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KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017

SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 3: ENGLISH DRAMA: ELIZABETHAN TO RESTORATION

BLOCK 2: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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REFERENCES : For All Units

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May, 2017

ISBN : 978-81-934003-2-6

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Printed and published by Registrar on behalf of the Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University.

Headquarters: Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017
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The University acknowledges with strength the financial support provided by the Distance Education Bureau, UGC for preparation of this material.

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BLOCK INTRODUCTION

[Adopted from Encyclopaedia of British Writers 16th and 17th Century, edited by Hager Alan, New York: Facts On File, Inc.]

Block 2 of Course 3 deals with William Shakespeare and his plays. He is one of the few Renaissance playwrights to write both successful comedies and tragedies. Unlike his comedies, tragedies are more difficult to define, but are usually easily identified, in that they tell the story of a single character's downfall. They concentrate on an essentially good, yet importantly flawed, person to invite the audience to identify with his or her troubles (a classic Shakespearean example of this is *Hamlet*). Modern critics usually divide his plays into tragedies, comedies, and histories. Sometimes these same critics refer to Shakespeare's "romances" and "problem plays," which are works that combine elements of all three genres. Other dramatists tried their hand at both genres but were generally successful in only one of them. Ben Jonson, for example, is known for comic masterpieces like *Volpone* (1606), but when he turned his attention to tragedy, he produced stilted failures like *Sejanus* (1603). Shakespeare not only wrote successful comedies and tragedies, he also helped redefine each of these categories. "From first to last each play of Shakespeare's," the scholar Derek Traversi observes, "represents not only a development from what has gone before, but a new beginning, a fresh attack on problems involved in the very decision to write a particular kind of play." In *The Tragedy of Richard III* (1592–93), for instance, Shakespeare restructures actual events of English history so as to create a history play that follows a simpler story. He presents key episodes of Richard's reign in a more digestible form. This practice was not unique to Shakespeare, as the history play as a dramatic form was in fact gaining popularity by the year. It can, however, be said that Shakespeare was a key contributor to this movement in the culture and tradition of English drama.

Block 2 William Shakespeare comprises six units, which are as the following:

Unit 6 William Shakespeare: Life and Works, which is the first unit of the Block, is dedicated entirely to the life and works of Shakespeare. The dramatic genius of William Shakespeare gave a new orientation to the practice of drama in the Elizabethan period. There is perhaps no area of human concern that has not been explored and creatively exploited in the plays by Shakespeare. This unit shall act as the Introduction to the plays that shall be discussed in the following units of this Block.

Unit 7 & 8 William Shakespeare: *King Lear* (Part I & II) deal with a discussion of Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear,* the other three great being *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Macbeth. King Lear* is based on the individual tragedies of Lear himself and his three daughters, and on the tragic dimension of the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons. From these units, the learners will get to acknowledge that one of the

basic philosophical formulations by William Shakespeare was that pain and suffering are inseparable parts in human life.

Unit 9 provides an intense discussion of one of Shakespeare' finest comedies—*Twelfth Night* an important play in the development of Shakespeare's dramatic art. You will soon realise that the play *Twelfth Night* celebrates the triumph of love, and yet it is distinguished by a troubling undertone of melancholy, which suggests the playwright's tendency to enter into the deeper realms of the human psyche.

Units 10 & 11 *The Tempest* (Part I & II) deal with William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* which is the fourth, final, and the finest of Shakespeare's late romances. It is a complex work whose original plot structure serves to draw attention to wider aesthetic and philosophical themes. King Alonso of Naples and his entourage sail home after attending his daughter's wedding in Tunis, Africa. They encounter a violent storm, or tempest. The ship in which they are sailing is wrecked, and the crew are washed ashore on a strange island inhabited by the magician Prospero who has deliberately conjured up the storm and who happens to be the banished Duke of Milan. As the learners finish reading the unit, they get to know that Prospero is the rightful Duke of Milan, and that the course of events in between his banishment and regaining of Dukedom at the end of the play constitutes the plot of this great play called *The Tempest*.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READING" list, which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know, the world of literature is too big and so we advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you should read the original texts of the writers as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 6: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 William Shakespeare: Life and Works

