise as Ganymede. When Oliver informs her that Orlando saved him from a lion and in his struggle to kill the lion he got injured, Rosalind faints.

In the last moments of the play, Rosalind reveals herself before every one and facilitates the happy ending of the play. She also uses her wit to convince Phoebe to marry Silvius. Throughout the play, Rosalind shines like the morning star. Without her mischief, playfulness, spirit, and wit, life for other in the forest would have been a tormenting experience. It is she who transformed a punishment place into a heavenly place for everybody with her charm, grace and comic spirit. But then, we as audience should not ask certain questions like how does Orlando fail to recognize his lady love Rosalind's face even if she is in disguise etc. We can enjoy the comedies of Shakespeare only if we follow the willing suspension of disbelief in the theatre. Rosalind is a favorite among feminist critics. They admire her ability to subvert the restrictions that the male centric society keeps on a woman.

### **Orlando**

Orlando is another dominant character and the counterpart of Rosalind. In Shakespearean tragedies, we find male characters glorified in terms of their valour, nobility and tragic fall etc. But in Comedies, we have male characters who are subsumed by the female characters. They do not have anything other than falling in love with the heroines. Here again in this play, Orlando not even falls in love but simply reciprocates the love expressed by Rosalind. After his leaving the dukedom and in the absence of Rosalind, his love for her increases and he becomes love sick. He is almost laughed at for his follies and feelings.

In the initial scene, he feels that he is betrayed by his brother Oliver. The crux of Orlando's complaint is that Oliver does not bring him up properly and fails to make him a gentleman. But, Oliver praises Orlando as a noble character, unschooled yet learned, and loved by people of all ranks. Though Oliver hates Orlando and tries to harm him, he speaks praiseworthy words about Orlando. That is the generous depiction of the hero of *As you Like it*. In the romantic endeavours in the forest, he is taught by Rosalind about the grammar of love. But he speaks all clichéd love verses that he will die without Rosalind etc. He does not have the wit compatible with Rosalind. He writes poems for her and hangs them from the branches of trees. Touchstone

laughs at it and comments that they are of poor style. Despite all other negative traits, Orlando is projected as the perfect 'other' for Rosalind. He always exhibits his nobility by taking Adam with him wherever he goes, by daring his life to protect the life of his brother Oliver who usurped his property and harmed him. All these acts show that he is a hero who does all these things not only to impress the lady love but also the audience.

### **Jaques**

Jaques is a typical Shakespearean jester introduced in this play. Many philosophical renderings are passed on to the audience only through Jaques. Jaques suffers from self-pity and self-love. He derives pleasure in his sadness that too in a play that delights in happiness. Jaques himself strongly feels that his gloomy nature fits well for the Duke Senior's fool. Among the fools in Shakespeare, Jaques is very dull and lacks wisdom. He is not as powerful as the fool in King Lear. In this play, Jaques summarizes the philosophy of the seven stages of human life in a brilliant manner.

His "All the world's a stage" speech is an often quoted passage where he talks about the philosophy of human existence. All of us play some roles at some times throughout our life. The Skepticism that was prevalent during the Renaissance is powerfully expressed by Jaques. There is a subtle difference between the wit of Rosalind and Jaques. Rosalind laughs at the society only to reform it. She plays with Orlando only to make him a better lover and with Phoebe only to make her a practical lady love. Jaques is almost a recluse who finds fulfillment in his own sadness. Even at the end of the play when all the characters are enjoying merrily Jaques decides to follow the reformed Duke Frederick because he feels that only from such reformed characters he will his melancholy enhanced. For Rosalind, togetherness and community living teaches the meaning of life. For Jaques, loneliness and sadness offers wisdom. After all, wisdom is mistakenly identified with loneliness and melancholy in most cases. Jaques emphasizes the same belief in this play with his role.

### **Thematic Analysis**

In *As you Like it*, Love takes its stride throughout the play. Since time immemorial, love has been considered an essential ingredient in literature and other art forms. All the literatures deal with the concept of love and the treatment of love in such texts were totally different from the concept of love propagated by Shakespearean comedies. Love was treated as a sickness that

causes severe inner crisis for the lovers and it is used to enslave the other. But Shakespeare humanizes the concept of love by assuring that love brings happiness and pleasure. Love of course brings torment and sadness but then there is pleasure in overcoming the pain of love. In this play, Orlando suffers because of his love for Rosalind. His suffering is a butt of ridicule. Even his love poems for his lady love are not metrically compatible to be laughed at by Touchstone.

All the trivial torments and strange behaviour of the lovers are ridiculed and laughed at by other characters. Of course Rosalind in the guise of Ganymede reforms the characters of Orlando and Phoebe. She tells Orlando not to be a slave for his love. She also tells the same thing to Silvius and scolds Phoebe not to make a fuss over the proposed love of Silvius. But there is a discrepancy in her attitude to love and her very behaviour. She teaches Orlando how to love effectively. According to her, one should love the other accepting all the strengths and weakness. She even laughs at the way Orlando expressed his love for Rosalind that he will die without Rosalind. It is very common in Shakespearean comedies that love plays a vital role in shaping the plot. And the love of Rosalind and Orlando and the love of others bring delight and happiness.

The primary role of Shakespearean comedy is to delight the audience and the secondary function is to enlighten them with the philosophical ramifications. In this play, the philosophical undercurrents are taken care of by Jaques. Though he is not as powerful as the fool of *King Lear*, he has some serious stuff to offer us. Especially when he utters the philosophically drenched passages about the seven stages of human life, there is something that disturbs the audience. In Act II Scene VII, Jaques ruminates on the seven stages of human life-infancy, boyhood, adulthood, lover, soldier, and a wise civic leader and perhaps becoming a bit more foolish until he takes a u-turn to his “second childhood.” Jaques talks about the changing nature of human life. How often human beings change is evident from the changes the characters undergo in the play. All the characters in this play undergo some change- be it physical, emotional, or spiritual. Almost all the characters enter the Forest of Arden and none returns the same person.

All of them undergo some change in their behaviour or their view of life. Rosalind changes metaphorically when she disguises herself as a man. Orlando changes his notion of love and similar is the case with Silvius and Phoebe. The vengeful and wicked Duke Frederick changes

his power hungry attitude and prefers to be a hermit. Duke Senior changes from a hermit into a Duke. After all, change is the only unchangeable thing in human life. Another predominant theme in the play is the urban life versus rural life. The courtly life in the urban space has its own demerits. People tend to become wicked due to the pressures of urban life.

Oliver betrays his own brother Orlando and usurps the property. He does not stop with it but tries to harm his life. Duke Frederick also betrays his brother Duke Senior and usurped the ducal throne. When he feels that Rosalind's character will have a negative impact on his daughter's behaviour and attitude, he banishes Rosalind. All these characters flee the urban space and take refuge in the forest. The rural space provides them some solace for the corrupt minds. Nature in its pristine form has the power to transform the corrupt minds. In the forest, everyone gets reformed. Even the spiteful Duke Frederick changes himself seeing a religious person in the forest. Shakespeare does not intend to provide a bleak picture of the urban life giving a preferential treatment to the pastoral. He just tries to give a balanced treatment to both the spaces. He never passes any judgement. And there lies his greatness as a master playwright.

## **2.3 The Merchant of Venice**

### **Background**

*The Merchant of Venice* is a much read comedy penned by Shakespeare who is also known as the Bard of Avon. Written between 1596 and 1598 this is considered as the most popular comedy ever written by him. Though *Merchant of Venice* had been categorized as a comedy, contemporary critics consider it as a problem play owing to the controversial contents.

Every Shakespearean play is said to have been having their roots in history or other literary works or events that happened during the life time of Shakespeare. *Merchant of Venice* also reflects certain instances in *Il Pecorone* by Giovanni Fiorentino. The tale of a merchant who had to go by a deadly bond because he stood as surety for his friend, the suitors' competition in Belmont, are a few examples to cite. The Orator by Alexander Sylvanne might have influenced Shakespeare in creating the interesting court scenes; the similarities between the two speak so.

This play was performed for the first time in the court of King James in 1605. Later some adapted versions were made and the adapted version by George Granville - with a jail scene,

extended banquet scene and no clownish character of Gobbo- was so popular among the audience for almost half a century. In 1741 the original text was restored.

Shakespearean comedies are noted for the clownish characters, prominence of women going to the extent of even giving them the status of Heroines and unrequited love. This play proves to be no different. The character of Gobbo, the heroine Portia, and unrequited love of Prince of Morocco and Prince of Arragon justify this fact.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

The play is set against the backdrop of Venice as the title of the play suggests. Antonio is a leading and prosperous merchant in Venice. Bassanio, one of his good friends, owes him a considerable amount of money which he has been unable to pay back so far. Bassanio plans to repay him in another way. He reveals his plans of winning the heart of a young wealthy heiress in Belmont. For this Bassanio is again in need of a loan from Antonio as he cannot go without a monetary aid. Bassanio must be financially sound or at least make an impression that he is so because of the tough competition from others suitors who are financially well off. When Antonio is approached by Bassanio for lending money, the former is facing shortage in cash as his money is in the merchant ships that are stuck in the sea. He suggests that Bassanio should go to another moneylender that he knows and use his name as security to get money.

Meanwhile in Belmont, Portia and her confidante Nerissa is having a conversation. Portia tells how fed up she is with the constant appeals by the suitors. She also expresses her wish to free herself from the depressing obligation of her father's will according to which Portia cannot marry a man of her choice but only the one who chooses the correct casket (bearing her portrait) among the Golden, Silver and Lead caskets. Fearing to take up risk, none of the suitors has hitherto gone for choosing the caskets, which is in fact a relief for Portia as she does not like any of them. Nevertheless when Nerissa speaks about Bassanio- a prospective suitor, Portia's face brightens up. Portia has already seen him once and was very much impressed by him.

Shylock the antagonist enters here. Shylock is a Jewish money lender who has a personal vendetta against Antonio. He agrees to lend three thousand ducats to Bassanio on Antonio's bond. This time Shylock goes for a different kind of bond altogether instead of high rates. He sets the condition that if the payment of the money back is delayed even for a single day then one pound of flesh from Antonio's body will be cut off. Antonio readily agrees to this condition

as he counts on the ships that are yet to be back in Venice and he expects them to be there at least one month before the deadline set by Shylock.

Shakespeare's plays are noted for their parallel subplots that get unfurled along with the main plot. *The Merchant of Venice* too is no different. The sub plot revolves around the romance between Lorenzo- a common friend of Antonio and Bassanio and Jessica- the daughter of Shylock. Both of them elope one day with Jessica disguised as a boy. Jessica also takes with her a considerable amount of her father's money. Infuriated Bassanio vows to avenge for this betrayal on the part of his daughter and her lover. Soon after this Bassanio and Gratiano sets for Belmont where Portia has rejected two suitors: Prince of Morocco and the Prince of Arragon. Bassanio and Portia fall in love with each other and the former insists on taking the risk of choosing caskets against Portia's implorations to wait for a few days. To both of their relief Bassanio chooses the right casket made of lead which has the portrait of Portia.

In the meantime Nerissa and Gratiano fall in love. Both the couples decide to get married soon. But their happiness is short lived as Bassanio is brought a letter from Antonio bearing sad news. Antonio bids farewell to Bassanio forever as the ships that he expected were lost in the sea thereby making it impossible for Antonio to payback Shylock's money as per the deadline. This would mean that Antonio will have to go by the conditions set by Shylock which is letting him cut off one pound of flesh from his body. This certainly means death for Antonio. Bassanio, shocked by this news, immediately starts for Venice with money given by Portia to payback the bond.

In Venice the things have grown really grim as Shylock is all obsessed with the idea of taking revenge and has entirely given up his interest on getting the money back. The issue of Jessica (a Jew) eloping with Lorenzo (a Christian) has all the more complicated the issue thereby transforming it into an inter- community discord because Shylock alleges that a Christian has stolen both his daughter as well as his money. Any issue when looked through the lens of religion, community, caste, race or gender will get aggravated into monstrous proportions. Here too the case is not different. Shylock insists on fulfilling of the legal bond. Shylock and Antonio come face to face in the court in which the Duke of Venice presides over. Antonio has almost resigned to death and is accompanied by his friends. Shylock refuses Bassanio's request to accept double the amount that he lent him.

Portia in the disguise of a lawyer and Nerissa in the disguise of a clerk enter the court at that point of time. They proclaim themselves to be coming from Padua, sent by Dr. Bellario a well reputed attorney in order to plead for the defendant's cause. As Shylock persistently denies the alternatives presented to him by Portia, the latter announces that the lawful procedures must ensue. Here the lawyer sets the condition that Shylock can take the one pound of flesh from Antonio's body but must do it without spilling even a drop of blood. As Shylock understands that it is impossible he goes for the option of getting back thrice the amount he has lent. This time the lawyer does not consent to this option. Shylock's demand at least the amount borrowed by Antonio and Bassanio is also not encouraged. Moreover, his actions are termed as an attempt to take the life of a citizen of Venice. As a punishment for this the lawyer suggests that his entire wealth should be divided among the Venetian citizens.

The Duke spares his life and orders him to give half of his wealth to Antonio and the other half to the state. To this however Antonio reacts by saying that he will not take the money if Shylock is willing to convert to Christianity and if he will agree to leave his money to his daughter through his will. The marooned Shylock has no options but to agree to the conditions.

Out of extreme joy Antonio and Bassanio show their willingness to pay the lawyer anything. Portia disguised, as the lawyer, asks for the ring from Bassanio which was given by her on the promise that he will not lose it. Similarly Gratiano's ring is also taken by Nerissa disguised as the clerk. When both Bassanio and Gratiano return to Portia and Nerissa, they ask about the ring and act as if they had given it to other two women. After exchanging some comic dialogues they reveal the mischief. Thus the play ends on a happy note.

### **Analysis of Major Characters**

#### **ANTONIO**

Compared to other characters like Bassanio and Portia, one can say that Antonio's is much of an under-developed character. Generosity, trustworthiness and honour seem to be the three words around which this character is moulded. Among them the striking feature of this particular character is the generosity combined with selflessness. Genuine generosity makes Antonio stand apart from the rest of the characters. "The Duke cannot deny the course of the law," he says. And later, he adds that he is "arm'd / to suffer, with a quietness of spirit . . . For if the Jew do cut but deep enough, / I'll pay it presently with all my heart."

Not only in lending money but also in helping others Antonio does not hesitate. The extent to which Antonio goes to help Bassanio bears testimony to his worth as a friend. In order to help Bassanio he was even ready to pledge his own flesh to Shylock, the moneylender. Even though he is rich and popular he is not carried away by it. Antonio is endowed with many virtues that human beings wish to see in our fellow members of the society. He is also an honourable man. Antonio goes by his word. When Bassanio and Antonio fail to pay back the amount they lent from Shylock, Antonio bravely readies himself to face the situation rather than running away. Though in most of the plays poetic justice is not followed by Shakespeare; Merchant of Venice has taken a departure from this convention. Antonio is rewarded towards the end. The most explicit instance for this is the remainder that Portia hands over to Antonio which stated the safe return of his ships.

### **BASSANIO**

Contrary to the character of Antonio, Shakespeare has woven this character to full. Bassanio is always shown as a person in financial need who is always helped by Antonio. Thus Bassanio becomes the representative of common man prone to vulnerabilities. He is always in need, help and support. He falls in love with a girl, takes risk for her, and is affected by the bad situation his friend is in- traits of ordinary human being rather than a hero. Bassanio is courageous, faithful and impulsive.

The feelings that Bassanio shows is uncalculated and natural; no matter if it is towards his lady love or towards his friend. He does not hesitate even to plead with Shylock to accept double the amount back and let Antonio go off the bond. He is a man who admits his faults. The instance where he foregoes his ring and later admits that it was wrong because he had promised Portia to keep it bears testimony to the fact that he admits his faults. Portia loves him in spite of his impulsiveness. She is fully aware that if another adventure beckons, Bassanio is sure to go.

The fact that is still in obscurity is the question of whom does Bassanio loves the most- Antonio or Portia. However, there are different views on this particular debate.

### **PORTIA**

Shakespearean comedies are known for the fully developed heroine characters who can be called the Heroines. There is a clear cut division of roles between man and woman in

Shakespearean plays: Comedies are set aside for women and tragedies for men. In this play, Portia steals the show. Portia is presented as a lady who wishes to exert her own rights which in fact she does in the course of the events. She is mentally against the patriarchal system of father choosing a bridegroom for her; a system that was prevalent in those times.

Portia is also epitome of presence of mind and cleverness. Had she not been so, Antonio's life would have been in danger. It was because of the timely intervention of Portia that the entire play took a deviation from the course of a tragedy that it had been following. Portia is also kind and understanding. This is quite evident from her reaction towards Bassanio when he relinquishes his ring. Similarly, she does not become a hindrance between the good friends; she does not make a hue and cry when Bassanio is required to go and help Antonio rather, she herself comes to the forefront to help him out.

Portia's eloquence comes to the forefront in the way she converse with the Prince of Morocco. She is polite, gracious and mindful in her words; still she also manages to infuse irony to it subtly yet significantly. She tells him that he is "as fair / As any comer I have look'd on yet / For my affection." But "A gentle riddance," she says; "Draw the curtains." The arguments that she raises in the courtroom also bear testimony to her eloquence.

Portia is a sum of cleverness, grace, wit, playfulness, and repartee. Thus Shakespeare has created the mould for a popular and smart woman.

## **SHYLOCK**

Shylock is presented as the antagonist of the play. The religious bias of Shakespeare becomes evident in the characterization of Shylock who is depicted as a shrewd and cruel Jew. Shylock reflects the anti-Semitic spirit of the Elizabethan era. Though Shakespeare cannot be blamed for this as he was just reflecting the sentiments of the society in his era, his tactic of utilizing that sentiment to make his drama popular cannot be ignored. He can be considered as the archetypal villain as eventually he is overpowered by the "heroine".

Shylock's character is used as a medium by Shakespeare to propagate his didactic ideas. Selfishness will lead you into grave troubles is the message that Shakespeare is trying to drive home. However, Shylock is reacting so because of his predicament. He is a father who is shocked to the core by his daughter's sudden abandonment. Eloping with Lorenzo is in a way Jessica's abandonment of her old father. He is also consumed by his revenge for Antonio which

can be traced to the Christian-Jew tensions. He is being a victim of the trends of his contemporary society. He might be cruel but he is a complex human as well. As W. H. Auden said “Those to whom evil is done,” he says, “do evil in return.” This quote encapsulates the character of Shylock.

## **THEMATIC ANALYSIS**

The play is intended to highlight moral values like Mercy, friendship, trust, love against the problem of vices like greed, revenge and cruelty. The theme of the need of Mercy is very well highlighted through Portia’s eloquent dialogues in the court scene. The entire plot is a pointer towards the benefit of having trustworthy and loyal friends. The mutual help and support extended by Antonio and Shylock to each other proves this.

The theme of wealth is another prominent one. Entire story’s crux is on the monetary exchange and transfer. The attitude of Christians and Jews towards money is presented in such a way that there is a huge contrast between the two. The play also brushes on the theme of personal choices. In the case of Portia it is regarding choosing her life partner thereby bringing in the need to have the power of choice for women. In the case of Bassanio, it is his choice regarding two things- first whether to go for the risk of choosing the caskets or not and the second is the act of choosing the caskets itself.

Another theme that is prominence in this play is Anti- Semitism or the hostility towards the Jews. This is evident from the characterization of Shylock endowed with vices and the other characters who are Christians endowed with virtues. In fact, the inter religious relationship between Jessica and Lorenzo is included to highlight the anti-Semitic feelings. Speaking of Jessica and Lorenzo brings us to another powerful theme in play which is the concept of love as explicitly depicted through Portia-Bassanio, Nerissa- Graciano and Jessica- Lorenzo.

### ***2.4 Much Ado about Nothing***

#### **Background**

Although Shakespeare is known for his tragedies, his comedies exemplify his natural genius as a writer. As is the case of his other 37 plays, the story of *Much Ado About Nothing* is also borrowed. Critics have noted two possible inspirations for this comic play. One is Matteo Bandello’s *Novelle*, dealing with the love story between Sir Timbreo and his fiancée Fenicia

Lionata and the other one is Ludovico Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*, a story on the romance of Ariodante and Ginevra. Since, the action is set in the city of Sicily, it also implies at the 16<sup>th</sup> century romances in Italy. The play is similar in theme to two other plays by Shakespeare – the romantic tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet* and the problem play, *The Winter's Tale*. But unlike his other comedies, *Much Ado about Nothing* is one among the plays written by Shakespeare with a prominent portion of the text in prose.

Though mixed with dark elements like in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, *Much Ado About Nothing* exemplifies Shakespeare's usual elements of crisscross marriages, mistaken identities and no sad ending.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

As in most of the Classical texts, the play begins with the news of the return of the hero, Don Pedro from winning laurels in a battle. But the audience are in for a surprise as Don Pedro's enemy was none other than his own brother, Don John. Also, later this courageous hero turns out to be a match-maker in this dual love storied plot. The play is centered on the two love stories of Beatrice and Benedick, and Claudio and Hero. Although the main focus is on the love story of Claudio and Hero, Benedick and Beatrice eventually became the central characters.

The dislike between Beatrice and Benedick is expressed through Beatrice's comment on him as an unfit soldier. But their future love story is revealed to the audience through Leonato, her uncle's words "there is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her" (*Much Ado About Nothing*, I.i.49-51).

The introduction of an illegitimate brother, Don John who wants to seek vengeance on Don Pedro, the legitimate Prince of Aragon fills the seemingly breezy love story with deception and treachery. This conflict of interest between the legitimate and the illegitimate children is a constant theme in many of Shakespeare's works like Edmund's jealousy to Edgar in *King Lear*. The warm friendship between Leonato, Hero's father and Don Pedro is what paves to the blossoming of love between Claudio, a companion of Don Pedro, and Hero. But the play gives the impression that Claudio is in love with Hero even before the action begins but it is their chance meeting in Leonato's home in Messina that compels him to chase after her. On making the same being known to his friends, Benedick and Don Pedro, Benedick speaks against the

concept of marriage while Pedro supports it. The irony in the story is that it is Benedick who enters into marriage first in the play.

As in his other works, *Romeo and Juliet* for instance, Shakespeare uses the masquerade ball for the setting of his love story. Here, it is used as an instrument to make Claudio and Hero fall in love. The idea of mistaken identity comes into play when Don Pedro tries to court Hero in Claudio's disguise for his boon companion's sake. As a result, a brief chaos ensues in the play. This also hints at a possible love triangle between Don Pedro, Hero and Claudio; a constant theme in Shakespeare's comedies. But rather than paving way for love it serves for a villainous plot for Don John who was waiting for an opportunity to settle his scores with the Prince and his men. Don John finds it as the perfect time to instigate Claudio against Don Pedro by poisoning his ears that Don Pedro is trying to snatch the love of his life. But his plan is spoiled as the misunderstanding is quickly cleared and Claudio and Hero becomes a couple.

In the ball, Benedick invites Beatrice to dance with him and with his identity hidden she rambles about her dislike for Beatrice, calling him as "the prince's jester, a very dull fool" (II.i.114).

Being a firsthand witness to her insults, Benedick decides to seek revenge from her. The thirst to do something rather than remaining sloth propels Don Pedro to be a cupid between Benedick and Beatrice. The most comical part of the play comes forth in the following scenes where Benedick and Beatrice are made to believe that they are in love with each other by the combined 'plotting' of Don Pedro with his men, and Hero with Ursula, her maid . Their seemingly comic trick yields the desired results as both, Beatrice and Benedick decide to be nice to each other and enter into a relation. As Shakespeare says:

*"Love goes by haps;*

*Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps" (III.ii.110-111).*

Having his attempt spoiled, Don John devices another plan to bring a fall out between Leonato and Claudio to shame Pedro's honour. For this Don John brings in the question of Hero's chastity where he plays out an affair between Hero and his supporter, Borachio. He shows Claudio and Pedro, Borachio entering Hero's chamber and her being seduced by his lustful intentions. But, unbeknown to them the woman in his arms is Margaret, her maid. The ever-baffling question of a woman's faithfulness is introduced into the play and as is expected Claudio is angered by her disloyalty and decides to teach her a lesson.

In front of the entire assemblage of guests who had come to witness their wedding, Claudio forsakes Hero and besmirches her image by accusing her of debauchery while portraying himself as the victimized. Unable to bear the blatant refusal from her man and the resultant disgrace it brought to her honour, Hero falls unconscious. Her father, Leonato also doesn't believe in her integrity and asks her to kill herself rather than shaming their family prestige. The modern issue of honour killing is subtly brought out by the Bard here. Only, the presiding Friar believes in her innocence and opines them to stage Hero's fake death to find out the truth as well as to win back her lost love. This scene is similar to the one in *Romeo and Juliet* where Juliet is put under an induced coma by Friar Laurence for "two and forty hours" (IV.i.105) as well as to Hermione staging her death to win back her husband's trust in *The Winter's Tale*. All these plays exemplify the idea that a woman's chastity can be proved only by death or near death experiences as shown in the predicament of Sita from the Indian epic of *Mahabharata*.

Fearing for the worse, the 'lovers by trick', Beatrice and Benedick accept their love to each other. Unlike in the other plays of Shakespeare, one can find a slight strain of feminism where one woman stands for another, Beatrice wants Benedick to finish off Claudio for mudslinging her cousin, Hero. Although, initially against her request, when Claudio is blamed for Hero's fate by Leonato and Antonio (her uncle), Benedick also joins the bandwagon and starts hunting for Claudio, his friend turned foe.

The saviour comes in the form of the local Watch, Dogberry who had chanced upon the conversation of Borachio and Conrad, another assistant of Don John, of their dreadful plotting. He brings the culprits to the light along with their own self admission of the offence, thus restoring Hero's integrity. The treacherous villain, Don John flees for his life but the soldiers are sent to make him captive.

Claudio, filled with the guilt and shame at the loss of his beloved, accepts Leonato's condition to proclaim the chastity of Hero's character to the public and to marry Antonio's daughter "almost the copy of my child that's dead" (*Much Ado About Nothing*, V.i.273) to carry on their tradition.

The dramatic irony comes into play when Claudio is shocked to find the 'supposedly dead' Hero as his bride which is followed by their marriage. Also, upon their friends' bidding, Beatrice and Benedick accept their relation in front of everyone. The play ends with the news of Don John's capture but Benedick reserves the trial and punishment to another day and

chooses to revel in the happiness of their relations. The denouement echoes the familiar endings of Shakespearean comedies – *All's Well That Ends Well*.

### **Analysis of Major Characters**

#### **Beatrice**

Beatrice is the niece of Leonato, a wealthy governor of Messina, and the daughter of Antonio. Even though she is close to her cousin, Hero, they are poles apart in their characters. She is shown as a fun loving and bold woman while Hero is of the typical lady- like qualities – meek and gentle. Her disapproval of Benedick from the start of the play hints at a failed relationship between them. Hence, her hatred and anger at him for abandoning her is expressed through her harsh words against him.

But, as the play progresses we realize that she is nothing but a woman waiting for her love to return back to her arms. When she listens in to the conversation of Hero and Ursula on Benedick's undying love towards her, she wilfully welcomes herself into the world of love. But even then, she is one of the powerful feminine characters designed by Shakespeare. She is a woman who listens to her heart and her unwillingness to submit to the whims of another being forces her to remain a bachelorette, a decision which she expresses in the beginning of the play. She voices out against the injustice that she finds in front of her rather than being a mute spectator. When Hero is questioned on her chastity, Beatrice intervenes and showers her wrath on Claudio for ill- treating her cousin. As a result of her exasperation and anger she says "I cannot be a man with wishing, therefore I will die a woman with grieving" (IV.i.312-18), mirroring the words of a modern feminist. Unlike the other heroines in Shakespeare's comedies, she is an embodiment of positive qualities.

#### **Benedick**

He is portrayed as a handsome lord who has recently been to war and had brought laurels to his country and his countrymen. His interactions with Beatrice are nothing short of a tournament for him where his prime purpose is to prove whatever she says as wrong and to prove himself to be more smart and capable than her. On being aware of Beatrice's love for him, he accepts himself to be "horribly in love with her" (II.iii.207). He is one among the most melodramatic characters in the play and even in all of Shakespeare's plays put together. The playwright portrays him as indulging in over the top expressions and showcases him as an amusing performer for the other characters. More than his individual traits as an individual,

Shakespeare has used Benedick as an overemotional being for the purpose of his audience's enjoyment.

## **Thematic Analysis**

### **Title**

According to his critics, the word 'nothing' is regarded as one of the most favourite words by Shakespeare and he uses it in innumerable ways in his plays. For example, in *The Winter's Tale* when Leontes suspects his wife, Hermione's character, he says:

"Is whispering nothing?  
Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses?  
Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career  
Of laughing with a sigh?--a note infallible  
Of breaking honesty--horsing foot on foot?  
Skulking in corners? wishing clocks more swift?  
Hours, minutes? noon, midnight? and all eyes  
Blind with the pin and web but theirs, theirs only,  
That would unseen be wicked? is this nothing?  
Why, then the world and all that's in't is nothing;  
The covering sky is nothing; Bohemia nothing;  
My wife is nothing; nor nothing have these nothings,  
If this be nothing"(I.ii.292-96).

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, the word 'noting' is used in triple sense:

"Note this before my notes:  
There's not a note of mine that's worth the noting"(II.iii.50-51).

The title shows Shakespeare's fascination for word play or pun and at the same time, prepares the audience to be ready for a story where there is much trouble but for 'nothing'. This is because in all of Shakespeare's comedies, including this one, the plot is lengthened by the ever-elusive theme of 'misunderstanding'. But, all these problems could be easily resolved if all the characters would just talk to each other face to face. Hence, it is 'nothing' which prolongs the plot as well as our lives, as Macbeth said:

"Life is a tale.  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing" (II.v.25-28).

## **Deception**

The entire plot is centered on the theme of deception. Some are intended to unite the lovers, some to create differences between them and some to overcome those misunderstandings. While Don Pedro disguised as Claudio serves to ignite love in the heart of Hero; Hero, shown as having an illicit affair with Borachio leads to a fallout between the lovers and later Hero's fake death unites the two star-crossed lovers and exerts the purity of Hero's character.

Also, Beatrice and Benedick are tricked to fall in love with each other. But, later both of them fall deeply into their relation more than Claudio and Hero; thereby, taking the position of protagonists in this romantic comedy.

But, the point to be noted here is that deception which is usually associated with negative qualities has been used for the good as well by Shakespeare, exemplifying the universal dictum: "Nothing is either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (*Hamlet*, II.ii.233-34).

## **Honour**

In Shakespearean period as well as in the present, a woman's integrity, self-respect and worth is depended on her virginity. If a woman is 'said to have' indulged in sexual liaisons with another man, i.e. even if it's just a gossip, hell is loosed upon her and she must suffer for her 'unpardonable crime' at the hands of both the society and the men of her family, who might themselves be immoral. Also, a woman's honour is the family's honour; if she destroys it, death is the only fit punishment. This is echoed from Leonato's words on learning of Hero's supposed adultery:

"O she is fallen

Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea

Hath drops too few to wash her clean again" (*Much Ado About Nothing*, IV.i.138-140),

"Hence from her, let her die" (IV.i.153).

While a woman's honour is purely physical, a man's honour depends on his valorous acts in the battle. Hence, in the play, Beatrice asks Benedick to reclaim Hero's honour by challenging Claudio to a one-on-one combat as Hero herself is helpless to do so.

## **Shame**

Shakespeare has shown the depth and effect of shame and disgrace in a person through Don John's character. His villainy stems from his social position of being an illegitimate child as it has made him bereft of all the comforts and luxuries as well as the coveted Princesdom. His public humiliation at the hands of his brother, Don Pedro, by being defeated in the battle, adds fuel to the fire of shame which was burning inside him. It prompts him to avenge each and

every one responsible for his fate – Don Pedro, Claudio, Leonato, etc. to make them feel the same pain and let them be in the same predicament as him. For this he finds Hero as the suitable victim and ‘using’ her he kills two birds with one stone, as slandering her self – respect would lead to a skirmish among the bosom friends. But the irony comes at the end is when all his plans are spoiled, all his crimes are revealed, it is Don John himself who is shamed and prosecuted for his crime.

### **Noting**

During the Elizabethan period, ‘nothing’ sounded similar to ‘noting’ which meant vain talk. In the entire play, it is this useless talk among the characters that lead to problems among them and at times solves them - Benedick and Beatrice are compelled to open up on their love, and Claudio abandons Hero on their fixed marriage date because of believing the words of another. Also, for deception to work one must be willing to believe in the false rumours of another. To make Beatrice fall in love with Benedick, Hero and her maid deliberately make her to ‘note’ their conversation:

“..look where Beatrice like a lapwing runs  
Close by the ground to hear our conference,” (III.i.24–25).

Claudio believes in Hero’s unchaste character when he ‘notes’ the happenings of Borachio entering her chamber and Benedick and Beatrice’s love is revealed to everyone when Claudio and Hero reveal Benedick and Beatrice’s romantic sonnets addressed to each other. Here, noting is used synonymous to writings.

### **Mistaken Identity**

A constant theme in Shakespearean comedies, mistaken identity comes into play in *Much Ado About Nothing* as well. The confusion in Claudio and Hero’s love story is brought about by Margaret being mistaken for Hero, leading to Hero’s humiliation on her wedding day by her prospective groom, Claudio. Beatrice rambling on her dislike to Benedick occurs because his identity is masked in the ball. The happy ending of Claudio and Hero is provided with a twist for the audience were instead of Beatrice, Hero’s cousin, the ‘dead’ Hero itself takes the position of the bride. This is revealed only at the end, before which the identity of the bride is masked.

## **Study Questions**

### **As you Like it**

1. Explain the theme of love in *As you like it*.
2. Sketch the character of Rosalind.
3. Explain the reasons for the rift between Oliver and Orlando and how is it resolved.
4. Explain the theme of urban life versus rural life in the play.
5. Describe how effective is the disguise motif in this play.

### **The Merchant of Venice**

1. Explain how *important is the character of Gratiano?*
2. *How does the character of Portia develop through the play?*
3. *How are the themes of love and hate presented in the play?*
4. *How important is the trial scene (Act 4, Scene 1) to the play as a whole?*
5. *Critically analyze the character of Shylock.*

### *Much Ado about Nothing*

1. Compare and contrast Beatrice and Hero.
2. Discuss the many mistaken "notings" in *Much Ado about Nothing*.
3. Explain the theme of man-woman relationship in this play
4. Discuss the relationship between Benedick and Beatrice. How is it different to the relationship between Claudio and Hero?
5. Discuss how Benedick's perception of himself affects his behaviour in the play.

## UNIT III

### 3.0 Shakespeare's History plays

#### Background

Drama as an indigenous art form of each community branched into various forms like tragedy, comedy, tragi comedy, history plays etc. Most of the times, the subject matter of the tragedies and comedies is borrowed from history. History served as a raw material for the playwrights. The plays that deal with the history of the nation were regarded as chronicle plays. In the case of the Elizabethan society, they took special interest in the heroic past of their country and as a result of this interest, a wide spectrum of three hundred years of English history had been enacted on the stage. In a period when history and literature were treated as opposite poles, weaving history into a literary form posed a lot of challenges to the playwrights.

History was considered factual and literature as fictional. Now of course the illusory gap between fact and fiction is reduced thanks to postmodernism. An offshoot of postmodern thought, New Historicism says that there is no history, but histories. The singular version of history is shattered paving way for multiple versions of history. So long a period, history has been tailored by the victors to suit their purposes relegating the histories of the subalterns to the peripheries. Now the hitherto neglected histories protrude themselves into the realm of history. The very authenticity of history is invalidated. But in olden times, people believed whatever was supplied to them as a readymade finished product as history.

During the Elizabethan regime, Shakespeare and Marlowe borrowed histories and tailored their own literary works. In their attempt to mix historical facts with the imaginary characters or to fix the historical characters into the fictitious framework, they faced a lot of problems. The playwrights with an artistic sensibility searches for the historical facts that suit their theatrical requirements. But a historian will be searching for the facts whether it is aesthetic or morbid. Hence, the playwrights feel that the historical facts fail to provide them with an effective theatrical representation. The playwrights suffer as a thin veneer that separates history from literature troubles their creative activity.

But, quite surprisingly, Marlowe and Shakespeare excelled in the treatment of Histories in their plays. Nobody knows the real Edward II or Henry IV, or Richard II. Everybody comes to know the defects and greatness of such kings and warriors only through the lens of Shakespeare and Marlowe. Shakespeare never intended to project the plays dealing with English history as history plays. It was the later critics and theatre historians who termed these plays as History plays. Shakespeare's History Plays include King John, Richard II, Henry IV, Part 1, Henry IV, Part 2, Henry V, Henry VI, Part 1, Henry VI, Part 2, Henry VI, Part 3, Richard III, Henry VIII. Shakespeare borrowed the past only to infuse a contemporary stuff into the minds of the audience. The contemporary value of the past is felt when one reads or watches the history plays of Shakespeare.

### **3.1 Characteristics of Shakespearean History Plays**

Shakespeare romanticized most of the historical characters and named his history plays after the characters. Most of the history plays are based on the great English civil war that occurred two hundred years before the time of Shakespeare. The War of the Roses, fought between the two royal families the Lancasters and the Yorks becomes an important raw material that got transformed into beautiful masterpieces in the hands of Shakespeare. He never followed any chronological order in writing his history plays. Shakespeare freely fabricated the facts to suit his purpose that is to entertain the audience and to glorify the rulers. To glorify the present system, Shakespeare presented a gloomy past and by keeping both the social systems for comparison, he leaves the audience to choose between the two.

For all his History plays, Shakespeare relied mostly on two principal sources- Edward Hall's *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancastre and York* (1548) and Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irlande* (1587). Though Shakespeare has written history plays dealing with Roman histories, they were not branded as history plays. The plays that deal with the English History were considered as the History Plays. Eight of Shakespeare's ten history plays together trace the period of English monarchy from the fourteenth century to the emergence of the Tudors. The series of History plays that begins with *Richard II* is considered more successful. It continues through the two parts of *Henry IV*, in which the audience were introduced to Falstaff, one of Shakespeare's most imaginative comic characterizations. Even Elizabeth liked Falstaff so well that she pestered Shakespeare to write another play featuring him, and the product was *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The history plays of Shakespeare are set against the medieval English History. Shakespeare dramatized the select

events of the hundred years' war with France. Like a historian, Shakespeare never bothered to give an accurate depiction of the past. He in fact borrowed the historical facts and used it only as his raw material. Keeping the raw material threadbare, he bent the facts according to his whims and fancies. Historical anachronism is another important feature of the history plays of Shakespeare. During the time of Shakespeare, trial by combat was not in vogue. People of the Elizabethan period did not consider this kind of trial as a conventional form of justice. So, Shakespeare used history as a flexible source and not a rigid narrative.

Though Shakespeare romanticized and played with the serious historical past, he never underestimated the value of history. He made it a point that all his history plays should provide a social commentary. The present social political system should learn meaningful lessons from the past. It should try to rectify its present crisis only by going through the errors of the past. Richard II is a classic lesson for the present day rulers-how to rule and how not. Henry V is an attempt to intensify the patriotic zeal that every citizen possesses.

Last important positive trait of Shakespeare's history plays is their clear depiction of the social structure with its inherent hierarchical grades. He presents the king and at once the beggar. He shows us the palace and at once the brothel house. Surprisingly he gives a rare insight into the social set-up covering the upper and lower strata- juxtaposing the king and the beggar. Irrespective of their different social status, Henry IV and Falstaff are yoked together wonderfully by the great bard Shakespeare. The History plays provide a fairly equal measure of tragic and comic elements. The History plays sometimes end tragically and at times happily, but quite often they end with the death of one king and the triumph of a new king.

### **3.2 Henry IV Part II**

#### **Background**

Shakespeare has borrowed the story of Henry IV from the Holinshed's *Chronicles Scotland and Ireland* (1587) and modified the historical episodes of three significant rebellions against the King Henry IV. The first part of *Henry IV* depicts the massive victory of Henry IV over the rebels at Shrewsbury. The second part of the play deals with the civil war that posed a severe threat to the north of England. *Henry IV* was probably written around the year 1598. The historical episodes of Henry IV, Part 2 occurred in the early 1400s, almost two centuries before Shakespeare's time. In this play, history and comedy are interwoven perfectly that the plot gradually rises from serious scenes of battle ground to subtle scenes in taverns and country life.

The play covers dominant themes including Henry IV's struggle with the burden of royal power and Henry V's transformation from a young reckless man into a wise king. A quick review of the historical events covered in the play *Henry IV, Part 1*, would prove helpful in understanding the second part of the play fully well.

*Henry IV, Part 1*, discusses the battle of Shrewsbury between the king's army and rebel forces looking for the crown. The difference of opinion erupted with Hotspur, Northumberland's son growing incompatible with the king. Hotspur, his Northumberland, and his uncle Worcester plot together to usurp the throne. While Prince Hal, Henry IV's son is in a tavern planning to trick the mischievous Sir John Falstaff, he is summoned to war. In the war, Prince Hal protects his father and then kills Hotspur. Falstaff, on the other side, cheats his soldiers by boasting about his war adventures and takes credit for Hotspur's death. Part two of *Henry IV* deals with what follows the death of Hotspur.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

*Henry IV, Part II* is a continuation of the story of *Henry IV, Part I*. In the expository scene, Northumberland is informed by Bardolph that his son, Hotspur, has killed Prince Hal. This news evaporates quickly when Morton who is straight from the war field brings shocking news for Northumberland that his son Hotspur is killed by Hal.

Hence the play opens with Northumberland, one of the rebels and Hotspur's father, getting a message that the King has won the war at Shrewsbury and his son Hotspur is killed by Prince Hal. Hearing that the Bishop of York is preparing for a fresh war against the King, Northumberland, though initially shaken by his son's death, joins the opposing forces and sends letters to powerful rebels throughout Britain. The King would have won the war at Shrewsbury but lost his peace because his troubles continue. For the moment, John Falstaff is enjoying with his newly acquired fame as a great warrior as he has falsely claimed responsibility for the killing of Hotspur. He does not deserve the reputation because he survives only with his cunningness and wit interspersed with criminal mind-set. This false reputation and Prince Hal's new orders protect Falstaff from facing arrest for his earlier crimes.

Meanwhile, the rebels Mowbray, Bardolph, Hastings, and the Archbishop of York continue to hatch conspiracy against the King. In the chamber of the Archbishop of York, Hastings, Mowbray, and Bardolph hold discussions to mobilize forces against the King. In the meeting,

Bardolph expresses his doubts whether their rebel forces are strong enough to resist the forces of the King. Hastings expresses his optimism saying that the King has more enemies than friends. Yet they are skeptical about their prospects of winning the war in the event of Northumberland's withdrawal of his support. These rebel forces have one advantage that the French and the Welsh too are up in arms against the king.

In the Second Act, Lady Percy, Hotspur's wife and Northumberland's wife persuade Northumberland not to extend his support for the rebels. Though not convinced by the pleas of both his wife and his son's wife, Northumberland decides to hide in Scotland and wait for an appropriate occasion and time to rebel against the King. On the other side, Falstaff lands into a fresh problem as Hostess Quickly tries to arrest him for unpaid debts. But Falstaff with his wit manages not only to evade arrest but also to borrow more money. Falstaff makes his mind up to dine with her. Knowing the dinner plan, Hal and Poins, decide to camouflage themselves as servers to watch the erratic mischievous behavior of Falstaff. Hal and Poins, in disguise, are shocked to find Falstaff hurling insulting comments about both of them. Enraged by his comments, Hal reveals his identity and Falstaff feels humiliated but manages to escape by convincing Hal that he spoke ill of the Prince to wicked people so that they would be refrained from the Prince. Prince Hal has been a prodigal son for the King spending most of his prime time in taverns with a group of mischief making friends. One of his closest friends, Falstaff wins wealth and power at the Battle of Shrewsbury through improper means.

Henry IV becomes fragile and upset with a lot of apprehensions. King Henry's condition is synonymous with the nation that is torn apart by civil wars. Like all other tragic heroes of Shakespeare, King Henry also faces inner turmoil. He torments himself remembering his role in the toppling of Richard II. As a rebel he, along with Northumberland, turned against Richard II and now the same Northumberland tortures him as predicted by Richard II. He also expresses his anxiety whether the King's army will win the war or not. He enquires about the mutiny of the rebels and expresses his doubts about the possibility of his pilgrimage to the holy land with the deteriorating health conditions.

Like the storm scene in *King Lear* where Lear experiences the storm internally and externally, Henry IV faces crisis in the Kingdom and experiences severe inner conflict. Since Hal, the eldest son is irresponsible, Prince John, the king's second son, takes the responsibility of leading the king's army to defeat the rebels in the forest. In Act Four, Mowbray, Hastings, and the

Archbishop hold a meeting with Westmoreland and Prince John in Gaultree woods. Westmoreland says that the Prince is ready for any compromise formula. The Prince is prepared to address all their grievances if they are ready to drop their arms against the King. Trusting the words of Westmoreland, they all agree for a truce. In fact, Mowbray has his own doubts about the offer of ceasefire that it may be a strategy to suppress the rebellion diplomatically and to trap them. But Westmoreland successfully allays the fears of Mowbray. But Mowbray continues to dissuade his friends from yielding to the tempting truce of Prince John. Despite his protests, Hastings and the Archbishop accept the truce, send their grievances with the hope that they would be resolved and ultimately dispersed the armies. Once Prince John promised that he would drop arms, they disperse their army.

Waiting for this opportunity, Prince John breaks his promise and arrests all of the rebel leaders for treason. He ordered all of them to be executed rapidly. Prince John somehow contained the rebellion through unethical means. The king who is already in failing health gets to know the happy news from John and quickly faints. Seeing the King swoon fast, Prince Hal thinks that he is dead, removes the crown from his head and keeps it over his head. But the king opens his eyes and rebukes Hal's act. Hal realizes his mistakes, apologizes, and promises to behave in a reformed way. The King offers a lengthy advice to Hal and expresses his last wish to be taken to the holy land of Jerusalem before he dies.

King Henry IV is in his deathbed in the Jerusalem Chamber flanked by his sons on his side. He finds out that Hal is enjoying his food with Poin and his other friends. The King feels depressed to know that Hal, the heir to his throne, is unruly and disloyal. The King reprimands Hal for his reckless nature and disruptive behavior. He painfully says that Hal has confirmed that he lacks genuine love for his father. Feeling remorseful, the Prince tells his father that he will live longer. The King repents for his earlier crimes and tells Hal that he accessed the throne unfairly and thus had a turbulent rule. He tells positively that Hal will certainly have a good time in power as he inherits the crown from his father. The King prays to God asking repentance for his role in the death of Richard II and to grant his son a glorious period in power. After the lengthy sermon for his son Hal, Henry IV dies.

The Play reaches its climax in Act Five in Gloucestershire, where Prince Hal keeps his brothers and his father's friends reassured that he is a reformed man now and would serve as a good King. He also says that the Lord Chief Justice would be his principal advisor. Hearing about

the king's death, Falstaff, Shallow, and Eastcheap fellows arrive in London and wait eagerly for the Hal. He expects that Hal's regime would help him acquire power and prosperity. But contrary to his expectations, Hal, now Henry V tells him that he wants to get rid of his past and therefore his former associates as well. He even warns him not to be seen within ten miles of his palace. Falstaff again feels that his friend Hal would invite him later. But he and his friends are asked to board a fleet. The play ends with Hal, King Henry V calling for an invasion of France.

## **Analysis of Major Characters**

### **King Henry IV**

King Henry IV is a victim of his own position as a king. He suffers a lot because of the burdens of ruling a kingdom. King Lear faces a similar problem of ruling the land when he becomes very old. Here in Henry IV, the king is suffering due to his ill health. Old age itself brings enormous problems and it becomes even worse when it is accompanied by external problems as well. The King lost his health due to two important reasons. Firstly, he feels depressed as he remembers how unfaithfully he usurped the throne from Richard II. The memories of the death of Richard II haunt him too badly that he develops inner conflict. Secondly he is worried about the uncertainty of the nation after his demise. He is concerned about his eldest son and the heir Hal behaving so irresponsibly and reckless.

Though he wins the battle of Shrewsbury, he is happy with the triumph because he knows fully well that he has to face a series of rebellions. One after another, three opposing forces trouble him waging war within and from outside the kingdom. He is in deep distress as his regime has seen more and more civil unrest. He, instead of employing repressive measures to tackle the civil rebellions, feels that it is a product of his earlier crimes. He thinks that as he disturbed the former King, now he is disturbed by the rebels. His realization is good for him as a human being but a weakness for him as a king. He trusts his son John more that he asks him to lead the army. He is half dead when he sees his son Hal wearing the crown mistaking that his father is dead. He is happy when the same prodigal son becomes a responsible reformed character. He reaped what he has sown.

He is tormented more when his proposed trip to the Holy Land to lead the crusade was deterred by continuous civil wars. Throughout the play, Henry IV is shown as a sick man quite

inappropriate for the title 'King.' Though he acquired the throne through unethical means, he has enormous love and concern for his people. He is concerned about the future of the kingdom in the hands of his reckless son Hal. He advises Hal to be a responsible king. He is a good father. Just before he dies, he reconciles with his son and of course his last wish of fighting in the crusade in the holy land goes unfulfilled.

### **Prince Hal**

Popularly known as Hal, Prince Henry or Harry is the eldest son of Henry IV and the possible heir to the throne. He is a heroic man and his defeating Hotspur, the son of Northumberland and the rebel leader is a standing proof for his fearless fighting spirit. Despite his valour and warfare, he has a bad reputation for his way of living. He leads a reckless life, roaming around with mischief makers and criminals, including Sir John Falstaff, in East cheap taverns. He discovers the real character of Falstaff when he gains popularity by falsely taking the responsibility for the killing of Hotspur. He tests the integrity of Falstaff by visiting the dinner party disguising himself as a server. Till the last segment of the play, he remains a playful merry go around character. He playfully takes the crown of his father and keeps on his head assuming that his father is dead. When his father rebukes him, he realizes his mistakes and promises his father that he would behave responsibly.

As promised he reformed his character and surprised his brothers and the Lord Chief Justice. He even goes to the extent of banishing his former associates including his close friend Falstaff to uphold what he has promised his father. He says with wisdom that he wants to detach himself from his past and therefore his friends should also be kept away. Though reckless in the first phase of his life, he turns a reformed man with responsibility and concern for law and order. He deserves the crown for he becomes as promised. His journey is a psychological development of a man from his position as a rabble rouser to a dignified King Henry V. Prince Hal becomes every young man in his unripe age, behaving in an irresponsible manner but getting rehabilitated at a mature age. Hal deserves all our praises when he has the guts to sacrifice his happy-go-lucky, careless way of living to bear the burdens of kingship.

### **Sir John Falstaff**

Falstaff is one of the most memorable characters celebrated by audience all over the world. He stands taller among the Shakespearean characters because of his presence in more than four

plays. Falstaff is perhaps the most dynamic and human of Shakespeare's characters loved by everyone including Queen Elizabeth. He is a fat, cheerful, witty criminal and he has been Prince Hal's mentor and close friend. Falstaff deserves our applause when he pretends to have killed Hotspur at the Battle of Shrewsbury. He is known for his humorous speeches in all the plays he appears. He is a person with lots of wisdom. Even when he is caught by Hal for abusing him in his dinner with the Hostess, he skillfully manages the situation telling that he spoke ill of him to wicked people so as to avoid their proximity to Hal. The Play has a lot of episodes involving Prince Hal's comic encounter with Falstaff. Hearing the death of the King and the ascension of Hal to the throne, Falstaff expected that he would gain access to wealth as his friend has become a king. But, the play ends with Hal's betrayal of Falstaff. Falstaff's role is significant in two ways: to inform the audience of Prince Hal's reckless life style and to show the transformation of Hal by renouncing his old lifestyle and Falstaff, his old mentor. All his dialogues with the Lord Chief Justice are notable examples of his witty discourses.

### **Thematic Analysis**

Old age and mortality eclipse all other themes in *Henry IV* Part II. There are two old age men present in this play. Both Northumberland and King Henry suffer from their old age. Both of them are very old and are at loggerheads. Northumberland loses his son in the battle and King Henry loses his peace in the war. Once King Henry IV and Northumberland revolted against Richard II and now as predicted by Richard II, Northumberland turned an opponent to Henry IV. Both these old men are suffering from intense emotional crisis.

King Henry IV suffers from an inner conflict because he feels that he loses his peace as a result of his usurping the throne. Northumberland suffers losing his son because he has not extended his support for the army raised against the king. King Henry is again afraid of his deteriorating health and approaching death. Both of them feel the infirmities of their old age. The theme of loss is another predominant theme in this play. King Henry loses his friend Northumberland who turns into his enemy. Falstaff loses his best loved friend Hal. Hal too sacrifices his friendship for Falstaff as his commitment to the throne demands it.

Expiation as a theme recurs in the play. The cry for forgiveness is heard throughout the play. Both the protagonist Prince Hal and the King Henry IV cry for their earlier mistakes. Realization of mistakes is a recurrent motif in this play. King Henry IV realizes his usurping

the throne as a crime and he begs for atonement. He feels broken only because of the memories of the death of Richard II. Again, Hal too realizes his reckless attitude and carefree life style later at a mature age and starts repenting for it. He even sacrifices his lovable companion Falstaff for upholding his promises. Henry IV's long cherished dream of undertaking a Crusade to the Holy Land is also a sign of repentance. Hal's promise to his father at deathbed is a sign of his repentance. The one, who has spent his prime age roaming around with mischief makers and prostitutes, turns out to be a responsible king. King Henry and his son Hal feel the burden of the crown. Henry IV remains sleepless, worried, and frightened about the future of his kingdom. His responsibilities as the king and apprehensions about the stability of his reign are causes of his crisis.

### **3.3 Richard II**

#### **Background**

*Richard II* is the first play of Shakespeare's famous tetralogy. This play is followed by the other three of the tetralogy- *Henry IV, Part 1 & Part 2*, and *Henry V*. The play was probably written around 1595. The play has a political significance as it talks about political conspiracy and rebellion during the Elizabethan period.

The play has captivated critics crossing boundaries of time and space. The play is thematically strong because of its existentialist assessment of the nature of kingship and identity. *Richard II* can be even termed as a prelude for the release of a fully developed intellectual like Hamlet. The play is seen primarily as a debate on the monarchical authority. Shakespeare derived much of his historical basis for the play from Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* written in 1587. Richard II has some historical anachronisms. During Shakespeare's time, the trial by combat was not in vogue.

Richard's idea that kings exercise their power as dictated by gods is replaced by Bolingbroke's idea that kings can exercise power using their discretion. An outdated world view that power of the king comes from above is replaced by a modern world view that power comes from below. In *Richard II*, Shakespeare explains how civilian revolt at a king's arbitrary rule leads to his downfall and also to a prolonged struggle for the crown.

## **Analysis of the Plot**

*Richard II* begins with a powerful expository scene introducing three important characters to the audience. The scene takes place in the palace of King Richard II. The introductory episode focuses on a friction between Henry Bolingbroke, Duke of Hereford, and Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk. Bolingbroke, Richard's cousin comes out with serious accusations against Mowbray including the murder of the Duke of Gloucester. On the other hand, John of Gaunt, Bolingbroke's father, secretly blames Richard for Gloucester's death. Both continue to accuse each other of treason, and they start hurling abuses at each other that too in the presence of King Richard. Initially Richard tries to resolve their problems amicably but he could not succeed in his attempts to pacify them. Fed up with their adamant behavior, Richard commands them to take part in a conventional trial by combat. At Richard's order, Bolingbroke and Mowbray get ready for the proposed trial by fight.

In the midst of combat, King Richard with a varying mood, stopped the fight abruptly and banishes both of them. Mowbray is banished permanently and Bolingbroke is banished for a period of ten years which is later commuted to six years. Richard wants to please John of Gaunt, Bolingbroke's father and hence this subsidy in punishment. After the exit of Mowbray and Bolingbroke, Richard starts rallying his army for a war with Ireland as it faces a revolt. Since the kingdom is facing economic bankruptcy, Richard orders his men to indulge in forced loans and chooses to misuse King's right to tax. While he is announcing these decisions, Bushy, a follower of Richard comes and informs him that John of Gaunt is in his deathbed. Richard hastily decides that he can confiscate Gaunt's property to fund his war.

When he goes to visit Gaunt, he cautions Richard with his last words that he is dancing with danger and doing great destruction to the kingdom. He regrets that Richard is carried away by the flatteries of his sycophantic courtiers. Strangely, Richard waits for Gaunt to die and once he dies, he takes possession of his property to finance his war. In a way, he deprived Bolingbroke of legally inheriting his father's estates. Meantime, Bolingbroke has mobilized an army and navigated towards the north. The moment he realizes that Richard has seized his estates, he plans to use the confiscation as a pretext to invade England. Richard's departure to wage a war in Ireland is ill-timed because in his absence it is easier for Bolingbroke to rally the troops and invade the north coast of England.