6.4 A Quick View at Shakespeare's Tragedies

6.5 Critical Reception of Shakespeare

6.6 Let us Sum up

3.7 Further Reading

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.9 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- discuss briefly the life and works of Shakespeare
- make a quick survey of the kind of plays and poetry written by the bard
- explain the causes behind Shakespeare's unprecedented popularity as an English playwright
- provide a critical reception of Shakespeare

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the Block, which is dedicated entirely to Shakespeare, and a few of his plays. There cannot be an iota of doubt that the world is yet to produce a playwright with the kind of overwhelming greatness and influence of Shakespeare. There is perhaps no area of human concern that has not been explored and creatively exploited in his plays. Goethe best describes the influence of Shakespeare on him when he says: "I do not remember that any book or person or event in my life ever made so great an impression upon me as the plays of Shakespeare." In fact, his appeal is so universal that we can safely conclude with Ben Jonson that

"He was not of an age, but for all time!" In what follows, you will be able to learn about the life and works of Shakespeare in detail, which shall further help you to discuss the prescribed plays of Shakespeare in the following units in a more meaningful way.

6.3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: LIFE AND WORKS



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

Although birth and death dates were not recorded in Shakespeare's time, the churches did record baptisms and burials, usually a few days after the actual event. According to the records of Holy Trinity Church, the Parish Church of Stratford, infant William was baptised on April 26, 1564. As it was usually the custom to baptise children on the third day after birth, it is generally accepted that Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564. Moreover, it is also evident from the inscription upon his monument that on April 23, 1616, he had already begun his fifty-third year. While his father, John Shakespeare was a farmer's son from a village close to Stratford called Snitterfield, his mother Mary Arden was the daughter of a prosperous farmer who descended from an old Warwickshire family of mixed Anglo-Saxon and Norman blood. Being the youngest daughter of the family, she inherited much of her father's landowning and farming estate when he died. John was by occupation a dealer in agricultural commodities. He also served the Stratford government in various capacities as a member of the Council, Chamberlain, Alderman and finally high Bailiff, which is the equivalent of town mayor. The family lived in Henley Street, Stratford, with John having earned for himself both fortune and fame. However, around 1577, when William was in his early teens, his father's fortunes began to decrease due to growing debt. Although his fortunes and respect were restored, several years of debt and lawsuits proved terribly distressing for the family. This also explains the reason why William could not proceed for university education of any kind. Not much is known about the education of William Shakespeare except that he attended the free grammar school at Stratford

where he learnt his Latin and Classical Greek. It is also not known as to how long he attended the school. However, the Grammar school proved to be of immense benefit to Shakespeare. For not only did it mark the beginning of his career but, almost everything he seemed to have mastered was learnt by him there. However, he had to leave the Grammar School when he was about fourteen years old to extend financial support to the family. Yet what occupation he pursued exactly for the next couple of years is a matter of conjecture. It is alleged on the basis of evidence available in his plays that he served as a country schoolmaster and a lawyer's clerk.



Chamberlain: An official who used to look after the home and servants of a king, queen or an important family in the past.

His Works:

However, it is generally accepted that Shakespeare arrived in London around 1588 and began to establish himself as an actor and playwright. He emerged successful as a playwright quite early and even aroused the jealousy of as reputed and established a playwright as Robert Greene, who termed him, "...an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers…" in a pamphlet called "A Groat's Worth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance" in 1592. In any case, Shakespeare's career began to flourish and several of his plays were performed by an acting company called PEMBROKE'S MEN for whom perhaps he also acted. Shakespeare also acted for various other acting companies like ADMIRAL'S MEN, DERBY'S MEN', LEICESTER'S MEN, but the company he was most closely associated with was the Chamberlain's Men (known as KING'S MEN after the accession of King James I in 1603).