Heavily burdened with taxes and the misrule of Richard, the subjects move in support of Bolingbroke, long for his invasion and join his armed forces. One after another, the nobles who are Richard's allies abandon him and shift to Bolingbroke's side. By the time Richard returns to England, he does not know that the nation is already out of his grip. Unfortunately, Richard leaves for Ireland not knowing that Bolingbroke has already reached England. In England, the Duke of York takes care of the regime in the absence of Richard. Bolingbroke informs York that he has come to England only to retrieve his confiscated estates and not for anything else. Expressing discontentment with Richard's incompetence as a king and upset by his illegal possession of Gaunt's wealth, more number of nobles come together in support for Bolingbroke. When Richard reaches with his army in Wales, he finds to his shock that the Welsh army has already dispersed. Therefore, he feels that it is impossible to mobilize sufficient troops to wage a war against Bolingbroke. As salt to injury, he learns that York has already surrendered all the northern castles to Bolingbroke. By this time, Richard understands clearly that it is unwise to fight with Bolingbroke as it is difficult to defeat him.

Understanding the setback for his military might, Richard disperses his army and moves to Flint castle. Meantime, Bolingbroke finds Richard's allies, Bushy and Green, and orders to execute them. Further, he marches on to Flint castle and commands Richard to return his confiscated estates and all other legacy. A serious battle is not actually required to nab Richard and Bolingbroke casually takes Richard as prisoner. Knowing that he cannot defend the castle, Richard prefers to come down from his position and meet Bolingbroke openly. Bolingbroke goes down on your knees before him, but Richard makes his cousin stand up and tells him that he will go with him to London. Back in London, Bolingbroke feels that Richard should willingly offer him the crown. He summons Richard to the Parliament and the nobles are waiting there to watch what actually is going to happen. Richard brings his crown with him, and asks Bolingbroke to seize the crown. After the coronation ceremony, Bolingbroke sends Richard to the Tower of London.

On seeing Richard being taken to the Tower, his Queen wants to accompany him to the tower. But, Northumberland doesn't allow her to go with her husband. Rather she is sent to France and Richard to Pomfret. When Sir Piers Exton, a loyalist of Bolingbroke overhears Bolingbroke saying that he is fearful of Richard, he decides to follow Richard to Pomfret and kill him. Aumerle, the Duke of York's son, comes home with a letter conspiring against Bolingbroke, who is already crowned as King Henry IV. Yet, York grabs the letter from his son and deplors

him as a conspirator. York then takes a horse and rushes to inform Henry about his son's treachery. Meanwhile, Aumerle and the Duchess of York hurry to London hoping to meet Henry to plead clemency. Henry grants him clemency but ordered his fellow traitors to be executed.

Meantime, Exton arrives in Pomfret and manages to kill Richard. Richard dies and Exton carries his dead body to London to show it to King Henry IV. To utter displeasure of Exton, Henry is not glad to see Richard's dead body. Henry feels that he is pushed to an uncertain situation where he may have to defend his throne against supporters of Richard. Had Richard remained alive, he may not have enemies and can rule the kingdom without any dissent. The play comes to an end with Henry promising to make a trip to the Holy Land as a sign of repentance for the killing of Richard.

## **Analysis of Major Characters**

### **King Richard**

Richard is Shakespeare's anti-hero. He is a man of ambitions and to fulfil his ambitious schemes he does not bother eliminating anybody who crosses his way. He is an absolutely heartless man but pretends to be a noble character. His quality that everyone detests is his hypocrisy. He exhibits the exact opposite of what he is inside. All his soliloquies and asides divulge that Richard is honest at least to himself. No doubt, he is courageous and possesses warfare qualities. Richard is a king who never ruled himself but ruled by greedy elements around him. His close associates happened to be greedy men who aim always at making profits from confiscating lands, levying excessive taxation, and indulging in fraud. Richard's tragic flaw is his own weakness for flattery. He yields to the temptations of flatterers and allows himself to be misused by greedy self-serving men. His powerlessness is explicitly revealed in the very opening scene of the play. He could not even solve the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray.

Since he himself is involved in the killing of the Duke of Gloucester, Richard distracts them by ordering for a conventional trial by combat. Richard is known for his continuous betrayals. He deliberately banishes Bolingbroke from the Kingdom. When John of Gaunt, Bolingbroke's father passes away, Richard cunningly plans to confiscate the estates to fund his war. Richard is a bad model for the rulers. He levies heavy taxes on ordinary subjects to finance his war. He employs all the available unethical practices to serve his own vested interests. He does not

listen to the warnings given to him by Gaunt in his death bed. He decides and proceeds with his plan. Richard II is an incompetent, ambivalent, insecure and a problematic hero of Shakespeare. He, like any other Shakespearean hero, is a split personality. He becomes a man of inaction standing in the middle of the war. In the war zone, he mulls over the burdens of the king: "Let's choose executors and talk of wills; / And yet not so, for what can we bequeath / Save our deposed bodies to the ground? . . . / For God's sake let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings: / How some have been depos'd, some slain in war, / Some haunted by the ghosts they have deposed, / Some poisoned by their wives, some sleeping kill'd, / All murdered" (Act 3.Scene 2).

Richard is certainly not a coward but he deliberately exhibits his incapability to act decisively in times of crisis. But, on ordinary occasions, he acts so swiftly that his swift action is not at all required. The way he insults and hurls abuses at an old man that too in his deathbed is an example of his inappropriate action. Moreover, when the old Gaunt dies, the hasty seizure of his lands and property by Richard is another act of immaturity. Only because of this premature act, Richard invites the wrath of the banished son Bolingbroke who brings the doomsday for Richard. He is a man of inconsistency in his actions and he falls a victim for his inconsistent acts.

Only towards the end of the play, he deserves our sympathy when Exton kills him. Even at that moment, he tries to defend himself. He manages to draw a sword and stabs two men before he gets mortally wounded. Richard's reversal of the coronation ceremony is also one of the most intense scenes of Shakespeare's plays. Despite his negative traits, he is considered the ruler of the kingdom. No matter whether he is good or bad, a king is believed to have been blessed by God. And no man on earth can unseat a king because it is done against the will of God.

Elizabethans believed that King is a demi God, and a representative of God. Therefore, when Richard is stripped of his throne, scepter and crown, people are not actually happy but rather agitated. And with the killing of the King, the audience move emotionally with the character on the stage. So, the character of Richard is designed in such a way that people should get a complex picture of the King. Though Richard is an anti-people king, a king is a king. The play also talks about how the private desires of a king affects the public interest of the subjects. Richard is painted as a tragic hero who is incapable of appropriate action. He does right things at the wrong time and vice versa. As Aristotle precepts suggest, a tragic hero should fall from

a greater height so that the tragic effect will be intense. Richard of course belongs to the noble esteem. He is the King of England who falls from that level, surrenders the crown to Bolingbroke and gets murdered later. Despite all these qualities and yardsticks being fulfilled, it is very difficult to call Richard II as a tragic hero because he looks more pathetic at times.

## **Bolingbroke**

Bolingbroke, the Duke of Hereford appears in the opening scene of the play. In fact he propels the plot with his quarrel with Mowbray, the Duke of Norfolk. In the initial scene itself, he is shown as an aggressive individual fighting with Mowbray. Since Richard himself is involved in the issue indirectly and because of his inability to solve the quarrel, he orders a trial by combat. Bolingbroke agrees for the combat. But Richard's mood changes and he stalls the combat and banishes both Mowbray and Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke cries that banishing him is injustice. But his requests fall into deaf ears, and he is banished. Bolingbroke is upset over this and wants to take revenge upon the King. He is already fuming in anger over the king's unfair banishment of him from England.

Adding fuel to fire, Richard seizes the estates of his father Gaunt after he passes away. Knowing that Gaunt is in his deathbed, Richard very cunningly uses the opportunity to confiscate the property of Gaunt to be used for the funds for war. Both the prejudiced banishment and the unlawful seizure of property fuelled the anger of Bolingbroke to a larger extent. He decides to take revenge upon the King. Bolingbroke could successfully mobilize the dissident voices within the kingdom. He explains the king's unlawful seizure of the lands which are supposed to be inherited by him. Carried away by the injustices meted out to him and also by Richard's own flaws, many nobles turned against the king joining with Bolingbroke. Bolingbroke wins the support of the audience as long as he is a victim of the injustices of the crown and questions the crown for its misuse of authority. But then when he strips the king of his crown and crowns himself, he loses his supremacy as the Elizabethans believed that he has no right to usurp the throne even if the king is corrupt as he is supposed to be God's agent on earth.

Bolingbroke is very honest and a person of integrity throughout the play. Even after his ascension as the king Henry, he is lenient towards Aumerly, the son of the Duke of York forgiving his conspiracy. In the killing of Richard also, Bolingbroke never asked Exton his follower to kill Richard. On seeing the dead body of Richard, he is indeed shocked and turns

unhappy. He thinks in the correct way that he could have ruled the kingdom peacefully without enemies if Richard is not murdered. Now with the killing of Richard, he is sure that he earns more enemies and is doubtful about his survival as a successful King. He is a practical man and wants to do some expiation for the killing of Richard even though he is not involved in the killing. He wants to have a holy trip to the holy land as a sign of expiation for the death of Richard. From that moment onwards, his mind is full of guilt consciousness. He is afraid that he will be unseated by somebody as he unseated Richard. So he becomes a King but lost his peace.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The expository scene of the play is very important in many ways. The scene skillfully exposes the conflict on which the plot is set by Shakespeare. The scene exposes the King's public display of his powerful monarch and genuine character and his private face with a lot of suspicious actions. Even the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke is a proxy fight. Mowbray is fighting for the King. It is actually a fight between the King and the Lancasters. Gaunt knows that Mowbray would have killed Gloucester only by the orders of the King. But, Richard tries his level best to hide his role in the murder of Gloucester and struggles to pacify both the parties. Once it is difficult to settle the issue, he employs a different strategy of asking them to follow a traditional trial by combat. Here the King's inability to contain the crisis is visible. He is inept and reveals the discrepancy between his public image and private face.

Richard's choice to solve the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray by means of a combat is seemingly an exhibition of his power and authority. But on the other side, this experiment is the prime force behind the troubles that haunt him till the end of the play. It is only in this combat, he banishes Bolingbroke and there starts all his problems. As a king, Richard knows that he is the maker of laws and rules. He knows that if he breaks the laws, then his subjects won't have any regard for the laws. Even then, he breaks the laws whenever he feels like breaking them. He undermines his own position as a king by indulging in hasty decisions. He is the one who orders for the combat and again he is the one who cancels it.

Richard is carried away by his sycophantic friends. Richard's anti-people policies are exposed when Gaunt regrets about the maladministration of Richard. But Richard turns a deaf ear to that calling him a lean witted fool. His complete disregard for Gaunt and Gaunt's love for the

nation are brilliantly juxtaposed by Shakespeare. On the death of Gaunt, Richard seizes all his properties and goes ahead to spend it for war expenses. He rejects the counsel of York and resorts to rude assertion of his power. Richard's musings about the burdens of kingship deserves our praise but then he lacks our appreciation when he shows a poor estimation of his people and nobles who support him. He has been politically unwise and widens the gap between his words and his deeds.

The entire play stands on a pedestal of contrasting characters-Richard and Bolingbroke. Richard is pretentious but Bolingbroke is realistic. Richard is politically incompetent, and Bolingbroke emerges as a shrewd politician. Richard believes in power politics and Bolingbroke believes in knowledge politics. Richard with his narcissism draws everybody's hatred and Bolingbroke with his cry for justice deserves everybody's love. That is why when Richard returns for Ireland, all his nobles and people are already on the side of Bolingbroke against the king. Richard usurps the property of Gaunt and in turn his son Bolingbroke usurps the throne of Richard. *Richard II*, the play is a power game.

### **3.4 Richard III**

#### **Background**

A family feud between rival cousins-grandsons of Edward III, resulted in a massive War of the Roses which devastated the peace of England. Using this historical source, Shakespeare wrote a tetralogy-Richard II, Henry IV, Pt 1 & 2, and Richard III, covering this sordid and turbulent era in British History. In Richard III, Shakespeare presents a dramatic representation of a turning point in English history- the end of the Wars of the Roses and the rise of the Tudor dynasty in the crowning of Henry VII. The Tudor rule continued in England in Shakespeare's day, with Queen Elizabeth I, a Tudor on the throne. As a prolific playwright in sixteenth-century England, Shakespeare had the political compulsion to write in favour of the people in power. The future prospects of any writer depends on his relationship with the power centre. Therefore, Shakespeare's portrayal of Richard III as a dreadful villain is political. In a way, he painted Richard black to glorify the Tudors as indirectly the Tudor state should approve the content of the play. Hence, in writing the past history through his plays, Shakespeare had the impact of the considerations of his own times.

## **Analysis of the Plot**

The play begins at the end of the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485). England heaved a sigh of relief under the peaceful regime of King Edward IV after a decade long civil unrest between the royal families of York and Lancaster that devastated the peace and welfare of the nation. The commoners of England after a hiatus live their life under King Edward IV and the triumphant Yorks. Richard, an over ambitious man and Edward's younger brother, grows jealous of Edward's peaceful rule and the happiness of people around him. He is such a wicked megalomaniac that he could convert any heavenly place into a hell with his ill feelings. Feeling inferior about his physical defect, Richard dreams to acquire the throne cunningly and chooses to exterminate anyone who stand on his way to become king.

Richard starts executing his clandestine plans to become the King. He is a man of intellect with a lot of deceptive techniques and skills for political manipulation at hand. First and foremost, he starts his negatively drafted plan by turning Edward against the Duke of Clarence, who is held a captive in the Tower on charges of treachery. As part of his larger plan, Richard prospers in convincing Hastings and Buckingham that the queen is to be blamed for Clarence's imprisonment. He then succeeds in coaxing a noblewoman, Lady Anne, into marrying him. Even though she curses initially for killing her father and husband, she yields to his flirtations and accepts to marry him. Lady Anne laments the death of Henry VI, and curses Richard: "O cursed be the hand that made these holes! Cursed be the heart that had the heart to do it! Cursed the blood that let his blood from hence."

Yet, she agrees to marry Richard as she could not resist the tempting words of Richard. From the very fact that Richard could murder a man and at once marry his widow, one can understand the unscrupulous nature of Richard. Then he misuses an order from the King and executed his own elder brother Clarence with the help of mercenaries. After murdering Clarence, he very cleverly transfers the burden of murder to his sick older brother King Edward. By doing so, he could effectively cripple the peace of the King and intensify King Edward's ailment. King Edward, who is suffering from prolonged illness, persuades his Queen's family to befriend his nobles. Richard enters the King's chamber and directly tells him that Clarence is killed.

Subsequently King Edward dies. The moment Richard enters the palace, the peace is gone. The moment he crowns himself, the peace of the nation is gone. Having impatiently waited for the

death of King Edward, Richard announces himself as the protector of England till the elder of Edward's two sons grows up. Richard does not wait for things to take their own course but he drifts the nature of time to suit his vested interests. Immediately after the king's death, he arrests Rivers and Gray, Queen Elizabeth's brother and son respectively and imprisons them in one of his castles. He also manages to locate the place of stay of Prince Edward, and brings him back to London. Richard exhibits a great display of courteousness and dedication and persuades Prince Edward and his brother to stay in the Tower. Edward, along with his younger brother, stays in the Tower.

As an attempt to carry out his next mission, Richard kills the nobles who remain loyal to the princes and in the process kills Lord Hastings, the lord chamberlain of England. Keeping a sinister plan in mind, Richard calls for two councils- a public council to crown Edward and a private one to enable Richard to acquire the throne. Throughout his creepy schemes, Buckingham helps him. As Hastings is not cooperative in extending help for Richard to become the king, he is put to death. With the helping hand of Buckingham, Richard stage managed everything perfectly. He arranges a neatly enacted scene where he says that Prince Edward is only a bastard child of King Edward IV.

Arguing this way, Richard paves the way for his claim to the throne as he is next in line. The Lord Mayor of London accepts this argument and requests Richard to be the Lord Protector of the Kingdom. With his inbuilt hypocrisy, Richard stunningly pretends to half-heartedly accept. He then proceeds to arrest the powerful kinsmen of Edward's wife, Queen Elizabeth who are the boys' maternal relatives and executed them. Keeping Elizabeth and the princes in an insecure state, Richard deploys his political associates, particularly his most reliable man, Lord Buckingham, to promote him as the next king. Meantime, Richard holds the young princes in the Tower as captives and arranges mercenaries to kill both the princes.

At this juncture, Richard's blood thirsty mission has its impact on the psyche of the subjects ruled by him. The common people of England start hating him and grow fearful of his tenure. Moreover, he has estranged almost all the nobles of the court including Buckingham, the equally power-hungry acquaintance of Richard. Seeing the way Richard has eliminated everyone who stands an obstacle for his power and being with him all through his series of killings, Buckingham starts trembling about his own plight in the hands of Richard. Therefore he runs away out of fear and assembles an army for his defence.

However, Richard could locate the position of Buckingham and executed him for treason. With his power hungry expedition, Richard has earned the wrath of a majority of his subjects and nobles. Anger of the masses gets accumulated against the blood-thirsty operation of Richard. Adding strength to the organized opposition, a rumour started spreading among the people that the Earl of Richmond, a descendant of the Lancaster family challenges the throne. He has already mobilized forces in France and is marching towards England. The dissident groups are happy over the development and are ready to join the forces against the King. In the intervening period, Richard makes efforts to consolidate his power. Horrible to the core, he murders his wife Queen Anne in an intention to marry young Elizabeth, the daughter of the dead King Edward and former Queen Elizabeth. He does not bother about the compatibility of his matrimonial relationship with young Elizabeth. Young Elizabeth is actually his niece but he feels that the marriage would guarantee his entitlement to the throne. However, for the first time, Richard begins losing control over the forthcoming events as Queen Elizabeth foresees the hidden motives of Richard and therefore secretly assures to marry young Elizabeth to Richmond.

Finally, the armies of Richard and Richmond meet at Bosworth Field. Ultimately Richmond invades England. The night before the battle that will decide everything, Richard has a nightmare. In his dreadful dream, the ghosts of all the people he has murdered appear and curse him that he will die the next day. They also prophesied that he will be defeated and Richmond will turn victorious. After the dream, Richard is psychologically dead. In the following battle, Richard is killed, and Richmond is crowned King Henry VII. The play ends where it begins. King Henry VII is engaged to young Elizabeth as an attempt to strike a concord between the contending houses of Lancaster and York. The plans begins with people living a peaceful life under the regime of King Edward IV and ends with the reign of King Henry VII which promises a new epoch of peace and harmony for England.

### **Analysis of Major Characters**

#### **Richard III**

Richard, the eponymous character is projected both as the protagonist and a villain. He plays both the roles in an unparalleled way. Keeping the political overtones aside, if one examines the character of Richard in *Richard III*, he is a resourceful protagonist who gives any reader a

well of psychological insights. Through Richard, Shakespeare has excavated the evil thoughts that lie in any person who is filled with greed and ambition. Richard's mind is a treasure house of evil which Shakespeare mines out in the play. In the medieval plays, the character Vice is introduced as a personification of evil. Richard is a personification of evil in the Shakespearean history plays. But, towards the end of the play, he turns out to be a highly complex character that readers suffer to comprehend.

Even before postmodernism spread its tentacles across the world, readers/audience had a multiple reading/viewing of Richard's character. He develops a highly multifaceted, ambiguous relationship with the audience. Richard is obviously viewed as a villain and he himself reveals in his first speech that nothing could stop him in his nefarious pursuits. His pursuit for power is so powerful that he stopped the breath of everybody who tried to stop his schemes. He is man of action. He is a man of powerful words. His words carry the force of law. The same man who comes out with pleasing words speak poisonous words as well. He conceals his evil under the carpet of language. His refined speeches impress people and he survives with the help of language. Shakespeare created such a powerful person only through his imagination and the real Richard would not have used language this much cunningly. He impresses not only his friends but also his foes through his language. Even Lady Anne, who knows more about his wickedness and his role in the murder of her father and husband, allows herself to be carried away by the seducing words of Richard.

As audience, we are fully aware that Richard's claim that other's insensitivity towards his deformity is the source of his wicked plots is another trick to harvest our sympathy for him. He draws sympathy from the other characters and of course from the audience with his crocodile tears. Almost all the victims of Richard's devious plans are partly responsible for their own downfall. Lady Anne, who is fully aware of his involvement in the murder of her father and husband, freely allows herself to fall a victim. She knows that he will even kill her one day or the other. Still she marries him. The tendency to view him as a villain and yet accepting and admiring his villainy is a significant aspect in this play. Though Richard is repulsive on most of the occasions, he looks attractive in his dishonesty and violent behaviour. Audience sometimes tend to imagine that Richard will succeed in spite of his evil acts and thoughts.

Audience get an experience of Richard not through the speeches made by other characters about Richard, but through his own captivating monologues. He is tight lipped about his wicked

plans in public but leaks them out only through his monologues. Initially, Richard draws the sympathy of other characters in the play by justifying his malice for them as a product of their disgust for his physical deformity. Since nobody loves him, he does not love anybody. But he does not stop with not loving anybody but starts hating everybody. The sympathy wave he creates in others evaporates quickly when people realize that he uses his deformity only as a tool to manipulate people. Richard's malice is an inherent part of his character and not a product of his reaction to others' perception of his deformed body. He uses the language as a substitute for his deformed body and keeps using flattery and deceptive language throughout the play to be crowned a King. As the play progresses, Richard loses the audience's impression about himself and ultimately he grows into a monster terrorizing them along with the characters on the stage.

### **Thematic Analysis**

There is a popular adage in Sanskrit, "you never ever enter the same river again." Every time a reader reads Richard III, he/she gets new insights into the monarchical system of governance. Though the plot dwells in the past history, the message that it propagates is relevant to the present. The power of Language is essentially a dominant factor in Richard III. Richard controls, owns, manipulates people not only through his deeds-good or bad, but also through his apparently good words. He knows the magic of mesmerizing people with his sweet words. Perhaps his sweet words are not actually sweet but only sweet coated bitter pills.

Even after murdering her husband and father, Richard could woo Anne and manages to get along with her so easily because of his 'glib and oily art of talking.' He uses language in such an effective manner that his evil inner thoughts get concealed in his flowery words. Despite his physical deformity and evil thoughts, he looks impressive and charming because of his speeches. His language captivates and captures people. Anne knows that he is the hardcore villain and yet she succumbs to his flattery and persuasive talk. Finally she agrees to marry him. Richard uses the same tactic with Elizabeth also but she understands his schemes and secretly deceives him. He manipulates language to deceive not only his enemies but also his friends and loyalists. He resorts to violence only when words fail to resolve the conflict. He gives that much importance to language and in turn language gives him life to a considerable extent.

The most important theme in Richard III is man's thirst for power. Richard is a man eater of England. He is a power hungry man who is always after power and is brutal in eliminating anybody to achieve the desired goal. For him, the end justifies the means. For Richard's power hungry expedition, almost all the characters in the play fall as victims. As a typical Machiavellian villain, Richard is quite cold-blooded and ruthless in getting rid of people who trespass his dream boundary. Richard's brutality is explicit when his right hand Buckingham gets executed accuses of treason. Richard III is a classic example of the fact that when man get too materialistic and ambitious, he becomes stone-hearted and inhumane. Throughout the play, Richard never feels guilty of the murders he committed.

*Richard III*, as a historical play, illustrates the historical character Richard III. Borrowing sources from history, Shakespeare dramatizes the emergence and decline of this king. Shakespeare wants to express a whole idea in this play that Richard III, as a king is too hard-hearted and ambitious to poison and corrupt others for his own endeavours. Watching Richard's cruel means to take over the throne, one can understand the power struggle in royal kingdoms getting extremely intense in those days. Therefore through these history plays and through the life of Richard III, one can learn that human beings can turn animalistic in the power struggle. *Richard III* is so powerful in another aspect that is characterization. We comprehend the evil nature of Richard III not through the words of others about him. He is sketched in such a way that his evil nature oozes out stealthily and the audience knows his evil before the unfortunate characters on the stage realize. At times he speaks the opposite of what he actually thinks of. His words either transcend or contradict their own meanings. He is such a complex character.

Richard III as a history play is concerned with the relationship between the ruler and the ruled. The play intricately explains how the private thoughts of a ruler influence the public policies of the Kingdom. Even the gossip in the royal palace comes as a law for the common masses. The articulation of the common people, Buckingham's speech to the masses and Richard's monologues prove the point that whatever trivial matters happen inside the palace have their serious impact on the innocent lives of commoners. The play also unravels the impact of the behavior of those in power on the powerless people. Richard's fall offers a lesson for the rulers that misuse of power is not an entitlement of a king. Richmond in this play wins over Richard not out of his might but of the common people's opposition to their own ruler. His own people

start distrusting Richard and grow fearful of his tyranny. Most of the nobles also join the opposite forces as they could not tolerate the tyranny of the King.

The idea that the personal integrity of a ruler has an impact on the peace and overall wellbeing of the nation. A state with a good king like Hamlet will flourish and a kingdom with Richard like king will perish. The importance of language in achieving political power is the underlying theme of Richard III. Language is not always a mode of communication. For Richard, it is a crucial weapon. Only when words fail, he uses violence. His extraordinary language skills with rhetoric enables him to manipulate, complicate, and control everybody. Richard's powerful use of language and argumentative skill empowers him to entice Lady Anne, to throw Clarence in prison, to blame the king for Clarence's death, and to execute Hastings.

Richard's hypocrisy is exposed when he eliminates his enemies using others. He does not do anything on his own because he does not want to endanger his reputation as a king. Though *Richard III* raises multiple issues and an assortment of themes, the main focus is on power and its equations. The play also talks about power as a corrupting force. **Richard III** manipulates people, devises dubious techniques, and exploit situations to his advantage only to gain, regain, and sustain his throne.

## **Study Questions**

### **Henry IV (Part 2)**

1. Discuss the tragedy of Henry IV.
2. Discuss Falstaff's character and his place in *Henry IV, Part 2*.
3. Discuss the use of humour and comic subplots in *Henry IV, Part 2*.
4. Discuss Shakespeare's view of power politics as evidenced in *Henry IV, Part 2*.
5. Consider *Henry IV, Part 2* as a history play.

### **Richard II**

1. Discuss Richard II's struggle to find his own identity.
2. Discuss the tragedy of Henry Bolingbroke.
3. Discuss *Richard II*, not as family history but as a public tragedy.
4. How does the play demonstrate Richard's tyrannical nature and policies?
5. Discuss Shakespeare's view of history with special reference to this play.

### **Richard III**

1. Consider Richard III as a man completely without moral character.
2. Explain what motivates Richard to act the way he does.
3. Comment on the tyranny of Richard III.
4. Write an essay on the Shakespearean History plays with reference to this play.
5. Explain the role of women in Richard III.

## UNIT IV

### 4.0 The Roman Plays

#### Introduction

The plays *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* have varied plots and immensely differing characterisations. But the common factor that clubs all these three plays together is their plots and characters from Roman history. It is hence crucial for us to understand at the very beginning that the term ‘Roman plays’ is not used in the same sense as ‘great tragedies’ or ‘early comedies’ that are classified by their genre and plot-structure, but more as a reference to their historical setting based on ancient Rome. All these three plays are demonstrate the exceptional mastery of Shakespeare in creating emotionally loaded plots and skilfully contrived characters from the rather dry pages of Roman history. Apart from these three plays prescribed for you in this unit, *Titus Andronicus* is often mentioned as one of the Roman plays authored by the Bard. However, the plot of *Titus Andronicus* is not drawn from the Roman history, it is more an imaginative plot set in the fictional past of Roman age.

Shakespeare has followed the history of Rome written by the ancient historian Plutarch, which got translated into English by Sir. Thomas North in 1579 and thereby acclaimed a wider reach. Shakespeare has even reproduced several phrases and sentences from North’s translation of Plutarch’s history, such as Enobarbus’ description of Cleopatra as “The barge she sat in ...” in the opening scene of *Antony and Cleopatra*. In their chronological order, *Coriolanus* is set in the infant stage of the Roman Empire, at least a couple of centuries earlier to *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* based on the political and personal conflicts of its glorious times.

All these three plays are tragedies by genre, and historical events as well as characters of the Roman Empire are presented so as to represent the universal human emotions and socio-political tensions. *Antony and Cleopatra* is a love tragedy, while *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* are political tragedies. In ancient Rome, the interests of the State were regarded superior to that of individuals, and political as well as personal conflicts presented in these plays in some or other way remain connected to this tension between the State and the individuals. We must also bear in mind that Shakespeare produced plays during the age of renaissance which was slowly giving raise to individualism. An intensive reading of these plays will give us a better

understanding of Roman history, its renaissance re-making and artistic excellence of Shakespeare. We shall take-up this task in this unit.

#### **4.1 Coriolanus Background**

The play *Coriolanus* was written most probably between 1606 and 1608, and got performed in 1609-10 by the Blackfriars Theatre in London. This was the time when Shakespeare was moving from his 'great tragedies' to the 'dramatic romances'. At the same time, the Bard was also busy producing historical plays based on the history of England as well as Rome. If analysed in sequence, *Coriolanus* follows just after the tragedies *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. Though the last before *Coriolanus* (*Antony and Cleopatra*) was a tragedy, this play differed in its extraction of characters and events from the Roman history. All these tragedies which preceded *Coriolanus* were written between 1604 and 1606. Shakespeare composed his next play *Coriolanus* on the same heels, as a tragedy extracted from the history of ancient Rome. While he took up the characters of imperial Rome and falling Egypt for his previous play, *Coriolanus* is set in the still infant city of Rome.

As discussed earlier, the other two Roman plays deal with the political and personal affairs of the Roman Empire in its glorious times. On the contrary, *Coriolanus* who was a mighty warrior lived when Rome had no other glory than being one of the Italian cities, at least a couple of centuries before Julius Caesar or Brutus or Antony would appear. Shakespeare's play named after him hence deals with a Rome that was under constant threat from its neighbours and depended upon the bravest of its warriors for protection.

After the fall of the Roman king Tarquin, a transformation took place in Rome. The monarchy was replaced by the republic system of governance after Tarquin, and the common masses and elites named 'plebeians' and 'patricians' respectively had their own rights and privileges in selecting the persons for governing the country. The interests and perspectives of the plebeians and patricians clashed against the other one during the transition period when *Coriolanus* became the prime ruler of Rome. The play is marvellous in capturing this transition and its related conflicts with a tragic touch and emotional appeal.

Though this play is not so popular as the other two Roman plays of the Bard, the political content embedded in it has been the source of much discussion and debate for the critics,

especially for the new historicists. James I (1603-23) was the King of England when Shakespeare wrote this play. There was a tussle going on between him and the Parliament or the House of Commons over a range of issues. It was in this time that London was undergoing a radical socio-economic transformation.

The feudal system was rapidly diminishing, giving way to an urban economy and industrial growth which would develop into capitalism in the next century. King James was in confrontation with the Parliament over several issues surrounding this transformation, which is depicted in the patricians versus plebeians' conflict in *Coriolanus*. Shakespeare's sympathy for the royalists has been asserted by the critics by drawing parallels and connections between the content of this play and political happenings of early Seventeenth Century England. The play has been adapted by the socialist writers as well as the right-wing groups and fascists in the modern times.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

A devastating famine has just haunted Rome when the play opens. The common people, called Plebeians, are desperate to have the right for fixing the price of grain to be supplied to the city. As the monarchical rule is over in the city of Rome, the elite merchants and aristocrats called Patricians negotiate with the Plebeians and settle for due representation of the common people in Rome's governing body called 'Tribune'. The Patrician soldier Caius Martius is enraged over the decision to grant representation for the Plebeians. His hatred for the common masses is a well-known fact among the Romans.

Caius Martius has only contempt for the lower classes of Rome, and it gets exhibited in vivid terms in all his words. At this juncture, the Volscians, who are an Italian tribe, wage a war against the Romans under the leadership of Tullus Aufidius. Aufidius is the arch rival of the bravest Roman soldier Caius Martius. In the bloody war that ensues, Romans emerge victorious primarily due to the bravos of Martius. They also capture the Italian city of Corioles where Aufidius gets defeated once again at the hands of Martius.

Romans hail Caius Martius as the savior of Rome and grant him the name Coriolanus in recognition of his heroic deeds. The common people as well as the aristocrats of Rome give him a huge welcome. The Sennett of Rome offers to make him the consul of Rome, which is the highest position in the governing body. However, Coriolanus has to seek the support of

common people or Plebeians in order to gain this honour. He must plead for the support of Plebeians in the market place and convince them of his commitment to the country and common people.

Martius for whom the hatred for Plebeians is deeply entrenched, undertaking of this task proves to be a failed attempt. He goes to the Plebeians for seeking their votes only with a high reluctance, and the same is reflected in his words. Though the Plebeians agree to give their votes for making Coriolanus the consul at the beginning, they are turned against him by his own enraged words and clever prodding of the two tribunes namely Brutus and Sicinius. They consider Coriolanus as an enemy of the people and convince the common people of Rome that electing him to the highest position would only increase his insolence and aversion against the Plebeians. Moved by the words of Brutus and Sicinius, and also reminiscing upon the ill-treatment of Coriolanus, the Plebeians reverse their decision to cast a vote in favour of making him the consul.

Coriolanus is absolutely enraged by this turn of events against his favour, and he speaks intemperately against the Plebeians, Brutus and Sicinius, and the very idea of republic or popular rule. This is more than enough for the tribune, especially Brutus and Sicinius, to declare Coriolanus a traitor to the State of Rome. As he refuses to plead to the common people again, he is exiled from Rome. Resolving to destroy Rome in its entirety, Coriolanus joins with Aufidius, his Volscian enemy, who is planning another expedition against Rome from the city of Antium. Coriolanus makes peace with the Volscians and offers to assist them in their invasion of Rome. Aufidius gladly welcomes Coriolanus to join with him and gives him an equal position in his army. However, Aufidius soon starts feeling that he is being overshadowed by the position and bravery of his once Roman enemy. Amidst this internal conflict, the armies of Aufidius march towards Rome. In the absence of Coriolanus to lead their army and having to fight against a mighty Volscian force led by Coriolanus and Aufidius, Romans fail miserably in all their attempts to stop the advancement of the invaders.

Two old friends of Coriolanus are sent as emissaries to meet Coriolanus and convince him to stop the war against Rome. They meet him at the Volscian camp just outside the walls of the city of Rome and persuade him to show mercy for his own country for which he has once been the savior and leader. But Coriolanus is not convinced to stop his acts of revenge against his country, and sends back the emissaries with his resolute decision to invade the city.

Knowing Coriolanus' deep respect and affection for his mother, Volumnia, mother of Coriolanus, is sent to meet Coriolanus and plead him to stop the war against Rome. Volumnia manages in her attempt as Coriolanus yields to his mother's plead for mercy to Rome. Volumnia is hailed as the savior of the Romans, and is welcomed with great respect. Back at Antium, Coriolanus is given a heroic welcome, and the residents hail him as their hero. Already frustrated over the power and respect he commands among his own people, Aufidius feels downgraded and convicts Coriolanus of treason. He declares that Coriolanus has committed treachery by not capturing Rome and yielding to the plea of his mother against the interest of Volscians. An argument ensues between the two former enemies, and some men loyal to Aufidius assassinate Coriolanus.

### **Analysis of Major Characters**

#### **Caius Martius**

Caius Martius is the tragic hero of this play. Shakespeare's extraordinary genius in making tragic characters from the persons of real history is exhibited in this play too. This Roman general is the bravest of all the Romans, capable of winning wars for the Romans against their enemies, honest in his acts, frank in his words and honorable in his conduct. Despite bestowed with all these virtues, he falls to be exiled from his own country and to meet a tragic death at the hands of his enemies due to too much of pride, intemperate, unrelenting, stubborn and aristocratic.

Above all, his utter contempt for the common people who are the lower classes of Rome triggers many problems and conflicts. He is thrown out from his own country and left to find an ally in his long-term arch rival. He is an excellent warrior and remains undefeated by any of Rome's opposite forces. He is sometimes shown to be a kind-hearted person, which he is not able to express through sugar-coated words so as to charm the people. After winning over the Volscians, Coriolanus instructs his military generals Cominius and Titus Lartius not to punish a poor man who gave asylum to him when he arrived at the city of Volscians earlier.

Though it is rather difficult to ascertain the historical authenticity of this incident, Shakespeare has included this minute remark for the obvious purpose of manifesting Coriolanus' intrinsically kind nature.

At the same time, his distaste for the lower classes of Rome remains a well-known fact in his country. He in many ways represents the aristocratic section that was reluctant to shed the monarchical mode of governance and its values even after Rome became a republic. The rest of Patricians had realized by the time of Coriolanus that they could not administer Rome without negotiating with the interests of the Plebeians. Conducting themselves as good politicians and talking to the people in an elegant and humble manner was seen as an inevitable requirement for becoming the consul. In spite of his bravery and honesty, Coriolanus is not willing to make a good politician of himself. In addition to his innate over-pride and disrespect for the common people, this also turns out to be his tragic flaw.

### **Volumnia**

Volumnia is a well-respected noble woman of Rome and the mother of Coriolanus, and commands full authority on her son from the very beginning of the play. When she gets the news of her son's military exploits against the Volscians, she is delighted over having made him a warrior. She has the ultimate control over the actions and decisions of Coriolanus throughout the play. When he falters to win the votes of Roman lower classes due to his intemperate words, Volumnia is the only person who is able to make Coriolanus appear before the people and the Tribune for pleading repentance. But in the absence of his mother during his re-appearance before the common people, Coriolanus commits the same blunder again, and is exiled from his country all together.

Volumnia is enraged over the exile of her son and shows the same kind of anger. But she is aware of the platform and impact of her words unlike Coriolanus who is not calculative in his showing of anger and aversion. She is a devoted mother and a clever woman. In turn, Coriolanus is also devoted to his mother, and allows himself to be dominated by her words and wills. He obeys to his mother's commands and pleadings respectfully perhaps for having raised him to be a great warrior. Towards the end, it is Volumnia's pleading which saves Rome from the invasion of Coriolanus and Volscian army. In ancient Rome, interest of the State was held primary above all individual interests. Volumnia sacrifices the victory and revenge of her son against the Romans for the larger interest of her country and people. She embodies the virtues which Coriolanus lacks in many respects.

## **Menenius**

Menenius is a Nobleman of Rome, and a close friend of Coriolanus. He is a clever politician and a gifted orator. He is a devoted Patrician and regards the aristocratic values essential for governing Rome. He also shares the same contempt of Coriolanus against the Plebeians. But he is very conscious of his words and expresses his feelings of resentment through witty speeches. He manages to control the wrath of Roman lower classes through his skillful negotiation, on which the Plebeians leave their plan for mutiny in the opening scene of the play. He understands the scheme of Brutus and Sicinius to trap Coriolanus using his ill-temper and unrelenting pride.

It is mainly because Coriolanus fails to listen to the advices of Menenius that he falls prey to his own uncontrolled rage and gets exiled. Though Menenius despises the Plebeians, he is able to fathom the dangers of antagonizing the lower classes. He is realistic enough to recognize the due share to be given to the Plebeians in the Roman economy and politics. Though older than Coriolanus, he is also able to cope up to the new challenges and newly arising conflicts, which essential quality the other seriously lacks. He also goes to beseech Coriolanus to give up his military campaign against the Romans, but fails to persuade him out of his strong thirst for revenge. Throughout the play, Menenius uses his witty tongue and clever mind for avoiding conflicts and resolving problems.

## **Brutus**

Brutus is again a clever politician, and he represents the common people or Plebeians of Rome. He has been elected by the Plebeians to represent them in the governing of Rome as one of the tribunes. Brutus is well-aware of Coriolanus' weaknesses and exploits them to the full for expelling him out of Roman politics. He realizes that the indomitable pride and of Coriolanus, combined with his innate hatred for the Plebeians, would only prove disastrous to the country. He foresees the unwanted consequences that would arise if Coriolanus is elected to power and made the consul of Rome. As predicted by Brutus, Coriolanus shows his natural temper and inflexibility before the common people, and also fails to convince them in his subsequent attempt. he ceases upon the flaws of Coriolanus and makes the maximum out of them to the effect of exiling him. Though Brutus would seem to be a villain who drives Coriolanus to his tragic end, he has no personal anger or revenge motive against Coriolanus. He acts only out of his conviction to keep Rome from the danger of dictatorial power and Plebeians from the

exploitation of Patricians. He can well be compared with his namesake in *Julius Caesar* in many respects. According to Aristotle, “a tragic hero is a character who is no eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice and depravity, but by some error or frailty”. A tragic hero is of a noble stature, and from the beginning of the play we find that Brutus is presented as a symbol of nobility. And it is his noble standing which adds to his appeal as a tragic hero. Others were inspired by Brutus’s patriotism and honesty, and he was respected by all. These qualities of Brutus made Cassius even more eager to involve Brutus in the conspiracy. It was out of jealousy that the other conspirators plotted against Caesar, whereas, in the case of Brutus, it was his love for the nation that made him get involved in the cruel act of murdering Caesar. In Act 5, Scene 5, Mark Antony says, “This was the noblest Roman of them all”

A tragic hero will have a tragic flaw in his character which leads to an error in judgement and to his eventual downfall and death. Throughout the play, Brutus displays the traits of a tragic hero, and the tragic flaw in his character is his being too naive. He thus made an error in judgement, and this error finally led to his downfall. Brutus caused his own downfall after the killing of Caesar, when the entire people of Rome turned against the conspirators. Brutus blindly believed every word he heard and thought no one would deceive him. Brutus was being too naive, and this caused his downfall and death. His initial mistake was in Act 2, Scene 1, when the fake letters were sent to him by the conspirators.

Brutus was unaware that the letters were fake and it was used to make him join hands with them. We find another example in Act 3, Scene 2 when Brutus allows Antony to speak to the people of Rome after Caesar’s death. In the end, Brutus suffers because of this decision. Antony stirs the crowd with his moving speech, makes them believe that the conspirators are all evil, and wisely moves the mob against them. As a result, a civil war breaks out, and during the war also Brutus makes a false decision. Cassius had advised him to let the enemies get after them, so that Antony would waste his provisions and his soldiers would get tired. But, Brutus did not heed to what Cassius said, and he marched upon the troops at Philippi.

It’s true that Brutus made some errors in his judgement, but his death is undeserved as he was a man admired by all, and his death created pity for him. Although it arouses pity and fear, the audience are not left in depression as the audience feel an emotional release with the speech of Antony about Brutus. Antony makes it clear that Brutus acted out of honesty and for general good, unlike the other conspirators who were jealous of Caesar.

It can be said that the downfall of a hero is partially his own fault, and the result of free choice, which is not of accident or villainy or some over-riding malignant fate. According to critics, Brutus disqualifies from being an Aristotelian tragic hero as he is a character portrayed with pride, high mindedness, over self-confidence, flawed judgement etc. But Brutus satisfies the traits of a tragic hero since he fails through false moral choice.

### **Sicinius**

Sicinius is also one of the tribunes of Rome. He is again a clever politician and good orator. He is a close friend of Brutus and allies with him to check Coriolanus from becoming the consul of Rome. He, along with Brutus, gets mocked as being old and lazy by Menenius, but he proves to be capable of exiling the greatest warrior Coriolanus out of Rome.

### **Tullus Aufidius**

Aufidius is a Volscian general and considers Coriolanus as his arch enemy. Defeating Coriolanus remains to be the long-nurtured ambition for him. However, destiny turns the events into unpredicted directions, and both the rival warriors become friends in order to defeat Rome. Aufidius considers winning over Rome as the ultimate aim of his warfare, but not able to quite do so till the very end. At the beginning, Aufidius gets defeated in a one-to-one fight by his greatest rival Coriolanus during the war between Romans and Volscians.

After being exiled from his own country, Coriolanus makes peace with the Volscian general and joins his army in the top position. Aufidius starts feeling slighted and dominated by Coriolanus very soon, and the reputation Coriolanus is gaining among his own people develops into a bitter resentment. Coriolanus, though being an ally of Aufidius this time, prevents Rome from getting conquered by the Volscian army as he yields to withdraw from the war at the request of his mother. Not being to win over Coriolanus rankles Aufidius throughout the play.

Towards the end, it becomes too impossible for him to live under the shadow of his once bitter rival. He charges, rightly so from the Volscians' perspective, Coriolanus of treason and the latter is murdered by some Volscians at the end. Even this time, Aufidius is not able to kill his enemy himself, only able to defeat him to death using his political influence.

### **Cominius and Titus Lartius**

Cominius and Lartius are appointed as generals of the Roman army along with Coriolanus to lead the war against the Volscians. Both are noblemen of Rome and old Patricians committed to the country's well-being. Of them, Cominius is a former consul of Rome whereas Lartius has been a renowned warrior. Both serve as valiant generals against the Volscians. Both are close friends of Coriolanus, and appreciate his bravery as well as Patrician values.

### **Virgilia**

Virgilia is a noblewoman of Rome and loyal wife of Coriolanus. Timid and fearful of wars, she keeps herself away from the celebrations of Coriolanus' victory over the Volscians. She exhibits the feminine qualities which are not seen with Volumnia or Valeria, other noblewomen of Rome. She remains aloof from the political and public affairs affecting her own husband and the city of Rome.

### **Critical Summary**

#### Act I

In this act, the exposition is complete and raising action is developed into a conflict. In the opening scene, the common people of Rome known as Plebeians are up in arms against the Patrician class who rule the country of Rome. A famine has just rattled the people of Rome. The Plebeians accuse the Patricians of hoarding the grains produced by them and leaving the common people to starve. They consider Caius Martius (Coriolanus) as the chief enemy of the people as he is working against the Plebeians. They tell Menenius, a Patrician nobleman who encounters them that they would march to the capital and revolt against the Senate.

Menenius cleverly convinces the rioters that the Senate is like Stomach of the human body, which is responsible to accumulate all the wealth and distribute them proportionately to all parts. The rioters claim due representation in fixing the price for grain supplies, and refuse to abide by the Patrician dictatorship any longer. As Menenius convinces the Plebeian rioters of getting their rights, Martius enters and announces the Senate decision to allow five tribunes to represent the Plebeians in the governing body of Rome. He curses the common people and calls them by names (like cowards and dogs) before delivering the Senate decision to Menenius. A messenger appears and tells them that the Volscians are all set for a war against Rome. Martius is rather happy about the forthcoming war, and tells that Tullus Aufidius who leads the Volscian army is a worthy rival. The Senators come to the place and declare Rome's war against the

Volscians. They nominate Cominius, who is the consul of Rome for one year, along with Titus Lartius to lead the Roman army as its generals, under whom Martius will serve as the lieutenant. The Plebeians disperse and senators return to the capital in order to prepare for the war. Sicinius and Brutus, two of the five tribunes elected by the Plebeians, discuss the mounting pride of Martius and his ill-treatment of the common people. They also comment that he will earn all the credits if the war is won, but will escape the blame if things turn otherwise.

Right at the Volscian city of Corioles, Aufidius is advised by the Senate, against his warnings of Romans' preparedness for the war, to leave the city and take out his army into the battle field. Back at Rome, Martius' mother Volumnia, his wife Virgilia and another noblewoman Valeria discuss how Martius was brought up as a great warrior. Volumnia tells her daughter-in-law that she is proud of her son's battle wounds. Meanwhile, Romans split their army into two parts, of which one attacks Volscians at the battle field and the other troupe sieges Corioles.

The Romans are driven back to their trenches by the troops restored to protect the city, but Martius very soon gathers his men and leads them against the Volscians only after cursing their cowardly retreat. Martius is separated from the rest of his army and caught inside the city, where he manages to single-handedly win over all the Volscians. He makes the city gates to be opened for the Roman army to enter. He moves on to join with the other Roman division fighting the troops of Aufidius at the battle field. On seeing Martius with bleeding wounds, Cominius, whose army is unable to withstand the Volscians, assumes that the other division has also been defeated. But Martius assures him that Romans have captured Corioles, and aids him to victory. Martius and Aufidius briefly engage in a one-to-one combat in which the latter is overpowered by his Roman rival. The Volscians are defeated at the end, and Aufidius sends his men to lobby for peace. He is also distressed over his defeat for five times against Martius. Having led both divisions of the Roman armies to victory, Martius is hailed as the hero, and he is bestowed with the name Coriolanus for winning Corioles.

## Act II

The raising action develops into a conflict in this act, and it nears its climax towards the end. Menenius is engaged in a conversation, rather a verbal battle, with the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius. The two tribunes point out that Coriolanus is too proud and anti-Plebeian. Menenius contends them that they too share the same faults pointed against Coriolanus, despite having no merit what so ever to be so. Brutus hits back at him saying that the Patrician is good only

for talking, and knows no politics or warfare. Volumnia and Virgilia arrive at the place, on seeing which the two tribunes conceal their presence. As they announce the victory of Martius to Menenius, the Roman army marches in and Martius is welcomed with the name Coriolanus. After greeting his mother and wife, he precedes with Menenius and other generals to meet the Senate at the capital.

After the departure of all patricians, Brutus and Sicinius exchange their fear that Coriolanus will be made the consul of Rome after which he is likely to commit more acts of hatred against the Plebeians. But they also predict that his contempt for the common people will not allow him to go out and seek votes in the market place, an exercise he must take up in order to gain the consulship. They are also certain that he will destroy his hard-earned fortunes of the battle field by his uncourteous words. In the capital, the Senate is delighted at Coriolanus' marvelous show of bravery. As Cominius describes the gallant acts of Coriolanus in the war, the subject of price goes out feeling embarrassed at the adulations rallied on him. Then the Senate calls him in and expresses its will to make him the consul of Rome, the highest office in the country. However, he is too reluctant to appear before the common people pleading for their votes wearing the Toga of candidacy.

The Senators at last convince him to go at once to the market place and seek the people's vote in his favour showing the wounds he got in the wars. Brutus and Sicinius, on noticing his reluctance over the long-nurtured custom of pleading for votes to the Plebeians, make sure to see his fall very soon. Coriolanus goes to the Market place with a high reluctance. He is accompanied by Menenius, who encourages him to talk to the people with patience and courtesy and leaves him alone. Then the citizens come in small group one-by-one, and Coriolanus pleads for their votes showing his wounds. The people are at large convinced more by his scars than by his words to vote for him. He is nevertheless not able to conceal his resentment for the common people which gets exhibited during his talks.

The tribunes Brutus and Sicinius are now left with no other option but to agree that Coriolanus has passed in this necessary test. After Menenius comes and takes Coriolanus to the Senate for taking the office, the two tribunes question the Plebeians why they voted for him. The people now tell them that they will reverse their decision and will get back their votes. Upon this, Brutus and Sicinius advice the Plebeians to gather in a large group and come to the capital where Coriolanus will be made the consul soon. They also persuade the mob to tell the Senators

that they agreed to vote for Coriolanus only since the tribunes had advised them to do so, and that they reverse their decision upon realizing their mistake.

### Act III

The conflict of the play raises to meet its climax in this act. The two tribunes come to the capital and announce to the Senate that the people have reversed their decision to give their votes for Coriolanus, and they have come to disclose their decision to the Senators. Coriolanus becomes intensely enraged over this unexpected turn of events and accuses Brutus and Sicinius of plotting against him. He also scorns the Plebeians losing his temper absolutely. The tribunes order Plebeians to arrest Coriolanus. As he refuses to be conquered, the tribunes order for his execution at once. But Coriolanus drives all the Plebeians and tribunes away using his sword and with the help of his Senate friends.

Coriolanus takes asylum in a Senator's home before the Plebeians come with renewed strength. Volumnia berates her son for being an unbending politician before the common people. Menenius and other Senators come to meet Coriolanus, and Menenius persuades him to meet the Plebeians in the market place again and repent for his scornful words against them and their tribunes. Coriolanus deters any further meeting with the Plebeians. Volumnia insists that he must go and at least pretend to be humble. She further instructs him to say words of repentance to the people out there even if he does not mean so. At last Coriolanus agrees to take up this task.

In the market place, Brutus and Sicinius prepare to make Coriolanus lose his temper and thus disclose his real face before the people. Coriolanus appears before the people and says that he will submit to the will of the people. The tribunes accuse him of trying to become a tyrant and ask for his explanation. Coriolanus becomes intemperate as expected, and confronts the tribunes and Plebeians with cursing remarks. Ceasing this opportunity, Brutus and Sicinius exile him from Rome forever amidst protests from Cominius, and helplessness of other friends. Coriolanus replies that he will leave the country gladly rather pleading to the people of lower class.

## Act IV

The climax is now complete and the play heads towards a tragic end in this act. After being exiled from Rome, Coriolanus bids farewell to his mother, wife, Menenius, Cominius and other friends. His he asks his mother to stop crying and refuses the offer of Cominius to accompany him for a month. After bidding him farewell, Volumnia, and others encounter the tribunes Brutus and Sicinius on their way back. Volumnia curses the two tribunes for sending her son out of Rome. She tells them that they have banished the most noble of all the Romans. Brutus snubs her back saying that she has lost all her wit and leave the place at once.

A Roman man who is paid to work for the Volscians and another Volscian man meet on a highway between Rome and Antium. The Roman discloses the news of Coriolanus' banishment, and both agree that Aufidius certainly has an ample chance for taking revenge against the Rome. At the same time, Coriolanus appears at the city of Antium and pleads to be allowed to meet Aufidius. Only after meeting his arch rival that he reveals his real identity, and informs him of his exile from Rome. He offers to aid Aufidius and Volscians in their next war against Rome. Aufidius is overjoyed at the appearance of Coriolanus and his offer to march against Rome under his leadership. He embraces his once enemy affectionately and offers him a respectful position in the Volscian army. He tells Coriolanus that they will soon get an exact time and place to revenge Romans for exiling him.

Back at Rome, things pass on normally and the tribunes tell Menenius that the city is thriving better without Coriolanus. A messenger rushes in just at this moment and delivers the news that Volscians are marching against Rome led by Aufidius. Bringing in even worse message, another messenger tells them that Coriolanus has joined hands with Aufidius and is going to clash against Rome along with the Volscian armies. Cominius and Menenius blame Brutus and Sicinius for this war which will certainly prove to be catastrophic. Though the two tribunes protest against the charge, the Plebeians are visibly panicked and now state that they were wrong to have banished Coriolanus. The tribunes rush to the capital in order to prevent any danger to their own position.

Meanwhile, Aufidius thinks that he has committed a blunder by admitting Coriolanus into his army, for his soldiers now respect him more than his Volscian master. He plots a scheme to get rid Coriolanus for ever after capturing Rome. He is sure that Rome will certainly fall this time

because of the valour of its exiled warrior, and plans to finish him off after the war is over. Aufidius and Coriolanus arrive at the border of Rome and camp there just outside the city.

## Act V

The tragic fall of Coriolanus is steadily accomplished in this act. Cominius recounts his experience of pleading mercy for the city to its exiled general, and tells the tribunes that Coriolanus is immovable. Coriolanus has turned down his pleadings and has reassured his revenge against Romans, even if some of his friends and noblemen ought to perish. Then the tribunes urge Menenius to plead Coriolanus and use his tongue at the service of saving Rome from destruction. But he is also sent back with the same reply, this time with the humiliating mockeries of Volscian guards. Soon after Aufidius appreciates Coriolanus for his firmness in turning away his close friends and the latter vows to admit no emissary from Rome., Volumnia approaches him along with his wife and his son young Martius. Volumnia kneels down and pleads her son to make peace with Rome. Though Coriolanus shunts away, he is already won by the pleadings of his mother and son. As he makes peace with Romans and prepares to return to Antium,, Aufidius plots to use this to finish off his rival.

In Rome, a messenger announces the news of Coriolanus' peace treaty with Rome to grieving Menenius and others, and all hail Volumnia as the savior of Rome. In Antium, Aufidius plans to trigger the anger of people against Coriolanus through his conspirators, even as people of the city give him a hero's welcome. Aufidius denounces Coriolanus of treachery against the Volscians as he yielded to the appeal of Roman women. As predicted by Aufidius, Coriolanus loses his temper and starts accusing back his Volscian rival and his men. One of Aufidius loyalists stabs him to death in the scuffle that follows. The Senate of Antium hail him as an extraordinary hero and give him an honourable burial. Moved by the strength and valour of his rival, Aufidius also joins to carry his corpse for a heroic funeral after declaring that his rage is gone and he is struck with sorrow.

## **Thematic Analysis**

Struggle for power can be found as the most crucial theme present all throughout the play. The monarchical rule is just over in Rome, and Coriolanus himself has played a vital role in removing the last king Tarquin from power. Rome is renovating itself to become a republic in which the aristocrats with unbridled pride have no place. Coriolanus does not transform

himself to accept the new reality of republican Rome. It is an irony that he is exiled by the very political system that he established. The Plebeians obviously struggle to find their place in the newly found political system, and they succeed partially in their attempt. They are given five representatives to advocate for their welfare in the Senate. But the Patrician class gives this representation not out of concern, only as a negotiating strategy.

Coriolanus has no political wisdom to comprehend the need for compromising with the opposite forces, and this lack of wisdom pushes him fast towards his doom. He refuses to recognize the power of others within the socio-political structure of Rome; he in fact considers it as a mark of weakness for the ruling class to give in to the demands of the lower classes. It becomes inevitable that he should be exiled from Rome. In the Volscian army too, Coriolanus' superior attitude and the power he holds over the soldiers invite murder plotting against him. Through presenting this power conflict, Shakespeare poses the question how power should be distributed and in what proportion, the same questions pestering human mind for centuries. Language and pretention are also stressed as determining factors for acquiring power. Political engagement is stressed as an essential requirement for capturing and retaining power.