The years 1594-1599 however turned out to be most productive for him. For not only did he produce a fairly large number of successful plays and some of his best poems, including his *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece* in 1599, he also became part owner of the most prestigious public playhouse in London, the Globe. Subsequently, Chamberlain's Men became the most popular acting company in London, being invited to perform at court far more often than any other group. Shakespeare himself must have done a great deal of acting. Indeed, he became so popular that he had his plays published and sold in octavo editions, or "penny-copies" to the more literate section of his audiences. Perhaps, Shakespeare's last work before

he retired was *The Tempest*, possibly based on the disappearance of an English ship in 1609. It was believed that the shipwreck had killed all on board but strangely enough, all the sailors returned home after a year.

Yet his success and popularity notwithstanding, Shakespeare decided to settle for the comfortable life of a country gentleman and around the year 1611, he left London for his permanent retirement to Stratford, leaving aside his dramatic career. However, he did not live for long, and five years after his retirement to Stratford, he died on his birthday, April 23, 1616. He was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church on April 25, 1616.



1. Ann Hathaway whom Shakespeare married in 1582 was eight years older than her husband.
2. On June 29, 1613 the Globe Theatre was burned down by a canon fire during a performance of *Henry VIII*. It was, however, rebuilt within a year by a carpenter named Peter Rose.

The great body of work constituting Shakespeare's legacy is indeed so vast that it is not likely to be matched by any other writer of any civilization, in the past, present or future. Both his poems and plays continue to inspire and influence generations with a degree of awe and charm that makes him a truly universal figure for all times. As has been stated already, Shakespeare authored 37 plays, 154 sonnets and 2 long poems, "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece".

Shakespeare's **tragedies**, about **ten** in number, were mostly inspired by his reading of *Lives* by Plutarch, the Greek historian and essayist and *Chronicles* of Raphael Holinshed. Some of these plays, again, were reworking of previous stories based on English or Roman history. Similarly, the Histories, a genre, presumably created by the Bard himself are an attempt to dramatise the lives, the rule and times of English Kings from King John to Henry VIII. His **comedies**, about **seventeen** in number, are often divided into subclasses like 'early comedies', 'middle comedies', 'problem plays', 'dark comedies', 'romances', etc. reflecting – the playwright's development with the passage of time. While the early comedies at times betray his inexperience, his later comedies, accompanied by serious intent, show a mastery unequalled by any of his contemporaries.

Coming to his one hundred and fifty four sonnets, it is seen that the first 126 sonnets are addressed to a young man, and the rest to a dark lady. Of course, the identity of "Mr W.H", the young man to whom the sonnets are dedicated is also debatable. For, if "W.H.", for most scholars, stands for the initials of William Herbert, the third earl of Pembroke, there are others

who would have us believe that the letters could be a reversal of Henry Wrothesly's initials. However, whatever be the private motivation that had gone into the making of the sonnets, there can be no doubt that the sonnets give us the impression of being the product of a mind with extraordinary poetic sensibility and calibre.

Now let us have a discussion on Shakespeare's works in more detail. As the stage was well set, William Shakespeare made grand entry, perhaps for the best ever. He raised the English drama to a height of envy and grandeur. Having penned down thirty-seven (37) plays spanning over a period of some twenty-four years of his writing career, Shakespeare proved his acumen as a dramatist par excellence, and became an institution himself. Any serious consideration into his writing would bring out the fact that he started his career with history plays trumpeting the glory of the nation and unconditional praise for the dynasty. As his plays were intended for performance, and not for publication, he always sought to cater to the taste of people. Taking a close look at the growing nationalist sentiment that owed much to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 or exploration of new geographical locations along English ethos and cultural ambience under the stewardship of Richard Hakluyt, Sir Francis Drake or Sir Walter Raleigh, he framed his ideas conforming to this and wrote plays accordingly. However, writing down the history plays, he was more concerned with examining the historical personalities with their virtues and vices. His hidden agenda was to bring those personalities within the reach of common people. The strategy made the characters more lively and vibrant. Of course, the Renaissance ideal of concentrating on the life of an individual had its role in this regard too. The idea in his history plays is not that of hero-worship, rather of humanising and examining a hero or monarch.

In course of time, Shakespeare broadened his horizon, and serious consideration into human life oriented his writing mechanism. As opposed to the early plays in connection with their being light and fanciful, most of the plays produced in this phase are more insightful and powerful. The strength he showed in characterisation and treatment of subject matter opened up a new chapter in the English drama. All the plays including *Richard*

III, King John, The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, to mention a few, document Shakespeare as a mature artist whose light-heartedness as noticed in his early dramatic pursuits dried out and made room for the more serious and realistic formulations. With this, he gave vent to personal sorrow and philosophical contemplation in the plays. As he experienced the worst, with his son and father dying, and friend deserting, his pen sketched the most vibrant plays that were highly accepted by the public. The period seemed to be a real beauty since everything was viewed through the lens of a shrewd eye that strove to find out the mystery of evil and sorrow affecting human life.

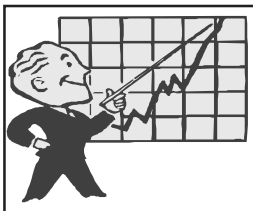
Given tragic dimension as an inseparable part of life, his plays, mostly tragedies, seek to unfold the root cause as it impinges untold suffering on human beings. Keeping this in view, his *Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra,* among others, are incredible editions to his creative genius. However, despite the darker side to these plays, there is something positive, bright, not completely missing. Of course, the overdose of tragic elements affects the good and noble, often in infinite measure. However, the ultimatum is not of the evil and bad. Another significant proposition in Shakespeare's endeavour at unveiling the mystery of evil and bad is that the king, traditionally accorded the closest position to God, could be an embodiment of evil as well. The proposition seems dangerous since it raises possibility of removing and replacing the king or the ruler and taking hold of the position by other agency. This is a recurring theme in most of his plays such as *Richard III, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth,* and *Coriolanus.* Moreover, love, ambition, power, death, authority are some of the abstracts that have great role to play in bringing out the evil and bad affecting all concerned.

Giving a vent to the personal experience that Shakespeare had, especially at a time conditioned largely by Senecan influence, he appeared at his level best in this distinctive form. Under Seneca's wide-ranging impact, he seemed to have found out a new dimension to the tragic downfall of people and orchestrated his writing in consonant with such an approach. Of course, Thomas Kyd's faithful adherence to the Senecan heritage equally

fabricated Shakespeare's concept of tragedy with no less vigour and enthusiasm. In addition, Aristotle's *Poetics*, heavily drawn upon theorising the drama, most strikingly tragedy, was equally elemental to the formation of Shakespeare's powerful concept of tragedy. Although he did not follow Aristotle wholeheartedly as he frequently diverted from the Classical Unities of Time, Place and Action in his plays, most of the basic observations by the Greek genius found an easy access to his writing skill.

As a faithful heir to the revenge tradition of Seneca, Shakespeare's early tragedies including *Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar,* and *Hamlet* are accomplished works in this direction. What Shakespeare concentrated upon was the tragic downfall of protagonists, a development that unfailingly owed to terrible weakness or error of judgment on the part of the sufferers. Its effect is so strong that the sufferers can do nothing substantial, but to endure and face the consequences. In the eye of Shakespeare, individuals are primarily responsible for their downfall. They are the real architects of the seemingly all powerful 'Destiny'. The Renaissance ideal of an individual being the central factor of everything seemed to have come out handy for Shakespeare in analysing the cause and effect of suffering or tragic overtones in one's life. Although the good and evil carry out their presence in his plays, particularly in tragedies, it is the evil that has been worthily punished. The evil cannot go scot free, but the good and noble also get punishment in the process. At the site of the good being punished or receiving pain at the hands of the evil, readers are moved. Indeed, destruction of the good seems to be a design framed by the dramatist perhaps with a view to inculcating the touch of tragedy in the creations.

Thus, you have seen that was Shakespeare the English poet, playwright and actor is regarded as one of the greatest writers in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is also known as England's National Poet and the "Bard of Avon." His plays have been translated into every major existing language and are performed more often than those of any other playwrights.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What did Robert Greene call Shakespeare?