Familial bondage is another theme dealt with in the play. In *Coriolanus*, the familial love of Coriolanus is shown as his weakness that is responsible for his lack of political wisdom and humility. Even though Volumnia takes pride of the fact that she has raised Coriolanus as a great warrior of unrivaled bravery, her too much broodings over his wounds and scars as well as her suggest that she has just brought him up as a killing-machine lacking human compassion and respect for others. She also pleads to show mercy for Rome, and convinces him that both Romans and Volscians will hail him as their hero if he makes peace with Rome. In fact it is Volumnia who is welcomed with the tributes of being Rome's savior, whereas her son gets killed for consenting to her pleading. Menenius' analogy of father son relationship for Patrician-Plebeian hierarchy is notable for its familial touch.

### **Critical analysis of the play**

*Coriolanus is overtly political in its subject matter and themes. It presents a man who is absolutely great in warfare, truly honest in his dealings, but miserably lacking in politics, frustratingly proud in his treatment of others and too adamant to accept reality. The patrician versus Plebeian conflict is represented in its raw, and Coriolanus represents the former class*

in its monarchical face. The themes and political content of this play have been presented in a well-structured manner. But the plot and characters lack the metaphysical and psychological depth which make other Shakespearian tragedies appealing. Though the characters are loaded with emotion and veracity, they lack the multidimensional vigour and complexity which make the characters of Shakespeare's great tragedies distinct. The mob as a group is also presented as a character in this play. Though the mob is shown to be vulnerable to political exploits and too senseless to decide anything on its own, it is not as mindless as in *Julius Caesar*.

Though the lower class people are shown to be rude and violent, they do not take up arms against their Patrician masters without a reason. As one of them puts it in the opening scene, they get ready for a riot against the ruling class not out of thirst for revenge, but only in need of bread for their hunger. While Menenius or Brutus are able to capture the inevitability of dealing with the mob in a seemingly fair manner, Coriolanus greets them with nothing but heap of curses. This bull-headed pride may serve his purpose on the battle field, but such an attitude and explicit statements of provocative nature prove to be fatally dangerous in the case of Coriolanus.

## **4.2 Julius Caesar**

### **Background**

Rome had grown in terms of geographical boundary, economic prosperity and military power during the time of Julius Caesar. He was likely to become the first absolute ruler of the Roman Empire, which happened to be the source of worry for a group of citizens who predicted him to act like a monarch with dictatorial power. They conspired to murder Julius Caesar for the Roman Empire to remain a republic. But their act of killing Caesar only resulted in a more chaotic situation as a worse civil war erupted between the conspirators and supporters of Caesar.

Roman Empire was unimaginably large, its territories stretching from North Africa to Britain and Egypt to Persia. So large were the problems and conflicts which posed a constant threat to the very existence of this great empire. Increasing conflicts between the citizens and lower classes, power struggles between the military generals and Senators, and other problems posed by the natural calamities and vastness of the empire rattled Rome time and again. Shakespeare dramatizes the murder of Julius Caesar and subsequent revenge of the conspirators in a most appealing manner.

The play *Julius Caesar* was first performed in 1599. This was the first play performed in the Globe Theatre which was built to accommodate more audience turning up for Shakespeare's plays. The first written script of the play is not available, and so it is not possible to guess the time when it was first written. First complete edition of the play is available only in the 1623 folio edition of Shakespeare's plays.

As the case with other Roman plays, Shakespeare has extracted the historical details and biographical sketches for this play from Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* which was written probably in the first BCE and translated into English by Thomas North in 1579. The play is set in the year 44 BCE and actions are located in the city of Rome and its surrounding areas. Though the plot seems to be dealing with an assassination and revenge, the events are concerned with the political destiny of Roman Empire.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

When the play opens, Flavius and Murellus, who are tribunes or representatives of the common people, find a group of mob wandering the streets of Rome. They have gathered here to watch the victory parade of Julius Caesar. Caesar marches in celebration with his military and supporters. The important figures accompanying Caesar include Brutus, Mark Antony and Cassius. A soothsayer warns Caesar to be aware of the Ides (middle) of March. But Caesar ignores the warning and precedes with his celebrations.

Cassius and Brutus, who are close aids of Caesar and friends with each other, converse, during which Cassius persuades the other to believe that Caesar is growing ambitious and authoritative. Both express fear that electing Caesar to become the king will overturn the republic system. Cassius recounts Caesar's weaknesses, but accepts that people consider him like the God. Cassius further warns that Caesar will enforce a tyrannical rule if elected to become the absolute ruler of Rome. As Brutus is brooding over Cassius' words, Caesar returns and remarks to Antony that he suspects Cassius of plotting against him. Then Casca reports to Brutus and Cassius that Antony offered the crown thrice to Caesar during the Parade amidst cheerful uproar of the mob, but he refused it all the time. He further reports that Caesar fell on the ground and had seizure before the crowd, which did not affect his heroic image among the mob.

While Brutus is deeply disturbed by the words of Cassius that night, Cassius plots to involve Brutus in a conspiracy against Caesar. He places many forged letters at Brutus' home seemingly written by the Roman citizens. As Brutus reads the letters, he assumes that people are distressed over the possibility of Caesar becoming a tyrant and tarnishing the republic setup of the empire. As a devoted republican, Brutus wants to save Rome, and Cassius convinces him to murder Caesar along with other conspirators. The conspirators decide to leave Antony and take out Caesar to the Senate and murder him there.

Caesar precedes to the Senate amidst his wife Calpurnia's fears of her bad dreams about Caesar coming true. She has just dreamt of blood gushing from Caesar's statue and men with their hands bathed in blood. Even though he agrees to stay at home for comforting his wife, a conspirator named Decius convinces Caesar and takes him to the Senate. The soothsayer tries again in vain to meet Caesar and warn him of approaching danger. A Roman citizen also hands him a letter warning of a conspiracy against him. But he chooses to neglect all these warnings and enters the Senate, where the conspirators fall at his feet and then encircle to stab him one-by-one. Caesar gives up his resistance on noticing Brutus along with the murderers and dies at once.

Antony returns and pretends to be allying with the conspirators. When he insists Brutus and other conspirators to disclose their reason for murdering Caesar, Brutus tells him that they will state the reasons apparently during Caesar' funeral. He also allows Antony to deliver a speech on that occasion, even though Cassius is suspicious of Antony's motives. Antony privately avows to avenge Caesar's murder. Brutus delivers an elaborate talk at the forum in which he states that he loved Rome more though he loved Caesar, and hence murdered him to protect the empire.

Amidst cheering of the crowd, Antony delivers a more powerful and sarcastic oration. He tells that Caesar brought wealth and glory to Rome for which he has been killed. He then reads the will of Caesar in which he has allotted a share of his money to every citizen and has made his private garden open to public use. Upon realizing the noble deeds of Caesar, the mob chase Brutus, Cassius and other conspirators away. Meanwhile Octavius, Lepidus and Antony form a three person coalition to fight out the conspirators who are raising armies outside the city.

At the camp of conspirators, Brutus is struck with grief as his wife Portia has killed herself in his absence. He and Cassius quarrel over several matters and then reconcile. Caesar's ghost appears to Brutus that night and warns him to meet again in the battle field. The war is begun after the generals exchange words of insult against each other. Cassius's armies flee unable to withstand the attack, upon which he sends one of his men to find out the situation in rest of his side. From a distance, Cassius' man notices Titinius surrounded by his cheering troops, but mistakes him to be encircled by the enemies. On getting the mistaken information of his best friend Titinius' plight, Cassius asks his men to kill him, and he dies saying that Caesar has been avenged. Brutus learns of the death of Cassius and Titinius, and his army loses to the Romans again. He also dies by impaling upon his sword and dies saying that Caesar can now rest in peace. Octavius and Antony lament for the death of Brutus, and he is given an honorable burial fitting to his noble intensions.

### **Analysis of Major Characters**

#### **Brutus**

Though Shakespeare has named the play after Julius Caesar, it is more a tragedy of Brutus than that of Caesar. Brutus is a committed republican and a true Roman devoted to the welfare of his country. He loves Caesar and considers him as his close friend. But when he has to choose between his personal allegiance to Caesar and public responsibility to the empire of Rome, he firmly decides to prioritize latter. He is inflexible and remains always mindful of his honour. These qualities prevent him from suspecting the validity of the conspirators' real motive.

The adversaries of Caesar easily trap him to believe that Rome is in a dangerous condition by the prospect of Caesar becoming the ultimate ruler. Other conspirators have villainous motives to assassinate Caesar, whereas he is the only person who acts out of his conviction to preserve the republican mode of governance in Rome. Antony rightly remarks at the end that he is the noblest of all the Romans. Being a historical play, *Julius Caesar* hardly has complex characters as in the great tragedies. But Brutus stands out to be the most complex character of the play, whose internal conflicts and emotional sufferings make him a tragic figure at the end. He reveals his tarnished mind in the soliloquies which offer an insight into his virtues as well as follies.

As with Macbeth, Brutus also questions the correctness of his act of killing Caesar. While he seeks to promote the republic system, but fails in this attempt also. He is too conscious of his

image and honour to understand the reality. His naïve sense of idealism also proves to be fatal in many occasions. He allows Antony to address the people during Caesar's funeral only out of this idealism. He quarrels with Cassius unnecessarily against his fund raising technique because of his self-righteous sense of image.

### **Julius Caesar**

Caesar is a man of power and authority, in many ways proving the charges of his conspirators to be correct. He has refused to accept the crown thrice. Though not so ambitious or tyrannical as claimed by the conspirators, he relishes the thought of getting crowned, and hence precedes to the Senate even after repeated pleadings of Calpurnia to stay at home. Though he rationalizes his decision to ignore the warnings of the soothsayer and letter of a citizen in personal versus public concern, he privately nurtures the dream of becoming the king of Roman Empire. He is the most valiant of all the generals Rome has ever seen. He has just won over the sons of his rival general Pompey and marches with his army into the capital for a victory parade. He is ambitious of establishing a permanent place for himself in the Roman history. With Octavius becoming Octavius Caesar, his dream comes true, but only after his death. He attains more glory and fame after getting murdered by the conspirators, perhaps far more than what he would have really achieved had he lived. Though Caesar does not appear in the second half of the play except for the appearance of his ghost, the entire play revolves around him.

### **Antony**

Antony is a perfect politician and a skillful orator who tailors his words to obtain people's support at the needed moment. Caesar is portrayed as a noblest man only due to the image created by Antony after his death, while we have to but suspect Caesar's real nature. Antony is gifted with all the virtuous qualities which Brutus lacks. While Brutus is unnecessarily over-conscious of his image and respect to virtue, Antony is practical enough to comprehend the real situation and act accordingly.

It is this contrasting quality between the both which makes Antony to pretend as if siding with the conspirators and makes Brutus to thoughtlessly permit him to address the people from the platform. He is the only character loaded with emotion and a sense of political delicacy. While Caesar is, Brutus and Octavius are inflexible and out of reality most of the time and consider being so as an essential ingredient of Roman virtue, Antony is not bothered by this self-righteousness and hence proves to be the game-changer in the play.

### **Cassius**

Cassius is an opportunist who conspires against Caesar and makes Brutus to fall into his trap through various manipulations. However, he completely lacks any political will or integrity. His motive of conspiracy against Caesar seems to be nothing more than an action out of his jealousy at the fame and glory he has achieved. He does not possess any of the virtues or commitment Brutus is bestowed with. He can be considered as the chief villain of the play. Even though he is a talented Roman general and a long-time friend of Caesar, he fails to live up to his noble position and gets aptly punished at the end.

### **Octavius**

Octavius is the adopted son of Julius Caesar. He has also been appointed as the successor to Caesar. Like his father, Octavius takes full control of the happenings. He promptly arrives after the assassination of Caesar and forms a three person alliance with Antony and Lepidus to revenge his father's murder. He also firmly states that he will decide the time and place for attacking the conspirators, and refuses to abide by the advice of Antony. He also shows the due respect deserved by Brutus, and orders for a heroic burial. While Antony is too emotional to act with political sensibility and military bravos, Octavius is filled with the necessary qualities that would make a superior commander like Julius Caesar.

### **Casca**

Casca is one of the conspirators who murder Caesar. He is opposed to Caesar raising to power and glory. He reports the incidents which take place during the victory parade of Caesar, and he tells Brutus and Cassius that Caesar refused to take the crown thrice even when Antony insisted him. But Casca believes that this is also a scheme of Caesar to pretend before people as if he has no intension of taking the crown or becoming the ruler.

### **Calpurnia**

Calpurnia is the devoted wife of Julius Caesar who strenuously persuades her husband to stay at home and not to proceed to the Senate. She believes that the bad omens which appeared in her dream the previous night. Caesar does not adhere to her advice and that costs his very life.

## **Portia**

Portia is a loving and loyal wife of Brutus. Brutus considers her as his confidant. But Brutus this time hides his conspiracy to murder Caesar, and that creates much distress to Portia. She predicts something dangerous to her husband. She kills herself on knowing that Octavius and Antony are too powerful to be defeated by Brutus.

## **Lepidus**

Lepidus is the third person in coalition with Octavius and Antony against the conspirators. He is also an able-warrior. Antony does not believe in his loyalty, but Octavius trusts him well till the end.

## **Critical Summary**

### **Act I**

Flavius, Marullus, and a few Plebeian masses are engaged in a humorous wordplay when the play opens. The people have abandoned their work and are going to see Julius Caesar who is going to conduct a victory parade for winning over his rival general Pompey. The two tribunes who represent the Plebeians despise Caesar and scorn the masses for their frivolousness, however people seem to like Caesar strongly. As the scene moves to Caesar's parade, he is seen at the center of a large gathering, and he is in conversation with Mark Antony over the superstitious omens he happened to witness. He is encountered by a soothsayer very soon, and he warns Caesar to beware of the Ides of March.

Though Caesar believes in superstitions and forces of nature, he conducts himself as if absolutely unmoved by the soothsayer's warnings. Even as the people cheerfully insist him to be the emperor and Antony offers the crown for three times, Caesar refuses the offer. In the midst of these events, Cassius starts convincing Brutus that Caesar is growing ambitious and tyrannical, and that there is no other option left to them but to kill him in order to save Rome. Brutus, as a Roman most devoted to his country's interest and always particular about doing only the right thing, assures to show his allegiance to Rome if that is true, even though Caesar is his loving friend. Rome is shaken by a series of bad omens on that evening. Wild weather and falling of fire from the sky frighten everyone alike in the city. But Cassius contends that only evil men like Caesar must be frightened of these natural warnings, not honest people like them. He continues with his plotting for Caesar's murder.

## Act II

The strange weather continues to rattle the city and plans for Caesar's murder also proceed in full swing. Brutus comes home and contemplates over Cassius' suggestion of parting with Caesar as he is becoming too proud to be controlled by the will of citizens. Just then he notices some letters written to him by the citizens expressing their fear of Rome being thrown to the rule of a tyrannical monarchy very soon. Those letters urge him to stop this havoc from destroying the Roman Empire. Brutus is now almost convinced of Cassius' plan and decides to act in the best interest of the country. The conspirators then arrive at his house and they together make plans for murdering Caesar. Even though Cassius insists that Antony should also be killed along with Caesar, Brutus disagrees that too much of murders will make their side weaker and firmly states that only persons responsible for Rome's downfall must be eliminated, not anyone else. They decide to kill Caesar alone and leave the rest. Then we learn that it was Cassius who forged the letters ostensibly written by the citizens in order to involve Brutus in the conspiracy.

Caesar is contemplating over the warning of the soothsayer about an approaching danger in the middle of March, and wonders if he should go out on that day. His wife Calpurnia adds to his worries by recounting the bad dreams she had on the previous night. She tells him that she saw Caesar's statue bleeding and that men appeared with their hands and swords full of blood. She also fears that the bad omens which frightened Romans on the previous night and her horrible dreams appear to foretell his death. She begs Caesar to stay at home at least to oblige her if not conceding to her fear.

Even as he decides to stay back at home Decius arrives and invokes Caesar's pride. He tells him that it is not proper for a great warrior like him to abstain from the daily business upon the words of a woman. He also tells him that Calpurnia's dreams do not indicate any danger to him, rather indicate that he will save Rome from the forthcoming dangers. Not willing to appear weak and frightened, Caesar precedes to the Senate despite the repeated pleas of Calpurnia. Artemidorus, a loyalist of Caesar and a citizen, waits on Caesar's way to the Senate so that he can hand over a letter warning him of the conspiracy.

## Act III

Even though Artemidorus succeeds in handing a note to Caesar about the conspiracy, the latter refrains from reading it, saying that his personal concerns are only next to Rome's interest. He

is also approached by the soothsayer who is desperate to warn him of the awaiting danger, but Caesar again neglects him. In the Senate, all the conspirators greet Caesar and fall at his feet one-by-one. They all then encircle him and stab him with their swords.

Caesar resists, but ceases from fighting back as soon as he sees Brutus as one among the conspirators stabbing him, famously asking “You to Brutus??” Brutus prevents the conspirators from killing Caesar’s supporters and friends, and all are glad that their act will be remembered and celebrated for ever by the Romans. Antony, who has been sent away on a false pretext, comes to the Senate and pretends to be sharing the conspirators’ rationales over the murder of Caesar. He shakes hands with them, thereby marking each one in the group. Then he asks for a proper explanation for killing Caesar. Brutus assures him to disclose his reasons for killing Caesar from a common platform during his funeral, and also permits Antony to address the people on the same occasion. But Cassius is dreadful of Antony being allowed to talk to the people, for he suspects some plans behind Antony’s acts.

During Caesar’s funeral, Brutus delivers a speech from a raised platform as Cassius leaves to address another section of the crowd. He tells the people that he even though he loved Caesar much, he loved Rome more than anything else, and that was the reason why he killed Caesar. He points out that Caesar trying to usurp power and become a tyrant ruler with ultimate authority. After Brutus completes his talk and goes on leaving Antony to address from the platform, Antony then begins his talk which is considered to be one of the masterpieces from Shakespeare’s pen.

He first praises Caesar and admires his qualities, and repeatedly says as a refrain that Brutus is noble and Caesar is bad. He points out that Brutus and others are right in killing Caesar even though he has brought much fame and glory to the Roman Empire through his victories. He also says that he will not read out the will of Caesar, for that will upset them and spoil their mood. But people press Antony to read it out at once, to which Antony concedes. He first shows the wounds in Caesar’s body and then reads his will in which Caesar has given a share of his money to every citizen and has pronounced his private garden as a public property of the people. The mob becomes too impatient to bear Caesar’s killing anymore. The mob goes in search of the conspirators and rampage the streets of Rome, even killing a man with one of the conspirators’ name. Brutus, Cassius and other conspirators flee from Rome.

#### Act IV

Octavius, who is the adapted heir of Caesar, is conveyed the news of Caesar's assassination and asked to come to Rome by Antony, upon which he rushes to the city. He makes a three person coalition with Antony and Lepidus, and all take an oath to revenge for Caesar's death by punishing the conspirators. Antony and Octavius methodically list out the names of conspirators to be killed, and they even pick out the family members of the conspirators to be executed. Preparations for the war begin on both sides, and each is mobilizing armies and making plans for the attack. In the camp of conspirators, Brutus and Cassius indulge in a long and fierce argument about one of Cassius' men taking bribe for raising funds. Brutus refuses to pardon him and Cassius reprimands his behavior. After throwing insults at each other, they reconcile and admit that they have been out of mind for some time. Adding to his miseries, Brutus gets the news that his wife Portia has committed suicide by swallowing hot coal as she is distressed over the might Antony and Octavius have achieved in Rome against her husband. Left alone, Caesar's ghost appears and tells him that he will meet Brutus again in Philippi.

#### Act V

The war becomes inevitable as generals of both armies, Brutus, Cassius, Antony and Octavius, indulge in a verbal encounter and each side accuses each other for the mishaps that have occurred. Brutus and Cassius also meet in private afterwards and part with each other bidding farewell. As the war begins, Brutus seems defeated and the news is conveyed to Cassius. Cassius himself is made to retreat as his armies flee fearing for their lives and unable to withstand the Roman army. Then Cassius sends his aid Pindarus to find out how Titinius is thriving.

On seeing Titinius surrounded by his troops from at a distance, Pindarus concludes that Titinius is caught among the enemies and is about to be killed. Cassius orders his men to take away his life thinking that his best friend Titinius is defeated. Titinius comes then and he also kills himself on seeing Cassius dead. Brutus is given the news of Cassius' death which he takes with a heavy heart. The army of Brutus is also defeated and his doom now appears inevitable. Brutus asks his men to hold his sword and he impales upon it to part with his life, saying that Caesar can now rest in peace as his death has been avenged completely.

The Roman army marches in led by Antony and Octavius, who mourn for the death of Brutus. Antony declares him as the noblest of all the Romans, and Octavius orders for his honourable

burial. All accept Antony's words that Brutus was the only conspirator who acted out of Rome's larger interest.

### **Thematic Analysis**

A major theme undercurrent all throughout the play is the conflicting relationship between fate and freewill. Cassius strongly believes that failings and fallings of men are not because of their fate, but only because of their own passivity and cowardly attitude. He tells Brutus that taking the victory and glory attained by Caesar as the working of some stars is just a pretext for others to remain submissive and passive. He firmly asserts that men can become the masters of their fate if they strive to success. But Shakespeare does not appear to be advocating a definitive answer or side in this fate versus freewill dichotomy, he rather suggests a more delicate coexistence of both in the human world. Caesar perhaps realises this fact than anyone else. He understands that certain happenings in the human life cannot be controlled by individual efforts.

It is perhaps because of this realisation that he abstains from reading the note of warning against the conspiracy. He also ignores the warnings of the soothsayer probably for the same reason, that he cannot stop or control what is up to befall upon him. But he makes use of his freewill to remain majestic and honourable even while dying. Brutus and Caesar also realise that to fear of death while living is like the paralysis of death itself.

Another theme of the play is the conflict between private life and public life of characters. It was considered to be an essential virtue of a Roman nobleman to regard the public interest and common concerns of the country superior to his personal wills and emotions. But an outright lack of concern for the private life seems to be leading the characters into their tragic destiny. As Caesar remarks about Cassius, he is bereft of any personal value or self-honour. Caesar predicts that Cassius will go to any extent beyond his honour and image.

Cassius proves to be so by taking forward his schemes of conspiracy without any valid justification. Brutus is on the other hand afflicted with too much of political concern. He thinks that it is his primary duty to preserve the republican system and values of Rome. He prepares to sacrifice his personal relationship with Caesar as well as his wife Portia in order to

accomplish his public role. But he loses both of them because of his own follies. The failure in private life makes the tragic end of Brutus inevitable.

Same is true of Caesar too, who considers his private concerns only secondary to his public duties. He dismisses the warning note of Artemidorus only on this excuse and pays his own life as the price for this fault. Misinterpretations, miscommunications and misreading also constitute to become significant themes in the play. Much of the play's actions are manipulated by miscommunication and misunderstanding. Wilful misinterpretations of the bad omens on the night preceding Caesar's assassination by Cassius and Decius are examples of manipulations in this kind. The death of Cassius is a serious instance of miscommunication. Antony is able to read the mood and sensibilities of the common masses while Brutus fails to comprehend the real intension of Antony. The power of Rhetoric is also stressed in this play, which is used to carry out the acts of offence and revenge effectively. The ultimate power of a politician was considered to be his skill in making things happen through words. The convincing conversations of Cassius and appealing addresses of Brutus and Antony form the core events resulting in the play's tragic end.

### **4.3 Antony and Cleopatra**

#### **Background**

As Shakespeare's other four tragedies got him enough appreciation and reception among the scholars and audience down the periods, the Play *Antony and Cleopatra* is conceived to be the fifth and the last great tragedies of Shakespeare, for it was written after the significant tragic play *Macbeth*. As his other Roman plays, this play is also set in Roman landscape to make the audience feel that they are exposed to the geographical set up of Roman Empire. By doing so, Shakespeare has tried to introduce the geographical and cultural backdrop of Roman landscape.

The background of the play is well-constructed history of the characters like Octavius Caesar, Marc Antony, and Cleopatra. In fact, the play revolves around these three main characters to give the picture of the revered Roman Empire. The primary source of this play was derived by Shakespeare from the life of Marcus Antonius in Plutarch's *lives of the noble Grecians and Romans* that was translated into English by Sir Thomas North in 1579. Since North's language was quite rich, Shakespeare included some excerpts directly into his play without changing

anything. In terms of plot, it follows North's history except the characters like Enobarbus and Cleopatra's attendants, which are largely Shakespearian creations.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the action of the play takes place two years after Shakespeare's famous play about Roman Empire *Julius Caesar*. Seen in its historical context, the action of Antony and Cleopatra takes place in the span of ten years. In the play however, the story is condensed to fit the needs of the stage and to keep up with the performance timing. The character Antony is much older than he was in *Julius Caesar*, and his political nature seems to be declining slowly. The character Octavius Caesar is only a minor one in *Julius Caesar*, yet in this play he is shown as a courageous man who rises to become the first Roman Emperor. It is said that most of the battles and machinations that are portrayed in the play are historically accurate.

### **Analysis of the Plot**

The protagonist and one of the three rulers of Roman empire, Marc Antony in the beginning of the play idly spends his time in Egypt and has an affair with the country's most beautiful queen Cleopatra. He decides to leave Egypt after getting the message that his wife Fulvia has died and Pompey is raging a war against the triumvirate. In the absence of Antony, his other two rulers Octavius Caesar and Lepidus are afraid of Pompey's development in occupying the Roman Empire. Caesar condemns Antony for his decadent life in Egypt, ignoring his obligation as a statesman and the military officer. As the quarrel between Antony and Caesar continues ever since Antony's returns, Lepidus tries to make them understand the advantage of fighting together against Pompey's army. In order to have a strong alliance to defeat Pompey's army, Caesar decides to get his sister Octavia married to Antony, thinking that the marriage would make Antony not to go anywhere.

Nevertheless, Antony's closest friend Enobarbus foresees to Caesar's men that despite the marriage with Octavia, Antony would certainly go to Cleopatra. When hearing the message that Antony is going to marry Octavia, Cleopatra gets jealous and becomes highly enraged. It is only after receiving the message that Octavia is plain and not impressive, she becomes confident that Antony will surely come to her. The triumvirs meet Pompey to settle dispute without going to battle. Pompey agrees to have peace in exchange for rule over Sicily and

Sardinia. As the triumvirs agree to handover the two places, the four men sit in that evening to celebrate the truce by drinking wine.

When Pompey's one of the soldiers discloses the plot of murdering the triumvirs to get the Roman Empire, Pompey immediately dismisses his plan and tells him that it is against his honour to indulge in such a cowardly act. At this juncture, Antony gets the news that a general appointed at his service has captured the country of Parthia. As Antony's presence is expected in Athens, the capital city of Parthia, he departs Rome to Athens with his newly married wife Octavia. Caesar breaks the peace treaty with Pompey and indulges in a war against him. He uses the army of Lepidus to attack Pompey. Pompey is defeated by Octavius completely with the help of Lepidus' army. But he accuses Lepidus of treason and confiscates all his property. Lepidus is also imprisoned by Octavius.

Antony is enraged on hearing the news of Octavius' actions against Pompey and Lepidus, and gets furious on getting the information that Caesar is speaking out against him in public. Octavia is intensely distressed over the raising conflict between her brother and husband. She pleads to Antony to maintain a peaceful relationship with her brother Octavius Caesar. She mourns that she will be forced to painfully divide her affection between them in case of a conflict. Antony calculates that Octavia can calm down the situation and make his relationship with her brother smoother if she goes to Rome on a peace mission. But he has a more intrinsic purpose in sending his new wife to Rome. He rushes to Egypt and surrenders again to the charming beauty of Cleopatra. He raises a large army against Caesar at Egypt and plans to put an end to his misdeeds. Caesar is in turn enraged over the way Antony has treated his sister Octavia and sent her to Rome all alone.

Caesar commands his army and navy to Egypt against Antony and his aid Cleopatra. Antony decides to take on Caesar's army on the sea where the Roman military is more powerful. Even as others suggest him not risk fighting Caesar's navy first, Antony precedes as per his plans and gets defeated. Even worse, Antony allows Cleopatra to take charge of one of his war ships without listening to the protesting voice of Enobarbus. Antony's forces get defeated obviously, and he is forced to retreat having lost many ships and a large amount of his force. He follows Cleopatra with his ship, and he follows her as she quickly retreats, upon which the rest of his forces are left in chaos and helplessness.

Antony condemns Cleopatra for having treaded him deep into defeat through her foolish act of a cowardly retreat. But Cleopatra begs for forgiveness in her customary way in which she has been controlling this great Roman general from the beginning, to which he readily melts and reconciles with her very soon. Their downfall having become apparent, Antony and Cleopatra send their men to request some mercy to their conqueror Caesar. Cleopatra pleads for her right to pass on her kingdom to the heir of her choice, whereas Antony requests to be allowed to live in Egypt with Cleopatra.