Q2: Name the important sources utilised by Shakespeare for his tragedies?

Q 3: How do Shakespeare's history plays connect with Renaissance Individualism?

Q 4: How come Shakespeare could have a powerful concept of tragedy?

6.4 A QUICK VIEW AT SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES

In this section, we shall have a look at the three tragedies other than *King Lear*.

You should note that all his tragedies such as *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear,* and *Macbeth* seem to be experimental in nature since Shakespeare took up pains at analysing the tragic dimension in life from various standpoints. For instance, his major work, *Hamlet* (1600-01), belonged as it is to revenge tradition, draws upon the principle that one's procrastination or frequent postponement of action leads to complicacy, often tragic downfall as well. If someone does not have the urge to do something, there is no question of experiencing the ebb and flow in life. However, it does not hold good to a person who wants to do something substantial, and fails to accomplish the design in due course of time. Hamlet's prime objective of taking revenge upon his uncle, Claudius gets delayed with the former searching for sound opportunity that is appropriate to the action. As the intensity of avenging the guilt of his uncle is delayed, he turns out more restless and fails to continue life as usual. The misdeeds of Claudius, viz. murdering Hamlet's father and marrying his mother, weigh so high on his psyche that he loses the sanity of mind and goes almost mad. Of course, his madness is feigned to some extent since it is in this guise that he would like to hide his real intention from others, especially Claudius. However, Claudius is not utterly convinced by Hamlet's affectation, and he finds him as a real threat and uses Laertes to kill him. Here Claudius' stance could be

viewed as a typical Renaissance ideal that remains ever ready to do anything to overpower any possible threat. As the society is replete with cruelty, hypocrisy, betrayal, and other inhuman qualities, Hamlet's idealised world is shattered, and he finds it hard to take anybody into confidence. Even Horatio, his most trusted friend fails to uphold friendliness with him. This relates to the breakdown of ethos in the set up Hamlet is placed upon. However, all this could be overcome if someone does have the strength of mind and character, and takes up prompt action when required. This is something quite missing from Hamlet, who is more considerate towards perception, rather than action. For this, he faces the punishment, though successful in taking revenge upon Claudius. The evil is punished, but the good is not left unhurt. Another important thing to be noticed in the play is that a person of action is the need of time, and that is what Shakespeare has done with Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, making the King of Denmark.

With the success scaling through *Hamlet*, Shakespeare proceeded towards *Othello* (1603-04) as a sequence to the revenge tradition. If Hamlet's tragedy occurs primarily because of his speculative and procrastinating mind set, that of Othello and Desdemona is materialised by a sexual trickery hatched by Iago. Here Othello's weakness is that he fails utterly to comprehend Iago's villainy, and acts under the pall of jealousy and brutality. As he is a Moor, he justifies his position by appearing as an inexperienced and self-distrustful person. Although Iago appears as a true 'Machiavellian' villain, a development gaining momentum in the Renaissance, he cuts himself as resolute and firm character, a person of action. The illicit love relationship between Desdemona and Cassio, falsely implicated as it has been, showcases Iago's powerful, indeed successful, manipulation of situation to his use and interest. However, all this might not have yielded the result as such, provided Othello had acted sense and logic. He is more at the emotional level, and acts accordingly. It is true that his emotional act unfailingly costs much damage in the play, but it also points out the intensity of love he possesses for Desdemona. Here she turns out a victim since she hardly knows the complicacy of action, but ironically gets punishment in the war between Iago and Othello. Her innocence is rewarded with a

punishment, and that is so because of two male characters. Hence, a question mark could be raised about the treatment meted out to a woman in the vortex of an Iago-dominated condition. However, this could not be taken as an ultimate and well-acceptable dimension considering Iago's rage and his single-minded work plan to destroy Othello at any cost. It does not matter whether there is Desdemona or any other person in that position. His sole motif is to bring an end to Othello, and there is no second thought to this.