Caesar promises Cleopatra to consider her plea and deliver a fair justice in her favour, only if she betrays her Roman lover and sends him back to his country. Antony's request is apparently turned down. Cleopatra is brooding over the offer of Caesar when Antony enters at Cleopatra's chamber, and becomes furious upon her thoughts over betraying him for the fortune of her country. He curses her for being unfaithful. Perhaps unable to whip Cleopatra, he orders the innocent messenger to be whipped. Antony forgives her very soon as usual, and Enobarbus, a close aide and confidant of Antony, realises that his master is all finished and there is no chance of him recuperating from the setbacks until Cleopatra holds complete control over him. He sees no purpose in staying with his master any longer, and shifts his allegiance to Caesar.

War ensues on the land between Antony and Caesar's armies, and Antony achieves a surprising victory over Caesar's forces. Then Antony learns that his friend Enobarbus has deserted him to join Caesar's camp, and laments for his own weaknesses which have forced a loyal and honourable man of Enobarbus' kind to become corrupt and treacherous. He sends all the possessions of Enobarbus to Caesar's camp to be handed over to him at once, and returns to the Egyptian queen in order to celebrate his victory on that day. But Enobarbus is traumatised by his guilt of leaving Antony, and he is unable to bear the burden of his guilt feeling when he learns of his desolate master's generosity in sending his belongings. He commits suicide soon after in Caesar's camp.

Knowing that it is rather impossible to defeat Antony on the land, Caesar continues his attack on the sea and Antony confronts the Roman navy with the help of Cleopatra's forces. The Egyptian forces retreat once again, deserting Antony to struggle with his own limited resources against the mighty Roman navy. Now Antony makes his mind to punish the Egyptian queen for her apparent act of treachery. Realising very well that Antony will not forgive her this time,

Cleopatra closes up herself in her monument and makes him believe that she has committed suicide.

Antony is struck with grief and the heap of despair laden upon him by the assumed death of Cleopatra makes him commit suicide. He orders his loyal servant to kill him without further questioning, but the servant kills himself. Then Antony falls on his own sword and gets fatally injured. As he does not die immediately, he is taken to Cleopatra's monument where the two lovers meet for the last time and reunite for a while before Antony dies. Caesar imprisons Cleopatra and secretly decides to parade her to Rome where he intends to display her as a token of his military might. Cleopatra comes to know of his plan, and decides to end her life rather becoming a prisoner in Rome. She makes several poisonous snakes bite her and dies. After briefly mourning for her death, Caesar orders her to be buried beside Antony.

### **Analysis of Major Characters**

#### **Mark Antony**

Having seen Antony at his best in Julius Caesar, One cannot help feeling dismayed over the tragic end of this clever politician and great warrior. He has been a fierce warrior and a powerful general of Rome to whom the entire Roman Empire was obedient. He successfully revenged the assassination of Julius Caesar by Cassius and Brutus, and was so dynamic to persuade all the Romans against the conspirators. But that heroic warrior and clever-tongued politician is gone, and Antony is a prisoner of Cleopatra's love and beauty all throughout this play. He is one of the triumvirates who rules the vast empire of Rome along with Octavius Caesar and Lepidus.

Antony is a complete prisoner of the Egyptian queen when the play opens, and he has deteriorated to such madness in his love that he will not sacrifice Cleopatra even for the entire empire of Rome. He has obviously neglected all his military and political duties as a triumvirate ruling the Roman Empire, and has surrendered to the whims and fancies of the Egyptian queen. Cleopatra's control over Antony is vivid from the very beginning when he commands to act according to her own wishes through her manipulations. Antony is presented more often than not as a helpless man, who is unable to resist the charming spell of Cleopatra's hold upon him. His political as well as personal allegiance is split between the western world of Rome and the eastern territory of Egypt, especially to its queen. But when it comes to choosing either of these two worlds, he apparently chooses the latter.

Antony is in that sense a man of inner conflict and he is torn between his political commitments and pleasures of love. He is able to reason out the need to reaffirm his valour and strength in Roman Empire in order to preserve his fame and glory which have made him a celebrated Roman hero. But he is unable to carry out his will after he has arrived at Egypt. Originally sent to bring Cleopatra and Egypt under the complete control of Roman Empire, he allows himself to be controlled by the queen of Egypt, even in his political decisions. Thus the theme of conflict between reason and passion gains much importance in the characterisation of Antony.

When the political duties of Rome press for his presence there, he begs for Cleopatra's permission to leave Egypt, and effectively stopped from going to his country many times before he succeeds. His wife's death somewhat brings him to his self-conscious mind, and he realises that he has lost himself in his unbridled love for Cleopatra. He sees his wife's death and declines of his power as a result of being idle in the idyll of Cleopatra's company.. His obligations to the State of Rome are attended only when the situation goes dangerously out of control, but he sticks to his passionate love in Alexandria (capital of Egypt) for ever. Even though he returns to Rome and makes peace with Octavius Caesar after the death of his wife and invasion of Pompey, there is a hastiness in all his action at Rome, the hastiness to complete his duties as soon as possible and return to the company of Cleopatra.

He however considers himself primarily as a Roman hero who succeeded to save the empire from treachery and established a powerful coalition of triumvirates to rule it. He often recalls his valiant deeds in battles and skilful strategies in politics. On witnessing his absolute fall as a politician and losses as a general, his recollections of the past only appear ironical and indications to the extent of his ruin. However, he is not devoid of his political wisdom and military bravos, which are exhibited when he is away from the company of Cleopatra. He convinces Caesar and makes peace with him soon after arriving at Rome, and also marries Octavia in order to avoid further conflicts with the mightiest of Roman generals. His political calculations however lack the vigour and precision of his early days when he could manage the affairs of Rome with ease. He is also majestic and honourable in his conduct even at the verge of his defeat and complete downfall. He handovers the properties of his friend even when he deserts him and moves on to his enemy's camp. He is in a way aware of his follies than anyone else, but stands helpless to prevent it his tragic end.

## **Cleopatra**

Considered as one of the most beautiful and enchanting women of human history, Cleopatra has attracted much historical, artistic and scholarly attention down the ages. Shakespeare's characterisation of this most charming Egyptian queen is indeed humanistic and emotionally loaded. The Bard also absolves her, though only to certain extent, from the charge of playing a conspiracy against Mark Antony. She has in fact been a well-known strumpet, and has seduced even the steadfast man Julius Caesar. Her charming company works like a magical spell upon Antony, who declares "Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch / Of the ranged empire fall," but nothing will affect him when he is in the company of Cleopatra. She becomes responsible for the defeat of Antony in all realms. Her indulgence in the war with Antony and her quick retreat are only visible signs of her role in Antony's failure as a ruler of Rome. However, her love for Antony is true and unshaken till the end, unlike her seduction and desertion of other kings. She remains faithful to him till her death in spite of her primary responsibility in their defeat against the Roman troops. Even though her commitment to Antony is misplaced in certain crucial instances, she is apparently distressed by Antony's death, and does not want to live anymore or visit Rome in the absence of her devoted lover.

## **Octavius Caesar**

Octavius Caesar proves to be the man delivering Antony's tragic end. Though mightier than Antony in military bravos and more powerful in administering Rome, he lacks the essential human emotions and compassion which delimit him from becoming a hero. He turns out to be a menacing adversary against Antony. His treatment of Antony, Pompey and Cleopatra only exhibit his rigid understanding of war and politics. He is a typical war-machine of Rome who almost stands unaffected by his personal feelings. At the same time, he is the fitting man Roman Empire is in need of, for only such a ruler can protect the larger interests of Rome. Though this view emanates from our present understanding of the text and Roman history, it is pertinent to bear in mind that the qualities exhibited by Octavius were exactly the once cherished as great virtues in ancient Rome. He attacks Pompey just after he has agreed for a peace treaty and all compromises have been done. In spite of his promise to meet out a fair justice to Cleopatra, he plans to display her as an object of victory before all the Romans. He is also ruthless in his treatment of Lepidus. Octavius is largely correct in his words and actions, but too correct to become a heroic figure. But his mourning for the death of Antony and his command that the lovers ought to be buried side-by-side hint a glimpse of sentimentality in his character.

## **Thematic analysis**

The play *Antony and Cleopatra* is abundantly filled with the dichotomy between passion and reasoning. As Philo remarks to Demetrius at the very opening of the play, Antony is an abled military general, but whiles away the most crucial of years in the company of Cleopatra. His comparison of Antony's gallantry with his present stupidity sets in the theme of emotions versus rationality. The first meeting of Antony and Cleopatra in the play intensifies the seriousness of this dichotomy. They indulge in a long argument about whether their love can be expressed through words, and wonder if it is beyond the power of reasoning. By considering his love as a mental faculty transcending human apprehension, then he is certainly failing as a statesman of Rome. Back at Rome, Caesar, Senators and other Romans consider Antony as an unshaken military general and a disciplined politician, the qualities which are solely based on the virtue of reasoning. But in Alexandria, Antony's dotage and idling cause much distress to his aids and friends. Antony chooses, or made to choose, to follow the path of his passions, happily leaving aside the part of reasoning and responsibility. This choice makes the tragic end of the play inevitable. But the play does not seem to be favouring reason against passion in totality. While passion was considered a necessary evil for human beings in ancient Rome's politics and philosophy, Shakespeare seems to be having a more delicate approach. While Antony and Cleopatra, who are filled with passion, win our sympathy for their tragic end, characters like Octavius bestowed with a strong sense of reasoning do not do better either. In another sense, this dichotomy between reason and passion can be extended to the western conception of west versus east.

In geographical terms, the West has been categorised as the land of reason, and territories of the east has been characterised as being passionate, emotional, irrational, and hence inferior. This play also endorses this dichotomy, and the territory is given a characteristic value all throughout. While Antony is able to act with reason and calculation while he is in Rome, he loses all his wisdom and reasoning capabilities once he enters Alexandria. Even Octavius Caesar, who hardly displays any concern for passion and sentiment, grieves for the death of his friend Antony and concedes to the power of love at least to order the burial of lovers together. In this aspect again, Shakespeare seems to be favouring no one particular side in this conflict. While the play deals with the differences and conflicts between both the worlds as conceived in western philosophy and metaphysics, it does not offer any definitive answer to establish one sides' superiority over the other. While Antony falls with the east to the western empire or

Rome, the fall is Majestic and respectful. Though the western empire of Rome succeeds ultimately, it lacks the compassion, emotion and sentimentality which are necessary for human life.

## **Study Questions**

### **Coriolanus**

1. Comment on the characterization of Volumnia.
2. Compare the mob as presented in this play *Julius Caesar*
3. Analyse the characters Virgilia and young Martius.
4. Write an essay on the merits and follies of Coriolanus, and discuss how he fits into the category of a tragic hero.
5. Draw a character sketch of Tullus Aufidius and compare him with Coriolanus.
6. Write an essay on the depiction of Patrician-Plebeian conflict of ancient Rome as presented in the play *Coriolanus*.

### **Julius Caesar**

1. Explain the significance of the meeting between Cassius and Brutus.
2. Explain the significance of Caesar's dying words, "Et tu, Brute? Then fall, Caesar!"
3. Describe the encounter between Brutus and Caesar's ghost.
4. Comment on the significance of Antony's final speech.
5. Explain How Cassius tricks Brutus into joining the conspirators?

### **Antony and Cleopatra**

1. Draw a character sketch of Enobarbus.
2. Who is Octavia? What do you feel about her characterisation?
3. Write briefly on the character of Octavius Caesar.
4. How would you evaluate the character of Cleopatra?
5. Write an essay on how Antony meets his tragic death.
6. Write an essay on the conflict between reason and passion as presented in the play.

## UNIT V

### 5.0 Shakespearean Songs & Sonnets

#### Introduction

What would have happened to the everlasting fame and universal acclaims of Shakespeare had he not produced his theatrical works? Many Shakespearean scholars and critics argue that the Bard would still have been at the centre of English literary renaissance with the virtue of his poems. In fact, the most celebrated literary work until Shakespeare's death was his *Venus and Adonis*, one of the long poems of Shakespeare. But the repeated performance of his plays down the centuries has obviously eclipsed the much deserving reputation of his poems and sonnets. This tendency of excluding Shakespeare's non-dramatic works began with the first folio of his plays published in 1623, which hardly contained his poetic works.

However, one clever publisher by the name Jaggard had used Shakespeare's fame as a poet to popularise his plays. For instance, his 1599 edition of *Love's Labour's Lost* contained some of Shakespeare's poems and sonnets. But subsequent centuries laid much emphasis upon his plays rather than his poems, and thus they got driven to the periphery. Going by textual evidences and critical accounts, Shakespeare's poems and sonnets are highly original and exhibit his own genius as a literary writer than his plays. It is also a recognised fact that most of his plays were taken from historical sources or previously written literary works. Many of the speeches and most charming rhetorical passages have been reproduced by Shakespeare in his plays. But with poetry, he has rather used this genre as a medium to exhibit his creative sense.

#### 5.1 Venus and Adonis

"Venus and Adonis" was the first formidable work of non-dramatic kind written by Shakespeare. The Bard had just entered 29 when the poem was first printed in 1593. This poem was written just before one of the most popular plays from his pen *As You Like It* was produced. The poem was dedicated to Henry Wriothesley, the 3rd Earl of Southampton. Southampton was a long-time friend of Shakespeare and subject of his many dedications. As many as 126 of his sonnets are assumed to have been written towards this Southampton, who was Shakespeare's chief patron. Shakespeare reaffirms in his dedication that he will endeavour some graver labour on behalf of his potential patron if the poem is received well. So it

happened, and his first long poem became immensely popular. The Bard on his part fulfilled his promise of a graver labour by dedicating his next poem within an year in the form of “Lucrece.” The poem’s popularity only increased in the following years, with next seven years witnessing as many as six reprints. The total number of reprint editions published before 1641 amounted to 17.

The main source for Shakespeare’s “Venus and Adonis” was Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Book 10. It must be noted that Ovid was one of the most popular classical poets of ancient Greek and Rome during the age of Renaissance in early modern Europe. His poems were also popular in England during Shakespeare’s time, and must have attracted him for its rich variety of imageries and wordplay.

Adonis is the most enchanting of all the young men the world has ever seen. He is the desire of love for each and every living as well as non-living thing in this universe. Even the sun and wind have bestowed their love and affection upon him. In spite of all these glories, Adonis is not at all interested in love or romance, but wants to enjoy nature by hunting and roaming upon the hills. He is more delighted in the acts like hunting deer and fox on the mountains than indulging in love. Upon noticing his handsome beauty and charming look, Venus, the goddess of love, comes down to earth. She has in fact fallen in love on Adonis, and plans to get the object of her love realise this.

On one fine morning, Adonis goes out for hunting as per his routine, and is encountered by Venus. She meets him and urges him to unmount himself from the horse. She also urges him to tie the horse for a while and talk to her. But Adonis has no intension of talking to any woman. She then reveals her real identity and tells him that she is the god of love. But Adonis remains unmoved and expresses his unwillingness to talk to a woman, be it the very goddess of love. But Venus is also stubborn in her decision, and asks him to do as she commands. Then she reclines on his side and looks at him with love and affection. She also caresses him and tries to seduce him to accept her love.

The more she becomes closer and intimate, he grows impatient and tries to run away for continuing his business of hunting. Venus also does not give up easily, and she talks to him about the wonders of love. She further tells him that even the god of war is under her complete control as a willing prisoner, and it is better in his interest to accept her love and follow the suit

of others. She also elaborates on her capability to grant several pleasures and comforts, only if he accepts her love and returns the same to her. Adonis pretends to be conceding to her will for a while, but soon breaks away from her hand and runs towards his horse for mounting it and riding into the hunting field.

At that moment, Adonis' stallion is attracted by the loving call of a jennet for making love in the nearby field. The jennet does not take any special notice of the advancing stallion, but both the horses unite soon after seeing Adonis' effort to mount the stallion again. The horses run away to the nearby fields and Adonis is left alone only having Venus to accompany him. He sits down with the anger of having lost his hunt for that day. After neglecting her pleas for a long time, Adonis starts feeling the heat of her body and seems to be conceding for her feelings of love. She carries him away to a field and lies by his side to convince him about the beauty of love.

As the sun sets and night falls, Venus holds Adonis back with her and indulges in making love with him for a very long time. Then he departs hurriedly and wants to rush back to his friends for the next day's hunting of a boar. Venus sees through her vision that the next day's hunting will prove to be fatal for Adonis, and hence begs him desperately to stay back with her for the next day alone. But Adonis will not bear her holding any longer, and flees away from her in haste. Venus hears the mourning of some hunters, and later finds the lifeless body of Adonis. Venus becomes dejected of Adonis' death and goes to a life of seclusion for a period of time.

#### The Rape of Lucrece

As he promised to his patron in his dedication to "Venus and Adonis" in 1593, Shakespeare dedicated this more serious and rich narrative poem to Earl of Southampton an year later in 1594. Both "Venus and Adonis" and this poem were targeted at aristocratic and intellectual classes, and hence are composed of sources from classical Greek-Roman poetry. This poem was also popular among the upper class readers of late Sixteenth and early Seventeenth century England. The poem saw its sixth edition by 1616. This poem is again a long narrative poem, and its subject matter has been derived from the historical and literary sources of ancient Rome. In 509 BCE, the Roman king Tarquin raped an aristocratic class of woman by name Lucrece, and she eventually died by committing suicide. The Roman citizens paraded her dead body in public as a token of tyranny committed by the Roman king. Then a wide-scale resistance erupts against the king, and he is dethroned. Rome becomes a republic afterwards. Shakespeare has

taken the plot of this narrative poem from various sources related to Roman history and art, especially the history of Rome. Shakespeare has rendered this story in an enchanting dexterity of poetic wisdom.

The Romans are engaged in a fight at a place called Ardea. Two Roman leaders, Tarquin and Collatine, indulge in a conversation on an evening. Collatine describes his charming wife Lucrece in such glowing terms that Tarquin's becomes passionate to capture her beauty for himself and gets aroused at each of her virtue. The next morning, Tarquin leaves the Roman host and travels to Collatium, where the unsuspecting Lucrece gladly hosts him as one of her husband's friends. As Tarquin tells her many tales of Collatine's prowess on the battlefield, he admires Lucrece and decides that she must be the most beautiful woman in Rome. In the night, while others are asleep, Tarquin spends the whole hours in restlessness. Caught between desire for Lucrece and dread of being discovered, to the consequent loss of his honour, roams aimlessly about his chamber.

While his position as a military man does not permit him to be a slave of his emotions, his overwhelming desire shakes him out of composure and self-discipline. He is worried that his lustful deed will certainly prove to be his doom from where he cannot recuperate. He broods for a while over trying to woo Lucrece, but decides that such a course will be to no avail. She is already married and is not mistress of her own desires. At last, emotion wins over all his sense of reasoning. As Tarquin makes his way to Lucrece's chamber, many petty annoyances hinder his way. The locks are too hard for him to open on the doors, the threshold beneath the door starts grating under his footstep, the wind threatens to blow out his torch, and at last he pricks his finger on a needle. Tarquin completely ignores these omens of disaster, and he misconstrues them as forms of trial that will convert his prize more worth winning.

When he enters the chamber of this chaste woman, Tarquin begins to pray for success. Realizing that he will not be pardoned for this sin in the heaven, he wishes that Love and Fortune will henceforth be his gods. Entering the room, he gazes at Lucrece in sleep. When he reaches forward to touch her breast, she is alarmed and wakes up with a cry of fear. He tells her that her charming virtues have entrenched his heart and that she must submit to his will. First he blackmails Lucrece with force, telling her that if she denies to submit to him and resists, he will kill her and dishonor her name. Lucrece is apparently shaken and begins to cry in sorrow and fear. She begs Tarquin not to indulge in this sinful act at least for the sake of her hospitality,

her husband's friendship and Tarquim's position as a warrior. Her tears serving only to increase his lust, Tarquin wipes away her tears and rapes her.

Shame-ridden, he stealthily runs away, leaving Lucrece desolate. She, horrified and revolted, injures herself and prays that dawn should not come for ever. In a desperate fury, she rails against the night; its darkness and secrecy have ruined her. She is visibly afraid of the day, for surely her sin will be revealed. Still worse, through her fall, Collatine will be forever shamed. She points out that the circumstances are at fault, working for the wicked and against the innocent. Exhausted from her emotional tirade, Lucrece falls back on her pillow. She thinks that she is desperately in need of a suicide weapon, for death alone will be able to save her from further disgrace.

Lucrece calls her maid and asks for pen and paper. Writing to Collatine, she asks him to return immediately. Studying a picture of the fall of Troy, she attempts to find the face showing greatest grief. Hecuba, who looks mournfully at Priam in his dying moments, appears to be the saddest. Lucrece grieved for those who died in the Trojan War, all because one man was not able to control his lust. Enraged, she tears off the painting with her nails. On returning home, Collatine finds Lucrece robed in black. With weeping and lamentations, she finally discloses the brutal act of rape committed against her. Collatine is driven half-mad by rage and grief. Before revealing the name of the man who raped, Lucrece gets promises from the assembled soldiers that the loss of her honor will be avenged. Then, naming Tarquin, she takes out a knife from her bosom and kills herself. Heartbroken, Collatine declares in rage that he will kill himself as well, but Brutus, his friend, stepped forward and convinces him that woe is no cure for woe; it is better to revenge Lucrece. The soldiers leave the palace to carry the bleeding body of Lucrece through Rome. The indignant citizens banish Tarquin and all his family from the country.

## **5.2 Lover's Complaint**

Unlike the other two poems discussed so far, "Lover's Complaint" is situated in the present and deals with a more emotionally loaded problem of desertion by a lover against his lady-love. This poem first appeared along with the collection of sonnets written by Shakespeare, in the year 1609. In the poem, the narrator is seen listening to the wailings of a woman who is pale and exhausted. She is tearing down the love letter and other tokens of love, as an apparent

show of her antipathy against the one who handed her those properties. Even though she appears dull and pale, her beauty is not completely lost, vestiges of which can be noticed even now. An old man, who is grazing his cattle nearby the stream where the woman is throwing the gifts of love, approaches her and sits down at safe distance. He enquires the woman about the trouble which has brought her here. The woman starts telling her story, and she begins it by saying that she would have appeared even more young and attractive, but a man who is a well-spoken and a well-dressed man seduced her from being so.

He rode skillfully and dressed fashionably. Many women admired him, falling in love even with him telling the story knew that he had been unfaithful to others. For a long time she had resisted him-until he began to woo her. He acknowledged that he had seduced others, but he claimed that the others sought their fate. Moreover he had loved none of these women. They gave him jewels and locks of hair and sonnets to signify their love, all of which he offered to the woman, including a favour given him he said, by a nun. He referred to this particular conquest perhaps to suggest that the lady was being too hesitant to return his affection when even a nun yielded at first sight.

In his final argument he told the woman that "He who had conquered so many was now himself defeated by her. Since the hearts of the seduced women depended on him for their happiness, and since he now depended on her for his, all relied on her to relieve their pain. His final word was truth, implying fidelity and even marriage. Then he wept and she yielded to him. The lady ends her complaint by stating that no woman could resist this man because women are good-natured, generous, and compliant. She herself, if he wooed her again, would yield once more even though she has reformed.

### **5.3 The Phoenix and the Turtle**

The Phoenix and Turtle is Shakespeare's allegorical poem on the mystical nature of love. The Phoenix and Turtle consists of 13 quatrains (four-line stanzas) rhyming abba, followed by five triplets (stanzas of three rhyming lines) all in iambic tetrameter. The poem tells of the funeral of two lovers the phoenix, a mythological bird associated with immortality, and the turtledove (usually called 'turtle' in Elizabethan English), a symbol of fidelity. The two birds have burned themselves to death in order to be forever joined in love. The allegory celebrates an ideal of

love in which an absolute spiritual union of the lovers, defying rationality and common sense is chastely achieved through death, the ultimate refection of the world.

This allegory reflects a notion that was widespread in the Renaissance: ideal love was felt to transcend reason and thus to represent a truer state of being than that of the material world. This idea, whose roots lay in the writings of Plato, is also related to the Christian concept of the state of grace that God offers to believers, and *The Phoenix and Turtle* has been interpreted as a specifically Christian allegory. More generally, it may be seen as illustrating the possibility of transcendence through love, an ideal that informs much of Shakespeare's work, particularly the Comedies.

*The Phoenix and Turtle* does not have a literary source, although the idea of an assembly of birds was a common one; for example, it appears in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* and a famous mock funeral in Ovid's *Amores*, to name only two great authors whom Shakespeare is known to have read and admired. The more specific motif of love between phoenix and turtledove was determined by its use in Robert Chester's *Love's Martyr*, a long allegorical poem celebrating the marriage of Sir John Salisbury and his wife; Shakespeare's poem was apparently written to be published with that work in 1601. The idea of love between these two symbolic birds was novel, originating with either Chester or his patron.

Salisbury and his wife are the likeliest subjects of any specific symbolism the phoenix and the turtledove may carry, in addition to their joint role as an emblem of ideal love. In addition, scholars have long speculated on possible hidden meanings in *Love's Martyr* and/or *The Phoenix and Turtle*, and various obscure references have been proposed. The two birds have been seen as Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex and as Essex and the Earl of Southampton, among other pairings. However, such hypotheses are not provable, and in any case the poem transcends whatever particular purposes it may have had, surviving as a mystical and powerful invocation of love.

The poem, written in heptasyllabic (with some octosyllabic) trochaic tetrameter, laments the death of the Phoenix and Turtle-dove, true lovers who perished together. In the opening five stanzas, each of four lines rhyming abba, an unnamed speaker summons the mourners. The first stanza invites "the bird of loudest lay," which may be the new phoenix because of the reference to the "sole Arabian tree," on which the phoenix traditionally sits. Another possibility

is the crane. The speaker refers to the bird as "herald" and "trumpet," and Geoffrey Chaucer in "The Parlement of Foules" (c. 1377), a possible source for Shakespeare's poem, wrote of the crane "with his trompes soun" (with his trumpet's sound). The cock, lark, and nightingale have also been proposed. Stanza 2 orders the screech owl, "shrieking harbinger," not to appear, and stanza 3 continues in this vein of interdiction, barring all birds of prey except the eagle, which is royal without being tyrannical. Stanzas 4 and 5 complete the guest list of mourners with the swan and crow. The swan's whiteness makes it the ideal priest, and its reputation for singing just before death links it to the dirge. Both the swan and the crow were regarded in the Renaissance as symbols of chastity and marital fidelity. The crow's sable hue also suits it to this occasion.

The following eight stanzas, also of four lines each with the abba rhyme scheme, shift from the imperative to the declarative mood as they praise the dead lovers. These lovers overcame the physical and metaphysical forces that would divide them to become one being, as indicated by the use of the singular verb in line 22 and the singular noun "simple" (meaning a compound and usually plural) in line 44. Reason speaks the last fifteen lines, consisting of five three-line stanzas each with a single rhyme. Reason had listened to the praise of the lovers in stanzas 5-12 and had found the paradoxes puzzling. Reason's response accepts the excellence of the pair of birds, but the tone of the "Threnos" shifts from celebratory to elegiac. However remarkable these birds were, they now are dead, and with them have perished "Beauty, truth, and rarity." Reason concludes by urging those who survive to visit the urn containing the ashes of these lovers and "sigh a prayer" for them.

#### **5.4 Sonnets**

In the common parlance, sonnets refer to a fourteen lined lyric poem written in iambic pentameter with a complex rhyme scheme. The word "sonnet" traces its roots to the Italian word "sonnetto" which means "a little sound or song." Sonnets are generally grouped into two: Petrarchan sonnets and Shakespearean sonnets.

Named after its most renowned precursor, Petrarchan sonnets (also known as Italian sonnets) organise themselves into an octave and a sestet, rhyming ABBAABBA CDCDCD or ABBAABBA CDECDE. The octave puts forth an argument or a question which is answered in the sestet. The juncture between the octave and the sestet called volta denotes the change in the treatment of the subject. Petrarchan sonnets were popularized in England by Sir Thomas

Wyatt in the sixteenth century who translated Petrarch's sonnets into English. He had also composed his own sonnets modelled on the Italian variant. Milton, Christina Rossetti, G.M Hopkins have used this form to write their sonnets.

Henry Howard, a contemporary of Wyatt, is credited with remodelling of the Italian sonnet to suit the linguistic features of the English language which later evolved into Shakespearean sonnets. Shakespearean sonnets are structured into three quatrains and a revelatory couplet rhyming ABAB CDCD EFEF GG. Its other variant popularly known as Spenserian sonnet rhymes ABAB BCBC CDCD EE. Sonnets have evolved over time tremendously in both structure and theme with the only common identity among them being their fourteen lined stanza. Sonnets now deal with themes as diverse as war, religion, passion etc. as opposed to the medieval sonnets that dealt primarily with love.

### **5.5 Shakespeare's sonnets**

The outbreak of bubonic plague in England in the early 1590s led to the shutdown of theatres in England. This hiatus from theatres afforded Shakespeare an opportunity to exercise his literary prowess in lyric poems. Written during this period, Shakespeare's sonnets were circulated among his close associates. The sonnets are dedicated to "W.H" whose identity has been a subject of contention among critics. Some identify W.H as William Henthrope, the Earl of Pembroke while some others claims that the initials stand for Henry Wriothesly, earl of Southampton. A few even believe that initials were a misprint of W. S (William Shakespeare).

In 1609, Thomas Thorpe published an unauthorised version of these sonnets. 1640, saw the publication of another edition of these sonnets by a publisher named Ben Johnson who took the liberty to change the 'He's in the sonnets addressed to the young man as 'she' s. Edward Mellone later restored these sonnets to their first version in 1780.

Shakespeare wrote 154 sonnets in total. The sonnets are not numbered according to the chronology of their composition but according to the convenience of grouping them. The sonnets are demarcated into three groups: sonnets 1- 126 that are addressed to a young man; sonnets 127- 152 that are directed towards a dark lady; and sonnets 152-154 that are modelled on Greek poems. The identity of the dark lady and the young man are again mysteries unsolved. The poet displays intense love for the young man. His relationship with the dark lady

fluctuates between love and hate. Some sonnets also suggest the young man's love for the dark lady. Thus a sort of love triangle is formed between the poet, the young man and the dark lady.

One cannot even be sure if these sonnets are autobiographical in nature or not as very little information is available about the personal life of the bard. Generally, the fourteen lines of the sonnets composed in iambic pentameter organise themselves into three quatrains and a couplet. The quatrain advances a subject which is resolved in the couplets. Not all of his sonnets adhere to this form. For example, sonnet 126 has only 12 lines and sonnet 154 is written in Anacreontic meter etc. The bard contemplates on various themes in the sonnets. The first seventeen sonnets are popularly known as **procreation** sonnets. These sonnets are addressed to the young man to whom the poet appeals to continue his line through his off springs.

### *Sonnet 1*

From fairest creatures we desire increase,  
That thereby beauty's rose might never die,  
But as the ripper should by time decease,  
His tender heir might bear his memory:  
But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,  
Feed'st thy light'st flame with self-substantial fuel,  
Making a famine where abundance lies,  
Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.  
Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament  
And only herald to the gaudy spring,  
Within thine own bud buriest thy content  
And, tender churl, makest waste in niggarding.  
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,  
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

The first line suppose that "fairest creatures" are expected to procreate so that their beauty may be kept alive by their progeny even after their death. The poet censures the young man's narcissistic obsession that is fuelled by his self-absorption. Inadvertently, the young man is his own adversary for he creates a drought where there is abundance. The poet warns the young man about the transcendental nature of beauty and life. The young man will die and his beauty

will wither away with him. He solicits the young man to share his beauty with the world or hoard his beauty like a glutton who consumes what he owes to the world.

### *Sonnet 14*

Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck;  
And yet methinks I have astronomy,  
But not to tell of good or evil luck,  
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality;  
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,  
Pointing to each his thunder, rain and wind,  
Or say with princes if it shall go well,  
By oft predict that I in heaven find:  
But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,  
And, constant stars, in them I read such art  
As truth and beauty shall together thrive,  
If from thyself to store thou wouldst convert;  
Or else of thee this I prognosticate:  
Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.

The poets say that he cannot predict good or bad luck or plagues or deaths or the season's idiosyncrasies or the fortunes of princes by looking at thunder, rain and wind. He derives his knowledge from the eyes of the lovers. The poet warns his beloved that if he refuses to carry his lineage it will be the doom of both beauty and truth.

*Sonnet 18* and *Sonnet 55* finds the poet devising a way to **preserve the beauty** against the wreck havoiced by time. He claims that the poet's verse will immortalize the young man.

### *Sonnet 18*

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?  
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:  
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,  
And summer's lease hath all too short a date:  
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,  
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,

And every fair from fair sometime declines,  
By chance, or nature's changing course untrimmed:  
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,  
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,  
Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,  
When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st,  
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,  
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

The poem celebrates the beauty of the young man by comparing him to a summer's day. But summer, he says, is not as temperate and gentle as his beloved. Summer wanes away soon but not the eternal beauty of the beloved for the poet has preserved his beauty in his verses which will remain as long as man exists in the world.

### *Sonnet 55*

Not marble, nor the gilded monuments  
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme;  
But you shall shine more bright in these contents  
Than unswept stone besmear'd with sluttish time.  
When wasteful war shall statues overturn,  
And broils root out the work of masonry,  
Nor Mars his sword nor war's quick fire shall burn  
The living record of your memory.  
'Gainst death and all-oblivious enmity  
Shall you pace forth; your praise shall still find room  
Even in the eyes of all posterity  
That wear this world out to the ending doom.  
So, till the judgment that yourself arise,  
You live in this, and dwell in lover's eyes.

The central theme of Sonnet 55 is immortality. The sonnet is constructed on Horace's theme of poetry outliving physical monuments to the dead: *Exegi monumentum aere perennius / Regalique situ pyramidum altius ... / Non omnis moriar*" meaning I have built a monument more lasting than bronze / And taller than the regal peak of the pyramids... / I shall never

completely die. In Horace's Ode 3.30, he himself will be immortalized by his poetry, but in Sonnet 55, Shakespeare tries to build a metaphoric monument to his beloved, the fair lord. The fair lord, his beloved is neither described nor shown in anyway in this sonnet. Rather the sonnet just deals with the idea of immortality. The theme of immortality through verse is common in Shakespeare's sonnets. Another recurring theme in Shakespeare's sonnets is the ravages of time and quite often it is addressed to in terms of its inevitable impact on beauty and youth. In this sonnet, the effects of ravages of time on statues and monuments is dealt with. "Wasteful war," "broils," the sword of Mars (the god of war), and "war's quick fire" are seen as the chief causes of the destruction of statues and monuments, in addition to "sluttish time." In Line 13, there is a reference to "the judgment that yourself arise," or judgment day. In religious tradition, judgment day is the point at which all souls, even those that have been dead for a long time will "arise" to be judged by God. The same day is also referred to as "the ending doom" in line 12. After the judgement day, there is no more reason for immortalizing anyone in poetry.

### **SONNET 19**

Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws,  
And make the earth devour her own sweet brood;  
Pluck the keen teeth from the fierce tiger's jaws,  
And burn the long-lived phoenix in her blood;  
Make glad and sorry seasons as thou fleets,  
And do whate'er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,  
To the wide world and all her fading sweets;  
But I forbid thee one most heinous crime:  
O, carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow,  
Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen;  
Him in thy course untainted do allow  
For beauty's pattern to succeeding men.  
Yet, do thy worst, old Time: despite thy wrong,  
My love shall in my verse ever live young.

Time is personified as an animal clawing and ravaging nature. He orders time to not subject his beloved to its damages so that beauty may make him her model. He says that time can't do anything to his beloved as the poet has gifted his him immortality by making him the subject

of his sonnets. Physically the beloved may die but he will remain forever in the sonnets of the poet.

In sonnet 33, the poet talks about **loss of love and the deceptive nature of beauty**.

### ***Sonnet 33***

Full many a glorious morning have I seen  
Flatter the mountain tops with sovereign eye,  
Kissing with golden face the meadows green,  
Gilding pale streams with heavenly alchemy;  
Anon permit the basest clouds to ride  
With ugly rack on his celestial face,  
And from the forlorn world his visage hide,  
Stealing unseen to west with this disgrace:  
Even so my sun one early morn did shine,  
With all triumphant splendour on my brow;  
But out, alack, he was but one hour mine,  
The region cloud hath mask'd him from me now.  
Yet him for this my love no whit disdaineth;  
Suns of the world may stain when heaven's sun staineth.

The sonnet talks about his friend's breach of trust. The young man is compared to the sun who lets base clouds come between his relationships with the author. He realises that the fault lies not just with the young man but also with him for supposing that external beauty is a mark of internal rectitude. The poet ends the sonnet declaring his unswerving love for the young man despite his beloved's betrayal.

The *Sonnet 104* and *Sonnet 130* describes the **irrelevance of beauty in love**.

### ***Sonnet 104***

To me, fair friend, you never can be old,  
For as you were when first your eye I ey'd,  
Such seems your beauty still. Three winters cold,  
Have from the forests shook three summers' pride,  
Three beauteous springs to yellow autumn turn'd,

In process of the seasons have I seen,  
Three April perfumes in three hot Junes burn'd,  
Since first I saw you fresh, which yet are green.  
Ah! yet doth beauty like a dial-hand,  
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceiv'd;  
So your sweet hue, which methinks still doth stand,  
Hath motion, and mine eye may be deceiv'd:  
For fear of which, hear this thou age unbred:  
Ere you were born was beauty's summer dead.

In this poem addressed to the young man, the poet tells his beloved that time has done nothing to the beauty of the beloved. The beloved looks just the same as he was the first day the poet saw him. Yet he perceives that his eyes might be oblivious to the changes in his beloved. Fearing this deception he declares to the future generations beforehand that the greatest example of beauty existed much earlier than the time they were born.

***Sonnet 130***

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red, than her lips red:  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.  
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,  
But no such roses see I in her cheeks;  
And in some perfumes is there more delight  
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.  
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know  
That music hath a far more pleasing sound:  
I grant I never saw a goddess go,  
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground:  
And yet by heaven, I think my love as rare,  
As any she belied with false compare.

Addressing the dark lady, the poet lists out the imperfections of his mistress. He says that his mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun. Her lips are not red as corals nor are breasts as white as snow. She has black wiry unlike the blond hair of woman that other poets praise. Her talk nor

walk or reek is endearing yet the poet declares to him she is as special to him as the woman the other poets falsely describe are to them.

*Sonnet 129* is a contemplation on the **futility of lust**.

### *Sonnet 129*

Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
Is lust in action, and till action, lust  
Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,  
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust,  
Enjoyed no sooner but despisèd straight,  
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,  
Past reason hated as a swallowed bait  
On purpose laid to make the taker mad;  
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so,  
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;  
A bliss in proof, and proved, a very woe;  
Before, a joy proposed; behind, a dream.  
All this the world well knows, yet none knows well  
To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

Sex is a waste of energy and it incurs only shame. Lust makes people inhumane and brutish. Yet the end of this anticipation of sex is a disappointment. They despise it as soon as they have had it and claim to have thrust upon them. Sex is enjoyable but not its aftermath. The world knows this worth yet none can avoid the temptation of lust that leads one to hell.

The last two poems of the collection called the **Greek sonnets** are written in the classical Greek meter, Anacreontic. The sonnets are filled with innuendos of **sexual intercourse and venereal disease**. They are similar in themes and structure.

### *Sonnet 153*

Cupid laid by his brand and fell asleep:  
A maid of Dian's this advantage found,  
And his love-kindling fire did quickly steep

In a cold valley-fountain of that ground;  
Which borrowed from this holy fire of Love,  
A dateless lively heat, still to endure,  
And grew a seething bath, which yet men prove  
Against strange maladies a sovereign cure.  
But at my mistress' eye Love's brand new-fired,  
The boy for trial needs would touch my breast;  
I, sick withal, the help of bath desired,  
And thither hied, a sad distempered guest,  
But found no cure, the bath for my help lies  
Where Cupid got new fire; my mistress' eyes.

When Cupid is in slumber, Diana, the goddess of chastity, lays hold of Cupid's torch and plunges in a nearby fountain. The fountain as a result became eternally hot and men used it to cure their diseases. A glance from the poet's mistress reignites the torch and Cupid tests his torch with the poet's heart. The love-stricken poet seeks the bath to cure him of his sickness but of no avail. He believes that only his mistress's eyes which gave the Cupid his new fire will cure him of his disease.

The most common symbols in Shakespeare's sonnets are flowers and trees, stars and weather and seasons. Flowers and trees are recurrently used to show the passage of time which results in the deterioration of beauty and life. Flowers stand for beauty and rotten flowers are considered worse than weeds as they turn rotten because of their transgressions. Stars represent fate and destiny which was dominant belief of the Elizabethans. It also stands for the poet's determination to operate his free will against the forces of the cosmos with help of his beloved. Weather and season is used to convey human emotion as well as the estrangement of the poet and his beloved. Pathetic fallacy, a technique where human emotions are attributed to inanimate objects or elements of nature, is also employed by Shakespeare to bring out the effect.

### **Study Questions**

1. Explain the views of Shakespeare on the nature of true love and the miseries of misguided love.
2. How does the poet's love for the young man differ from his love for the Dark Lady?
3. Discuss the theme of immortality in the sonnets.
4. Discuss the portrayal of beauty as an immortal ideal.
5. Analyse the theme of ravages of time in Sonnets.
6. Discuss the theme of love in the sonnets.

## UNIT-VI

### 6.0 Shakespearean Criticism

An array of critical approaches to Shakespeare's works sprang up and has been springing up till today. For more than four centuries, his works have been read, criticized, favoured and on the other hand served as a model for future authors. During his own times, he was held in higher esteem and his works had been considered as representative texts of the period. Still, his works cannot be judged by the socio-historical milieu alone. If his works are analyzed in terms of time, space and context, the criticism may be a one sided approach. He and works cross the boundaries of time, space, culture and context. Therefore, critical works on Shakespeare also have to be broader in their approaches.

During the 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, Shakespeare was admired by many critics and also at the same time criticized by some other critics. Critics during these centuries pose certain technical questions about Shakespeare's defects. More specifically, critics asked Shakespeare's strange mixture of the tragic and comic elements in his plays. Dr. Johnson defends Shakespeare on this aspect. There is considerable criticism about Shakespeare's violation of the three unities. Shakespeare violated the unity of time and unity of place as prescribed by the classical rules of Drama. A few other critics including Dryden and Johnson criticized Shakespeare for his language games like use of false wit, puns and ambiguity etc in his plays. They feel that these language games of Shakespeare polluted the pristine nature of English language. But then the modern critics come out with eulogies on Shakespeare for his use of the same devices. So there was/is mixed response to his use of language devices.

Refuting the allegations levelled against Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson defended Shakespeare on the issue of violation of unities and the incongruous mixture of tragedy and comedy. It won't be an exaggerated panegyric if one says that Johnson inaugurated the Shakespeare Criticism and it reached its pinnacle in the late 19th cent with A. C. Bradley.

### 6.1 Preface to Shakespeare: Dr. Johnson

1. Shakespeare is such a great poet and dramatist par excellence of the world who has been edited and criticized by hundreds of editors and critics all over the world for more than

four centuries. Dr. Samuel Johnson is one of them. But among the literary criticisms about Shakespeare, “Johnson’s edition was notable chiefly for its sensible interpretations and critical evaluations of Shakespeare as a literary artist.” As a true critic in his *Preface to Shakespeare*, Johnson has pointed out Shakespeare’s merits or excellences as well as demerits. Let us now discuss Shakespeare’s merits as discovered by Johnson.

Shakespeare’s greatness lies in the fact that he is “the poet of nature”. Johnson says, “*Shakespeare is, above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature, the poet that holds up to the reader a faithful mirror of human nature.*”

His writings represent the ‘general nature’, because he knows “*Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature.*” Therefore his characters are “*the genuine progeny of common humanity.*” “*In the writing of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakespeare it is commonly a species.*” Thus Johnson appreciates the universal aspects of Shakespeare’s writings.

In his eulogizing Shakespeare, Johnson examines another important aspect of the plays of the Bard. Shakespeare’s **dialogue** “*is often so evidently determined by the incident which produces it, and pursued with so much ease and simplicity, that it seems scarcely to claim the merit of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation and common occurrences*”.

Shakespeare's **treatment of love** proves the fact that his concept of love differs from that of his predecessors. Before Shakespeare, there was a belief that love was a disease which brings intense torments to the lovers and it is a tool to enslave persons of opposite sex. Shakespeare had a different notion of love. Dramatists in general give an excessive importance to the theme of love. But to Shakespeare, “*love is only one of many passions, and as it has no great influence upon the sum of life.*” In Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Julius Caesar*, love interest hardly has any place.

Johnson further comments on Shakespeare's **characterization**. He says,

“Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion.”

On the contrary, other dramatists portray their characters in such a hyperbolic or exaggerated way that the reader cannot suit them to their life.

Johnson defends Shakespeare for his **mingling of the tragic and comic elements** in his plays on grounds of realism ‘exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature.’ Because, Shakespeare’s plays express “the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another, in which at the same time, the reveler is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friends,(in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the florid of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design.’)

“The **end of writing** is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing.” And the mingled drama can convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy, for it best represents the life.”

Johnson regards Shakespeare’s **mingling of tragedy and comedy** as a merit, because he cannot “recollect among the Greeks or Romans a single writer who attempted both.”

“Shakespeare always makes **nature predominant over accident**. His story requires Romans but he thinks only on men.”

In his *Preface to Shakespeare*, Dr. Samuel Johnson brings out the excellences first, then he turns to his demerits. Johnson does not consider him a faultless dramatist- even he takes the faults “sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit.” That is Shakespeare’s faults are serious enough to overwhelm the merits if they had only belonged to other dramatists.

Discussion of Shakespeare’s demerits will better highlight the **merits of Shakespeare** .

Shakespeare’s first defect is –

“He sacrifices virtue to convenience and is so much more careful to please than to instruct that he seems to write without any moral purpose.”

Moreover, he lacks poetic justice-“He makes no just distribution of good or evil.”

Here we cannot agree with Johnson. He himself called Shakespeare a ‘poet of nature’. But now he cannot come out of the tradition of his age- explicit moralizing or didacticism. Actually, Shakespeare gives us a picture of life as whatever he sees. Didacticism which is expected from a true artist cannot be a basic condition of art. Thus here we see Johnson’s dualism in evaluating Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's **plot construction** has some inherent faults. According to Johnson, the plots are often 'loosely formed' and 'carelessly pursued'. "He omits opportunities of instructing or delighting which the development of the plot provides to him." Moreover, "in many of his plays the latter part is evidently neglected."

This charge is, to some extent true. The readers lose dramatic interest in the second half of *Julius Caesar*. But *The Merchant of Venice* shows a perfect sense of plot construction.

Johnson's another charge against Shakespeare is regarding **distinction of time and place**. He attributes to a certain nation or a certain period of history, the customs, practices and opinions of another. For example, we "find Hector quoting Aristotle" in *Troilus and Cressida*.

However, Johnson regards that it is not a fault of Shakespeare to violate laws of unities 'established by the joint authority of poets and critics'. Rather this violation proves "the comprehensive genius of Shakespeare". Actually a drama indicates successive actions. Therefore, just as they may be represented at successive places, so also they may be represented at different periods, separated by several years. And so, Shakespeare violates the unities of time and place. And according to Johnson "the unities of time and place are not essential to a just drama", and "they are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction". On the other hand, the plays scrupulously following the unities are just "the product of superfluous and ostentatious art." However, Shakespeare observes the unity of action.

Shakespeare's another fault in the eye of Johnson is his over **fondness for quibbles**. "A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world and was content to lose it." But to say Johnson here sacrifices his strong common sense for the sake of an eloquent metaphor.

Shakespeare's comic dialogue is often coarse. The gentlemen and the ladies in comic scenes show little delicacy or refinement and are hardly to be distinguished from the clowns.

His tragic plays become worse in proportion to the labour he spends on them.

His narration shows an undue pomp of diction and unnecessary verbiage and repetition.

His declamations of set speeches are generally cold and feeble.

What he does best, he soon ceases to do. He no sooner begins to arouse the readers sympathy than he counteracts himself.

2. Dr. Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare is a classic of literary criticism. It displays all Johnson's gifts at their best—the lucidity, the virile energy, the individuality of his style; his sturdy commonsense and discernment; and his massive knowledge of the English language and literature. In his criticism of Shakespeare he is above his usual political, personal, religious and literary prejudices.

His judgement here is impartial and objective. He mentions both the merits and faults of Shakespeare like a true critic. He is very honest and sincere in his estimate of Shakespeare. He is able to free himself from the shackles of classical dogma and tradition. In an age of classicism, he dismisses the classical concepts of the unities of Time and Place. He estimates Shakespeare by fact and experience, by the test of time, nature and universality. His defence of tragi-comedy is superb and still unsurpassed. He has excelled his guru Dryden. He finds Shakespeare the great because he holds a mirror to nature. In minimizing the importance of love on the sum of life, Johnson anticipates Shaw.

His enumeration of faults in Shakespeare in itself is a classic piece of criticism. These faults he finds are owing to two causes—(a) carelessness, (b) excess of conceit. "The detailed analysis of the faults" says Raleigh, "is a fine piece of criticism, and has never been seriously challenged." Shakespeare's obscurities arise from

- (a) the careless manner of publication;
- (b) the shifting fashions and grammatical licence of Elizabethan English;
- (c) the use of colloquial English,
- (d) the use of many allusions, references, etc., to topical events and personalities,
- (e) the rapid flow of ideas which often hurries him to a second thought before the first has been fully explained.

Thus many of Shakespeare's obscurities belong either to the age or the necessities of stagecraft and not to the man. "In my opinion," concludes Johnson, "very few of his lines were difficult to his audience, and that he uses such expressions as were then common, though the paucity of contemporary writers makes them now seem peculiar.

The object of all criticism is to make the obscure and the confused clear and understood and it is this service which Johnson has performed to Shakespeare. "Johnson's strong grasp of the main thread of the discourse, his sound sense, and his wide knowledge of humanity, enables him, in a hundred passages, to go straight to Shakespeare's meanings." (Raleigh). Johnson led Shakespearean criticism back from paths that led to nowhere, and suggested directions in which discoveries might be made. He was the first to emphasize the historical and comparative point of view in criticism. He says in the Preface, "every man's performances, to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived and with his own particular opportunities." It was he who, "stemmed the tide of rash emendation, and the ebb which began with him has continued ever since." With great shrewdness and acuteness, he states in the Preface that "they who had the copy before their eyes were more likely to read it right than we who read it only in imagination." Therefore, the readings of the earliest editions must be true, and should not be disturbed without sufficient reason.

In short, to quote John Bailey again, "Shakespeare has had subtler and more poetic art than Johnson; but no one has equaled the insight, sobriety, lucidity and finality which Johnson shows in his own field." Johnson's work on Shakespeare has not been superseded. He has been depreciated and neglected ever since the 19th century brought in the new aesthetic and philosophical criticism. The 20th century, it seems likely, will treat him more respectfully." (Raleigh).

"Johnson's Preface" writes E. E. Halliday, "is remarkable not so much for what it says as for what it is, the judicial summing up of the opinion of a century; it is the impartial estimate of Shakespeare's virtues and defects by a powerful mind anxious not to let his prejudices prevent the defects as he saw them from weighing too lightly in the balance. It is the final verdict of an epoch."

There are a few limitations of the Preface too. Johnson could not fathom the depths of Shakespeare's poetic genius. Nor could he think of the psychological subtleties of his characterization. He was equally deaf to "the overtones of Shakespeare's poetry at its most sublime. His criticism of Shakespeare's verbal quibbling shows the deficiency of his perceptive powers. The mystery of a Shakespearean tragedy was beyond the reach of his common sense. No wonder then if he feels that Shakespeare was at his best 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." He could not see "how truth may be stated in myth or symbol, how *The Tempest* and *Winter's Tale*, for instance, are more than pleasant romantic pieces: significantly, he says-of the latter that 'with all its absurdities, it is very entertaining.

The limitations of his critical sensibility are nowhere more prominent than in his complaint that Shakespeare "seems to write without any moral purpose." He "fails to see the hidden morals of Shakespeare's plays; to him only the explicitly stated morals are the only morals. Thus some of the most conspicuous virtues of Shakespeare, for example, his objectivity and his highly individualized treatment of his dramatic characters, are treated by Johnson as his "defect." These defects are certainly not Shakespeare's, but Johnson's.

But these shortcomings do not mar the basic merits of his Preface. His Preface is as immortal as the plays of Shakespeare. They demonstrate to the best his mature and profound sense of the human situation, his study and erudition. The tests of Shakespeare provided by him are valid even today.

3. Samuel Johnson in his book about Shakespeare gives reasons for the strength of Shakespeare and also the weaknesses that Shakespeare's literature brings. This is the strongest element of the book that it has given reasons to identify both parts of Shakespearean literature and is unbiased in his approach.

Samuel Johnson writes "Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature". The nature here is derived from the nature that Dryden talks about in his book. He explains how Shakespeare has a way of portraying nature as just and fulfilling and this is strength according to Johnson as well. Johnson carries on with his defence for Shakespeare and asserts that Shakespeare is a good dramatist. He does what a dramatists needs to do and that is to deal with the universal problem. The universal problem according to Johnson is the problem of good and evil and he does it best. He has a way of understanding people's ways of life and portrays them well in evil and goodness.

Johnson, like Plato believes that art is imitation of the nature and he calls Shakespeare the poet of nature in his work. Moreover, for Johnson what sets Shakespeare apart is that his characters are universal. They represent common people and the emotions one deals with; so he says

“Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied by men.” Johnson praises Shakespeare’s characters because they don’t exhibit norms of a particular society but are relatable by the whole world. He creates no heroic personalities but the character is still always strong and common at the same time.

Furthermore, Johnson asserts that language of Shakespeare is comprehensible and what sets the characters apart is Shakespeare’s use of language. Johnson claims that “His drama is the mirror of life” by which he means that the plays are so tragically near reality that it is hard to set them apart from reality. He believes that the division of Shakespearean plays into genre is wrong. According to Johnson Shakespearean comedy is ‘instinct’ and his tragedy is ‘a skill.’

Johnson points out Shakespeare’s weaknesses as well. He says “The end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing” by which he implies that art should be useful for society. He, like Sidney believes that art should be a moral teacher. He points out Shakespeare’s style critically and he says “He sacrifices virtue to convenience.” This means that Johnson is unhappy for the limited use of moral teachings in Shakespeare’s work.

Further contradictions that Johnson points out are that Shakespeare has a habit of using mere dialogues that have little relevance to the plot. And he thinks that Shakespeare did not work very well with plot construction.

Another important argument is given against and for Shakespeare. Johnson identifies how Shakespeare overlooks the unity of time, place and action that Aristotle thought were very necessary. However, Johnson puts his belief in Shakespeare’s work and tells how unity of time and place are contradictory in terms of reason and rationality. He believes Shakespeare is a genius to put his work neglecting them. He uses the words “Such violations of rules mere positive become the comprehensive genius of Shakespeare.”

4. Through the “Preface to Shakespeare,” Samuel Johnson points out different important matters to consider while evaluating a literary work. Particularly one of the reasons of this preface is to display scaffold by scaffold what Shakespeare has done in order to begin to “assume the dignity of an ancient.” Johnson justifies with a variety of arguments why Shakespeare’s work deserves to be considered a piece of art. In order to attain that, Johnson discloses what, as he considers, literary criticisms must do.

There are plenty of “big epigrams” concerning literary criticism all through the preface. As a man of letters and considered an authority most of them are not followed by a quote or an argument more than what his experience in the field can provide. In this essay some of them will be shown so that Johnson’s meaning of it can be determined and bound as far as this can be done.

Already after his preface’s opening the following lines are read: “The great contention of criticism is to find the faults of the moderns, and the beauties of the ancients. Immediately followed by these words: “While an author is yet living we estimate his powers by his worst performance, and when he is dead we rate them by his best.” Clearly the second sentence confers an ironic sense to the first one. Which means that it is not that the former line establishes what the ideal contend is but the real one.

Johnson calls his audience to refine and make their literary analysis deeper, which in this case means not to praise an author because of its antiquity and perhaps to be sensible to new forms of art. So already in the second paragraph of the preface Johnson has told us what is NOT supposed to be done by a critic. The acute reader will immediately ask, not what it is supposedly to be done then, but, in order to establish precepts to do a deep and useful analysis, what kind of work is it going to be on the table.

Johnson, who is a step ahead, begins his next paragraph establishing the game’s rules “to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientific, but appealing wholly to observation and experience.”[1, p. 3] Concisely, he classifies “works” into those that have demonstrative and scientific principles and those rise by observation and experience. Once this is known he strongly determines the way to evaluate them ‘no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem” and “frequent comparisons.” So, since art is not objective apparently for him the most adequate factor to consider is comparison.

To enlighten this point, the author gives his reader an example of an antique whose work has become part of humankind’s knowledge. Johnson presents Homer as an author who has gone through nation-to-nation, century-by-century and that is what makes him grand. But, as if Johnson was reading our minds, he kindly tells the reader why is it that comparison is the most important tool for literary criticism.