With *Macbeth* (1606), Shakespeare achieved the milestone he intended in the field of tragedy. It was none other than T.S. Eliot, who viewed the play as the highest feat of artistic excellence. Both form and content have been so dexterously accomplished that the play could be a real eye-opener for any writer aspiring for the best ever. Although Eliot did have a hidden agenda in his criticism, viz. to justify his theory of "Objective Correlative", Shakespeare's mastery in the play may not be ruled out. Here the dramatist deals with the greed of power, and how it leads to destruction and loss of peace in life. As in *Hamlet,* Shakespeare's *Macbeth* also introduces supernatural elements acting inseparably in the life of people. Perhaps Shakespeare was considerate towards the interest of King James I in witchcraft and of the people. Whatever it may be, the witches and the prophecy they make do have a far-reaching impact on the course of action that Macbeth pursues. Having learnt that Macbeth would be the king, Lady Macbeth becomes more ambitious and persuades him to accomplish the mission at any cost. It is true that King Duncan's murder has paved the way for Macbeth, but the act equally brings into effect the loss of refreshment and renewal in life. The sense of guilt is so strong that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth could hardly make themselves free of. As such the utterance—"What, will these hands ne'er be clean"- by Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene displays the mental agony and prick of conscience they are passing through. The most striking feature in the play is that readers hardly keep the villainy of Macbeth and her ambitious wife; rather they maintain a sympathetic attitude towards them. Their agony and loss of sanity of the mind act as an emotional bond with the readers. Perhaps their repentance gives rise to

forgiveness for others and it defies the tag of the malcontent. Besides, Macbeth's misdeeds are the result of his ignorance and an unexamined ambition. If Othello's tragic downfall owes to his innocence Macbeth has to do with his ignorance.

6.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SHAKESPEARE

[adapted from Wikipedia]

During his lifetime, Shakespeare was rated as one among many talented playwrights and poets. However, since the late 17th century, was considered the supreme playwright and poet of the English language. Till date, no other dramatist has been performed so often on the world stage as Shakespeare. Besides, the plays have often been being adapted in performance. So great was his influence that during the 18th and 19th centuries, to be a star on the British stage was synonymous with being a great Shakespearean actor. Then, the emphasis was placed on the soliloquies as declamatory turns at the expense of pace and action, and Shakespeare's plays seemed in peril of disappearing beneath the added music, scenery, and special effects produced by thunder, lightning, and wave machines. Editors and critics of the plays, disdaining the showiness and melodrama of Shakespearean stage representation, began to focus on Shakespeare as a dramatic poet, to be studied on the printed page rather than in the theatre.

The rift between Shakespeare on the stage and Shakespeare on the page was at its widest in the early 19th century, at a time when both forms of Shakespeare were hitting peaks of fame and popularity. Theatrical Shakespeare was successful due to spectacle and melodrama for the masses, while book or closet drama Shakespeare was being elevated by the reverential commentary of the Romantics into unique poetic genius, prophet, and bard. Before the Romantics, Shakespeare was simply the most admired of all dramatic poets, especially for his insight into human nature and his realism, but Romantic critics such as Coleridge made him an object of almost religious adoration, Bernard Shaw later coining the term "bardolatry" to describe it. These critics regarded Shakespeare as

towering above other writers, and regarding his plays not as “merely great works of art” but as “phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers” and “with entire submission of our own faculties” as mentioned by Thomas De Quincy. To the later 19th century, Shakespeare became in addition an emblem of national pride, the crown jewel of English culture.



6.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that the world is yet to produce a playwright with the kind of overwhelming greatness and influence of Shakespeare, which is mainly because there is perhaps no area of human concern that has not been explored and creatively exploited in his plays. Shakespeare authored thirty-seven plays, one hundred and fifty four sonnets and two long poems, “Venus and Adonis” and “The Rape of Lucrece”. Shakespeare’s tragedies were mostly inspired by his reading of *Lives* by Plutarch, and *Chronicles* of Raphael Holinshed. Some of these plays, again, were reworking of previous stories based on English or Roman history. Similarly, his History Plays dramatise the lives, the rule and times of English Kings from King John to Henry VIII. His comedies reflect the playwright’s development with the passage of time. It is expected that your knowledge about the life and works as well as the critical reception of Shakespeare shall help you to read the following units more engagingly.



6.7 FURTHER READING

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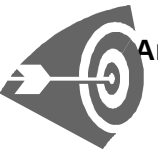
Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_reputation

6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Robert Greene in a pamphlet called "A Groat's Worth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance" termed Shakespeare as "...an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers…"

Ans to Q No 2: Shakespeare's tragedies, were mostly inspired by his reading of *Lives* by Plutarch, the Greek historian and essayist, and *Chronicles* of Raphael Holinshed… …some of these plays, again, were reworking of previous stories based on English or Roman history.



Ans to Q No 3: His history plays examines the historical personalities with their virtues and vices… … the hidden agenda was to bring those personalities within the reach of common people… …the Renaissance ideal of concentrating on the life of an individual had its role in this regard too… …the idea was not to hero-worship, but rather to humanise and examine the hero or monarch.

Ans to Q No 4: his personal experience was conditioned largely by Senecan influence… …he seemed to have found out a new dimension to the tragic downfall of people… …Thomas Kyd's adherence to the Senecan heritage further fabricated Shakespeare's concept of tragedy… …influence of Aristotle's *Poetics.*



6.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q.1: Write a comprehensive note on the development of drama and the shift the distinctive genre experienced in the preceding decades of the University Wits.

Q.2: How did the University Wits provide the platform for William Shakespeare? Assess the contribution by the University Wits.

Q.3: Do you consider William Shakespeare as one of the greatest dramatists in English literature? Give a reasoned answer.

Q.4: How did William Shakespeare come into terms with the blessings of the Renaissance? Write a note in the light of his four greatest tragedies he wrote in the last phase of his literary career.

Q.5: Write a note on Shakespeare's dramatic achievements with special references to the four of his greatest tragedies. What were the influences he made maximum use of in his pursuit of writing tragedy?

Q.6: While unveiling the mystery of evil and bad, Shakespeare implies that even the king, traditionally accorded the closest position to God, could be an embodiment of evil as well. Discuss.

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UNIT 7: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *KING LEAR* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Sources of the Play King Lear

7.4 Act-wise Summary of the Play

7.5 Critical Reception of Shakespeare's *King Lear*

7.6 Let us Sum up

7.7 Further Reading

7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

7.9 Possible Questions

7.1 OBJECTIVES

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

- have information about the sources of *King Lear*
- make a summary of the play *King Lear*
- write about the critical reception of the play
- appreciate *King Lear* as one of the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare

7.2 INTRODUCTION

Any discussion on *King Lear* remains incomplete unless consideration is accorded to the dramatic genius of William Shakespeare, who gave a new orientation to the practice of drama in the Elizabethan period. Although studying a text warrants the least consideration into its author's life and achievement, what is intended is to look at the different stages in his dramatic career that help us understand the context affecting his writing. As there is no denying the fact that *King Lear* is one of the four greatest tragedies, the other three being *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Macbeth,* written in the last phase of his illustrious career, Shakespeare also used his pen at comedy, tragicomedy and sonnet writing with an élan that was simply unprecedented. His genius apart, the stage was all conducive to an

artist directed towards excellence and novelty of expression. Of course, it is worth mentioning that the said stage did not come overnight, rather it equally owed to the alluvia left out by the dramatic performance in the medieval period and incredible works by the *University Wits*. In this unit, you will get an opportunity to read about the play in general as well as its sources.

7.3 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *KING LEAR*

William Shakespeare's *King Lear* takes recourse to a number of sources. This substantiates the view that he never lost originality of perception and novelty of exposition in his dramatic pursuits. Indeed, bearing an open eye on different sources and materials points out to his insightful approach that hardly allowed things go scot-free without considering their value judgment.