Frequent comparisons from different scholars through time lead to better understanding and deepening of what it is studied and when a literary work is better understood, probably if it is worth it, it will be more appreciated, since the secret of its structure is more revealed. Johnson is completely sure about this when he expresses with the following words “what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.” [1, p. 3]

According to Johnson, another fundamental factor to value literature is whether it conveys pleasure or not. Something is “praised only as pleasure is obtained.” [1, p. 4] These words raise some questions about pleasure. How does a work of literature convey pleasure? Why do some of them convey more pleasure than others? And this is where Johnson, while talking about Shakespeare’s work value proposes some characteristics that maybe are not only in Shakespeare but in other creations that make them valuable. Therefore these characteristics could be used as parameters to do literary criticism as well.

General nature, progeny of common humanity and passions are some of the characteristics that the work of Shakespeare presents. As Johnson establishes these are some of the main topics that he develops magnificently and that make his work worth of belonging to posterity. In this terms it is natural that literary criticism generally deals with those subjects. That is why a good piece of art develops probably one or some of them in an original and sophisticated way.

From Johnson’s preface another important variable, which could be interpreted that which should be considered by a critic could be is credibility. “The necessity of observing the unities of time and place arises from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible.” [1, p. 14] “The mind revolts from evident falsehood, and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality.” With these words Johnson locates credibility as a basic factor for literature in order to be good.

Finally it could be concluded that to Johnson literary criticism, which has the aim of evaluating works appealing wholly to observation and experience, should consider: comparison, understanding, topics like passions or common humanity, credibility among others in order to know how to praise literature. I would say that for him the most important factor is to understand the considered work by different means, comparison, credibility or general topics. Definitely,

“Preface to Shakespeare”, intentionally done by Johnson in order to justify what he establishes about Shakespeare, is a revelation of what literary criticism means to him.

5. Johnson in the Preface to Shakespeare holds that the mingled dramas of Shakespeare are not only effective but also fulfill the proper function of drama much better than pure comedy or tragedy. Shakespeare, in Arnold’s view, incurred the biggest censure “by mixing comic and tragic scenes in all his works. And this very faculty of Shakespeare made him-  
“Even nobler than both the Greek and the Roman dramatists”

Referring to the charge that Shakespeare has mixed the comic and tragic scenes, Johnson points out that the Shakespeare’s play are not in a “rigorous sense,” either tragedies or comedies, but composition of a distinct kind. Shakespeare’s plays exhibit the real state of earthly life which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled in various degrees and endless combination.

Shakespeare says Johnson has united the power of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind but in one composition. In other words, Shakespeare was equally at home in writing tragic and comic plays and he could combine comic and tragic elements in one and the same play. Almost all his plays are divided between serious and ludicrous characters and they sometimes produce sorrow and sometimes laughter.

This was a practice contrary to “the rules of criticism”. But Johnson says that there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature. The object of literature is to give instruction by pleasing. A play in which the comic and the tragic have been mingled, is capable of conveying all the instructions that tragedy or comedy aims at because such a play is closer to the reality of life than either pure tragedy or comedy. The mingling of tragic and comic scenes does diminish or weaken the vicissitudes of passion that the dramatist aims at. There are many people who welcome comic relief after a scene producing the feeling of melancholy.

Now we should look at the historical background of the matter. It is true that, on the whole, the ancient classical dramatists had kept tragedy and comedy strictly apart from each other. Neo-classical drama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in Italy, France and even England tried to observe the line of demarcation between tragedy and comedy. But Shakespeare was a romantic, not a neo classical dramatist.

The free use of tragedy and comedy in the same play is one of the most striking and familiar features in the work of Shakespeare and other romantic playwrights of his time. Romantic drama reveals in variety of effect, while tragic comedy or the mixed play was, according to Addison, one of the most monstrous inventions that ever entered into a poet's thoughts.

Neo-classic criticism showed a curious tendency to out-Greek the Greeks in strictness. Aristotle indeed says that tragedy represents an action which is serious; and Greek tragedy in practice has little comic relief; yet it has some. We find some comic elements in Homer himself. Homer's gods are sometimes used for a comic purpose, as well as men like Thersites or Irus. For the middle Ages, the mixture of tragic and comic was as natural as breathing, and it produced their best dramatic work. The greatest Elizabethan tragedies were half the child of comedy, not only because Polonius in Hamlet, the Porter in Macbeth, and the fool in Lear produce some of their most striking scenes. Johnson, it must be pointed out, justifies tragic-comedy on conflicting grounds.

In the twentieth century, T.S. Eliot has argued that, though human nature may permanently crave for comic relief, it does not follow that this craving should be gratified. Eliot upholds the doctrine of 'the unity of sentiments,' T. S. Eliot also said that the desire for comic relief springs from a lack of the capacity for concentration.

There is no reason why a tragedy must be absolutely laughterless and there is equally no reason why a tragedy should not be laughterless. Perhaps only one rule remains valid about humor in tragedy, namely that humor must not clash with the tone of the whole. It is extraordinary how seldom this fault is found in Shakespeare. Mercutio and Thersites, Pandarus and Polonius, the Grave-diggers and the Porter and Cleopatra's clown are certainly not out of place in the plays in which Shakespeare had depicted them.

Johnson is undoubtedly a critic of neo-classical school. However in his defence both of Shakespeare's disregard of the unities of time and place and Shakespeare's mingling of tragic and comic elements. Johnson seems to deviate from the rigid stand which neo-classicism adopted. Strictly speaking, neo-classic theory did not permit the mingling of tragic and comic in the same play. But it is possible to argue that Johnson defends such mingling on the fundamentally neo-classic ground that the imitation of general human nature not only permits

but demands it. Shakespeare's plays, combining comedy and tragedy, show real human nature which "partakes of joy and sorrow."

6. Eighteenth-century writer Samuel Johnson ((1709-1784) is one of the most significant figures in English literature. His fame is due in part to a widely read biography of him, written by his friend James Boswell and published in 1791. Although probably best known for compiling his celebrated dictionary, Johnson was an extremely prolific writer who worked in a variety of fields and forms.

### **Crux of the arguments in Johnson's Preface to Shakespeare**

Shakespeare's characters are a just representation of human nature as they deal with passions and principles which are common to humanity. They are also true to the age, sex, profession to which they belong and hence the speech of one cannot be put in the mouth of another. His characters are not exaggerated. Even when the agency is supernatural, the dialogue is level with life.

Shakespeare's plays are a storehouse of practical wisdom and from them can be formulated a philosophy of life. Moreover, his plays represent the different passions and not love alone. In this, his plays mirror life.

Shakespeare's use of tragic-comedy: The primary criticism mounted against Shakespeare is that he has indulged in an unfair adulteration of tragedy and comedy. The mixture of these two totally different genres became a matter of concern which Shakespeare is least bothered about. Johnson defends Shakespeare by saying that what he has done is a faithful representation of nature. By his integration of tragedy and comedy into one, Shakespeare has proved to be faithful to nature, because even in real life situations we have a perfect fusion of both good and evil, happiness and sadness, fears and smiles etc. The conglomeration of two different genres- tragedy and comedy- may be in violation of the classical tenets but Shakespeare has an appeal to nature. Moreover, tragic-comedy with its proximity to life merges within itself the didacticism and delight of both tragedy and comedy.

Shakespeare's use of tragicomedy does not weaken the effect of a tragedy because it does not interrupt the progress of passions. In fact, Shakespeare knew that pleasure consisted in variety.

Continued melancholy or grief is often not pleasing. Shakespeare had the power to move, whether to tears or laughter.

Shakespeare's comic genius: Johnson says that comedy came natural to Shakespeare. He seems to produce his comic scenes without much labour, and these scenes are durable and hence their popularity has not suffered with the passing of time. The language of his comic scenes is the language of real life which is neither gross nor over refined, and hence it has not grown obsolete.

Shakespeare writes tragedies with great appearance of toil and study, but there is always something wanting in his tragic scenes. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy instinct.

### **Johnson's defence of Shakespeare's use of unities:**

Shakespeare's histories are neither tragedy nor comedy and hence he is not required to follow classical rules of unities. The only unity he needs to maintain in his histories is the consistency and naturalness in his characters and this he does so faithfully. In his other works, he has well maintained the unity of action. His plots have the variety and complexity of nature, but have a beginning, middle and an end, and one event is logically connected with another, and the plot makes gradual advancement towards the denouement.

Shakespeare shows no regard for the unities of Time and place, and according to Johnson, these have troubled the poet more than it has pleased his audience. The observance of these unities is considered necessary to provide credibility to the drama. But, any fiction can never be real, and the audience knows this. If a spectator can imagine the stage to be Alexandria and the actors to be Antony and Cleopatra, he can surely imagine much more. Drama is a delusion, and delusion has no limits. Therefore, there is no absurdity in showing different actions in different places.

As regards the unity of Time, Shakespeare says that a drama imitates successive actions, and just as they may be represented at successive places, so also they may be represented at different period, separated by several days. The only condition is that the events must be connected with each other.

Johnson further says that drama moves us not because we think it is real, but because it makes us feel that the evils represented may happen to ourselves. Imitations produce pleasure or pain, not because they are mistaken for reality, but because they bring realities to mind. Therefore, unity of Action alone is sufficient, and the other two unities arise from false assumptions. Hence it is good that Shakespeare violates them.

Faults of Shakespeare: Shakespeare writes without moral purpose and is more careful to please than to instruct. There is no poetic justice in his plays. This fault cannot be excused by the barbarity of his age for justice is a virtue independent of time and place.

Next, his plots are loosely formed, and only a little attention would have improved them. He neglects opportunities of instruction that his plots offer, in fact, he very often neglects the later parts of his plays and so his catastrophes often seem forced and improbable.

There are many faults of chronology and many anachronisms in his play. Shakespeare never followed any chronological order in his selection of plots for his histories. Even the history plays that deal with the history of the English monarchy have not followed any chronological order. In *Julius Caesar*, the presence of belfry or the clock tower is an anachronism because there was no clock tower during the regime of Julius Caesar. In Richard tetralogy also, Shakespeare uses a system of trial called conventional trial by combat. This trial by combat is also an anachronism because in English Monarchy no such system prevailed. Thus in Shakespeare a lot of historical anachronisms are scattered throughout.

His jokes are often disgusting and immoral. In his narration, there is much display of diction and circumlocution. Narration in his dramas is often monotonous. His set speeches are cold and feeble. They are often loquacious and too large for thought. Insignificant ideas are disguised in resonant epithets. He is too fond of puns and quibbles which overwhelm him in marsh. For a pun, he sacrifices reason, modesty and truth. He often fails at moments of great excellence. Some despicable conceit spoils the effect of his pathetic and tragic scenes.

Merits of Shakespeare: He perfected the blank verse, imparted to it diversity and flexibility and brought it nearer to the language of prose.

## 6.2 Shakespearean Tragedy: A.C.Bradley

*I dreamed last night that Shakespeare's ghost*

*Sat for a civil Service post.*

*The English paper of the year*

*Contained a question on King Lear,*

*Which Shakespeare answered very badly*

*Because he had not read his Bradley.*

(Guy Boas, quoted by I. J.Semper in Hamlet without  
Tears (Dubuque, Iowa, 1946 p.5)

The eulogy on A.C. Bradley by Guy Boas is a testimonial for the greatness of A.C.Bradley as a Shakespearean Critic. An early twentieth century critic, A.C.Bradley is one of the widely acknowledged critics of Shakespeare. Shakespearean Tragedy by Bradley is a compilation of his own series of lectures on Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, and Lear. Bradley's most famous work, Shakespearean Tragedy, first appeared in 1904. Having crossed continents this Magnus Opus critical work has been the centre of Shakespearean Criticism for more than a century.

Till today, this book has been discussed and debated in University and college classrooms and Critical journals. In view of this continuing interest in Bradley's criticism, this specific book is recommended for Shakespeare lovers. The focus of this book confines itself to certain definite aspects of Bradley's criticism of Shakespearean tragedy. His other important works are Shakespearean Tragedy (1904, 1905), Oxford Lectures on Poetry (1909), The Uses of Poetry (1912), A Commentary on Tennyson's 'In Memorium' (1915), A Miscellany (1929), and, Ideals of Religion (1940) which was published posthumously.

In *Shakespearean Tragedy*, he poses some questions which even Shakespeare would not have thought about and aims at answering them. There is an array of questions: "What is the substance of a Shakespearean tragedy, taken in abstraction both from its form and from the differences in point of substance between one tragedy and another? What is the nature of the tragic aspect of life as represented by Shakespeare? What is Shakespeare's tragic conception or conception of tragedy? By way of answering these questions, Bradley begins his work by

collecting facts from the major tragedies themselves and gradually constructing the idea of the more abstract concept of Shakespearean tragedy.

First and foremost, Bradley discusses the tragic hero of Shakespearean tragedy. The tragedy is primarily the tragic story of an individual. All his major tragedies deal with the story of a single person who belongs to the noble esteem. In spite of his nobility, the hero of the play suffers, more surprisingly endure the suffering and yet falls at the end of the play. The tragedy usually end with the unhappy plight of the hero mostly in his death. The fall of the hero is exceptional because his fall is from a greater height as he belongs to the upper strata of the social system. The plot is constructed on an individual path concerning only about his rise and fall relegating all other characters to the background. The story follows the hero, prospers with his prosperity, suffers along with hero and ends with the end of the hero. The story gets an end only with the death of the hero. The story in short depicts the turbulent past of the hero's life leads up to his death. Any Shakespearean tragedy is essentially a sad tale of intense suffering and massive disaster leading to the death of the hero.

Everyone suffers in this world. Life is inherently a mixture of happiness/pleasure and sufferings/pains. But then, in Shakespeare the suffering and calamity of the hero are exceptional. The suffering of the hero becomes exceptional because of some spatio-temporal reasons. The fatal blow befalls a visible man who becomes responsible for the welfare of others. The tragic end comes all of a sudden usually following the heels of a happy moment or glorious time. The juxtaposition of an evil act close at the heels of a good thing and tragedy striking a person when he is at the pinnacle of his glory. As a pattern, misfortune for the hero comes not at a time of crisis but at a moment of joy.

The power of the exceptional misery and mishap affects the hero far and wide beyond him in order to convert a private grief into a public calamity thereby evoking the tragic emotions of pity and terror in the minds of the audience. The medieval drama believed in a total reversal of fortunes and favoured it for long. A complete subversion of fortune that too arriving unawares upon a man who is in higher esteem and full security is something very tragic. Of course, during the Elizabethan period, the nation won't be in tears for the death of a salesman or a beggar but only for a king or a prince or a noble person. The status of the hero matters a lot because the hierarchical height from which the fall happens plays an important role in deciding the level of

tragic sense. That is why Shakespearean tragedies are always concerned with the noble persons. Moreover, the tragedy of the hero should be the tragedy of the nation itself.

The hero's fate should affect the overall welfare of a whole nation or kingdom. When the tragic fall of an individual surpasses the individual territory and spreads its tentacles to the entire nation or kingdom, the tragedy becomes a real tragedy. Therefore, Shakespearean tragedy may be construed as a story of extraordinary catastrophe leading to the death of a man belonging to a higher estate.

Another prominent feature of Shakespeare's tragedies is its difference from the medieval tragedy. In the medieval tragedies, the heroes fall because of their fate. The role of fate is quite indispensable in the mediaeval tragedies. But in Shakespeare, the fall of the hero is not just because of his fate but also because of his actions. Even in Greek theatre, the destiny determines the character. But in Shakespeare, the character decides the destiny.

So, in Shakespearean tragedies, the disasters of tragedy do not occur naturally, nor are they designed and sent by extraordinary forces. They emerge mainly from the actions of the hero. In Hamlet, the fall comes mostly from his own actions and perhaps inaction. In Othello, it comes because of his hasty decisions and Macbeth brought his fall on himself as he had over vaulting ambition. King Lear's fall was due to his over expectations and poor judgment. In fact Shakespeare brought a human dimension to the tragic fall of the hero.

Next, Bradley explores the way Shakespeare introduces the supernatural into some of his tragedies. In Macbeth, the prime plot moves only after being propelled by the witches. The appearance of the three witches is the starting point of the actual tragedy. Macbeth a hitherto good man turns evil only after his encounter with the three witches. In Hamlet, the actual crisis begins only with the haunting of the ghosts. It was the ghost that informs Hamlet to avenge for his father's murder. Though Hamlet falls mostly due to his procrastination, the ghost also shares the responsibility of pushing Hamlet to develop inaction. Supernaturalism is one of the themes in the play Macbeth. Supernaturalism is a phenomena which deals with other worldly realm or beings who have no connection with the earthly existence. Supernaturalism have been much exploited in the literary works, particularly during the Elizabethan epoch. Shakespeare have employed supernaturalism in his plays especially in his tragedy Macbeth. The Elizabethan public believed in the existence of supernatural beings and this led to the wide

popularity of Shakespeare's play. Macbeth opens with the prophecies of three witches which manifest the extensive use of supernatural elements in the play. The prophecies foretold by witches guide the actions of Macbeth. The witches are impoverished women worn out of age but grows beard like men and ride brooms and relates to the most abhorable objects in the face of earth, namely, snakes, toads, snippets and so on. The witches dancing around the cauldron in merriment prophecies the impending doom of Macbeth. Hence the witches don the role of guilt within Macbeth. They represent the conflict and good and evil inside man. Even though the witches manage to fuel ambition in Macbeth, the grievous murders committed by Macbeth are not on the advice of witches but by his vaulting ambition. Hence the down fall of Macbeth does not rely on the prophesy of witches or fate but on his tragic flaw or error.

Another instance of supernaturalism in Macbeth is the appearance of Banquo's ghost during the banquet hosted by Macbeth. Macbeth hires murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance to prevent the latter from acquiring the throne. However only Banquo gets killed and Macbeth is ridden by guilt. The murder takes place during the banquet which makes Macbeth nervous. Even after receiving the news of Banquo's death, Macbeth tries hard to put up a pleasant demeanour before the assembled guests. However this plan is foiled by the sudden appearance of the ghost of Banquo which haunts Macbeth. Macbeth's idiosyncratic behavior puts the guests as well as Lady Macbeth into chaos. Although Lady Macbeth manage the situation well Macbeth is made conscious of the ghost of Banquo haunting him forever. The ghost does not have a physical existence but exists only in the mind of Macbeth. The psychological state of Macbeth prompts him to see the ghost. The illusion of dagger in the air is yet another instance of supernaturalism. Macbeth who is reluctant to commit the murder of Duncan is led by his mind to imagine the dagger with which he is going to murder Duncan. The use of supernaturalism contribute to the moral and psychological aspects of the work.

The appearance of ghosts, fairies, witches, or the unseen all account to the supernatural elements. Shakespeare have made a sumptuous use of supernatural elements to produce pity and fear in the audience. These supernatural elements help in delineating the character and the circumstances binding the character. Shakespeare cater to the public audience by the use of supernaturalism. This is one of the reasons behind the universality and timelessness of Shakespeare's plays. We can't blame it on Shakespeare for the introduction of ghosts, witches, witchcraft and other such supernatural elements in his plays. Shakespeare as a people's

playwright had to cater to the popular demands of the society. His age was filled with people who believed in superstitious things like necromancy, witchcraft etc.

Besides the superstitious elements playing havoc, Shakespeare in most of his tragedies allows chance to have a considerable impact on the overall action. In *Hamlet*, when Hamlet was about to kill his Uncle Claudius, he was seen in his prayers thereby thwarting the plan of Hamlet. In *Othello*, Othello's throwing the handkerchief offered by Desdemona and its subsequent transfer to the hands of Iago played havoc in the life of Othello. Hence, Chance, though not as powerful as the fate, plays its own destructive role in designing the fall of the tragic hero. In addition to fate, chance, superstitions etc, the hero himself contributes considerably to his own downfall.

As an imperative fabric of any tragedy, conflict plays a vital role. The hero faces both an external conflict and an internal conflict. The external conflict usually erupts between persons or groups, and the internal conflict happens between the hero and his conscience. In *King Lear*, Lear is tormented by the storm outside in the storm scene. Indeed, the storm outside is an externalization of the inner turmoil of Lear.

In *Hamlet*, Hamlet suffers more due to the inner conflict rather than external conflict. He develops insomnia, hallucinations, madness and other psychological imbalances as a result of his inner conflict only. Othello too suffers from a racial inferiority complex which determines all his actions. Though Macbeth has external conflicts, his actual suffering starts only with his conscience pricking him. Even his hard hearted counterpart Lady Macbeth has an inner conflict in the play. Most of the soliloquies uttered by these tragic heroes are products of their inner conflicts.

Towards the end of the book, Bradley sums up saying that the hero's tragic flaw is actually his own strength. The person's strength pulls him down than elevating him. The strength of the hero is indeed fatal to him. In Greek tragedy *Oedipus, the King*, Oedipus's strength of inquisitiveness pulls him down. A man who always cry for the truth falls a victim for the same pursuit of truth. Likewise, in all Shakespearean tragedies, the tragic heroes are men of strength but alas they fall victims of their own strengths. Despite his nobility and strength, the tragic hero commits mistakes by commission or omission. His mistakes join hands with other sources to bring the fatal blow on the hero.

A tragic hero, in Shakespeare's tragedy, is not an eminently 'good man' nor is he necessarily a 'paragon of virtue.' For the fall of a virtuous man can only shock us and will not arouse pity and fear, but sympathy, and hence it is not suitable for tragedy. The fall of a completely villainous character is also not approvable as we can only feel satisfied and happy at his defeat, and tragedy will not serve its fundamental purpose. Therefore, an ideal tragic hero should be a noble man and his fall from eminence to disaster is due to some fault in his own character.

Though accidents, chances, circumstances and superstitions are held partly responsible for the fall of the hero, it is the tragic flaw/ some fault in the character of the hero, because of which, and not because of violating some law of god, he falls. The hero errs, either out of ignorance, or in hastiness, or may be voluntarily. Northrop Frye, the chief architect of archetypal criticism, sees the fall of the tragic hero as an affirmation of moral order. In any tragedy, there is a fusion of grief and joy towards the end of the play and the audience laments over the fall of the hero and rejoices in the resurrection of his spirit. The hero's struggle against hostile forces would end in defeat and ultimately in his fall/death. So, Shakespeare asserts that human action is, after all, the central catastrophe. Shakespeare eventually believes that the ultimate power in the tragic world is a moral order.

## **Study Questions**

### **Preface to Shakespeare**

1. What are the merits of Shakespeare?
2. What are the demerits of Shakespeare?
3. Explain the justification for Shakespeare's violation of three unities.

### **Shakespearean Tragedy**

1. Discuss the views of A.C. Bradley on tragic flaw.
2. Explain how far the tragic hero is responsible for his fall.
3. *Shakespearean Tragedy* is a representative critical work on Shakespeare-Discuss.

## Important Quotations

### Tragedies

#### Hamlet

1. "To be, or not to be:  
that is the question". (Act III, Sc. I).
2. "Neither a borrower nor a lender be;  
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,  
and borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry". (Act I, Sc. III).
3. "There is nothing either good or bad,  
but thinking makes it so" (Act II, Sc. II).
4. "What a piece of work is man! how noble in reason!  
how infinite in faculty! in form and moving how express and admirable!  
in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a god!  
the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals! " (Act II, Sc. II).
5. "Brevity is the soul of wit". (Act II, Scene II).
6. "When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions". (Act IV, Scene V).

#### Macbeth

1. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair". (Act I, Scene I).
2. "Yet do I fear thy nature; It is too full o' the milk of human kindness." (Act I, Scene V).
3. "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood clean from my hand? No, this my hand  
will rather the multitudinous seas incarnadine, making the green one red" (Act II, Sc. II).
4. "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." (Act V, Sc. I).
5. "Out, out, brief candle! Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his  
hour upon the stage and then is heard no more: it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and  
fury, signifying nothing." (Act V, Scene V).

#### Othello

1. "O curse of marriage,  
That we can call these delicate creatures ... ours,  
And not their appetites!" (Act 3 Scene 3)
2. "We cannot all be masters, nor all masters

Cannot be truly follow'd." (Act 1 Scene 1)

3. "She loved me for the dangers I had passed,  
And I loved her that she did pity them." (Act I Scene III)

4. "Unkindness may do much;  
And his unkindness may defeat my life,  
But never taint my love." (Act IV Scene II)

5. Good name in man and woman, dear my lord,  
Is the immediate jewel of their souls:  
Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;  
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;  
But he that filches from me my good name  
Robs me of that which not enriches him  
And makes me poor indeed. (Act III Scene III)

## **Comedies**

### **As you like it**

1. "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" (Act II, Scene VII).

2. "The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be a fool." (Act V, Scene I)

3. "Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold." Act 1. Scene 3

4. "Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything." (Act V, Scene I)

5. "Love is merely a madness, and, I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is that the lunacy is so ordinary that the whippers are in love too. Yet I profess curing it by counsel." (Act III Scene II)

### **The Merchant of Venice**

1. "If you prick us, do we not bleed? if you tickle us, do we not laugh?  
if you poison us, do we not die?  
and if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" (Act III, scene I).

2. "The devil can cite scripture for his purpose". ( Act I, scene III).

3. "But love is blind, and lovers cannot see

The pretty follies that themselves commit." (Act ii. sce. 6. )

4. "Men that hazard all

Do it in hope of fair advantages:

A golden mind stoops not to shows of dross;

I'll then nor give nor hazard aught for lead." (Act II Scene VII)

### **Much ado Nothing**

1. "Everyone can master a grief but he that has it". (Act III, Scene II)

2. "How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping! (Act I Scene I)

3. "Not till God make men of some other metal than earth.

Would it not grieve a woman to be overmastered with a piece of valiant dust?

To make an account of her life to a clod of wayward marl?" (Act II Scene I)

4. "Friendship is constant in all other things

Save in the office and affairs of love:

therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues;

Let every eye negotiate for itself

And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch

Against whose charms faith melteth into blood." (Act II Scene I)

### **History Plays**

#### **Henry IV Part II**

1. "Conscience is but a word that cowards use, devised at first to keep the strong in awe".  
(Act V, Scene III).

2. "The king's name is a tower of strength". Richard III Quote (Act V, Scene III).

Coriolanus

3. "Nature teaches beasts to know their friends". (Act II, Scene I)

4. "O sleep! O gentle sleep!

Nature's soft nurse, how have I frightened thee,

That thou no more wilt weigh mine eyelids down

And steep my senses in forgetfulness?" (Act III Scene I)

5. "I care not; a man can die but once;

we owe God a death." (Act III Scene II)

## **Richard II**

1. "Not all the water in the rough rude sea  
Can wash the balm from an anointed king;  
The breath of worldly men cannot depose  
The deputy elected by the Lord." (Act III Scene II)
2. "I have been studying how I may compare  
This prison where I live unto the world." (Act V Scene V)
3. "Of comfort no man speak:  
Let's talk of graves, of worms, of epitaphs;  
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes  
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth.  
Let's choose executors, and talk of wills." (Act III Scene II)

## **Richard III**

1. "The king's name is a tower of strength." (Act 5 Scene 3)
2. "My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,  
And every tongue brings in a several tale,  
And every tale condemns me for a villain.  
Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree;  
Murder, stern murder in the dir'st degree,  
Throng to the bar, crying all, 'Guilty!, guilty!'" (Act V Scene IV)
3. "Conscience is but a word that cowards use,  
Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe:  
Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.  
March on, join bravely, let us to't pell-mell;  
If not to heaven, then hand in hand to hell." (Act V Scene III)

## **Roman Plays**

### **Julius Caesar**

1. "Danger knows full well that Caesar is more dangerous than he. We are two lions litter'd in one day, and I the elder and more terrible." (Act II Scene II)

2. "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him". (Act III, Scene II).
3. "Et tu, Brute!" (Act III, Scene I).
4. "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more". Quote (Act III, Scene II).
5. "Cowards die many times before their deaths;  
The valiant never taste of death but once.  
Of all the wonders that I yet have heard,  
It seems to me most strange that men should fear;  
Seeing that death, a necessary end,  
Will come when it will come." (Act II, Scene II).
6. "When beggars die, there are no comets seen; the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes." (Act II Scene II)

### **Antony and Cleopatra**

1. "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." (Act II Scene II)
2. "Under a compelling occasion, let women  
die; it were pity to cast them away for nothing,  
though between them and a great cause, they  
should be esteemed nothing." (Act I Scene II)
3. "The most infectious pestilence upon thee!  
. . . Horrible villain! or I'll spurn thine eyes  
Like balls before me; I'll unhair thy head:  
Thou shalt be whipp'd with wire, and stew'd in brine,  
Smarting in lingering pickle." (Act II Scene V)

### **Coriolanus**

1. "Nature teaches beasts to know their friends." (Act 2 Scene 1)
2. "Would you have me  
False to my nature? Rather say I play  
The man I am." (Act III Scene II)
3. "Anger's my meat; I sup upon myself, and so shall starve with feeding." (Act IV Scene II)

4. "O, a kiss long as my exile, sweet as my revenge!" ( Act V Scene III)
5. "What is a city, but the people; true the people are the city." (Act III Scene I)

### **Books for Further Study**

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