Of the available sources making their way to *King Lear*, the foremost was an old chronicle play by the name of *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, published in 1605. Although the play was of unknown authorship, it seemed to have lasting impression upon the public, and that was what Shakespeare wanted to give vent to, in fact with modifications. It is true that he deviated from the source at certain points, but remained a meticulous follower throughout. Going by the chronicle play, he introduced Leir, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella as Lear, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. With these major characters, he introduced the main plot. As both the plays open, we see King Leir and King Lear dividing the kingdom, indeed in different context. King Leir divided with a view to getting deserving suitors for his unmarried daughters. But, King Lear divides among daughters, already married, so that he could continue the rest of his life without under much compulsion. What strikes the most is the same attitude maintained by Cordella and Cordelia, viz. utter reluctance at flattery, which the rest of the daughters adopt as a powerful weapon to earn the maximum of their father's estate. Although King Leir does not banish Cordella, she is deprived of her due part. However, Shakespeare's King Lear banishes Cordelia and the banishment leaves Goneril and Regan at a free run to execute their evil plans. In contrast to Lear's madness and his tragic downfall leading to his

death and daughter Cordelia, King Leir is restored to the throne by the Gallian King and he lives happily for the rest of life. There is no question of Cordella's death, be it in the form of murder or suicide. As Perillus has been there to accompany King Leir, Shakespeare has Kent devoted whole-heartedly to King Lear even after his banishment from the kingdom.

The digressions Shakespeare makes in *King Lear* are the real markers to the novelty of approach as made to the source. Complete parallelism and affinity between the source and the play by Shakespeare would have raised big question mark on the playwright's power and originality for which he is well known worldwide. Moreover, another significant addition by Shakespeare is the introduction of the sub-plot comprising Gloucester and his legitimate son, Edgar, and illegitimate Edmund. Given the dexterous amalgamation between the main plot and the sub-plot, and their reciprocal position, Shakespeare seems to have gone a step farther than the source he has made use of.

Another important source of *King Lear* is, undoubtedly, Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577) that has been largely used in Shakespeare's other works such as *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline.* Like Holinshed's account, the opening scene in *King Lear* remains the same with the father dividing the kingdom. However, the division carries difference since Leir divides the kingdom into two distinct parts with one half being given to the two elder daughters and the other half reserving for himself. The youngest Cordeilla receives nothing. Coming close to this, Shakespeare prepares King Lear dividing the kingdom into three parts with a view to giving them to each of the three daughters. Consequently, he gives them all to Goneril and Regan because of disinterested attitude of Cordelia, keeping 'nothing' for Lear himself. As Leir, going by Holinshed's account, restores a part of the kingdom for himself, both his daughters, Gonorilla and Ragan wage war and deprive him of the individual part. Being deprived, Leir takes refuge with Cordeilla in France and succeeds in defeating the elder daughters with the help of the French army. Restored as he has been, Leir reigns for two years, this does not stand with conformity to *King Lear* in which Lear goes mad and dies on the bosom of Cordelia. Besides, in contrast to Cordelia being hanged following

the order of Goneril and Edmund, Holinshed's account shows Cordeilla succeeding father to the throne that has come to a fatal end with the two nephews revolting against and taking her as prisoner, and she breathes her last in the prison.

Apart from all this, Shakespeare's *King Lear* also draws upon Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* especially in the depiction of the Fool and Cordelia's death. Despite Spenser's account of Cordelia's death, a case of suicide, appearing as a contrast to that of Shakespeare, what establishes a fine rapport between the two is the instance of death as an ultimatum. Since Cordelia's death occurs out of the stage, the element of doubt is not missing altogether. As such, in spite of the information that she has been hanged, nobody could be sure hundred percent in this regard. And the last, but not least, the sub-plot in *King Lear*, though a decent and effective creation by Shakespeare, seems to have taken clue from Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, albeit with some modifications.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Trace some of the important sources of the play *King Lear*?

7.4 ACT-WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

William Shakespeare's *King Lear* consists of five Acts, with each Act having a number of Scenes. All the Acts are closely knit facilitating the five major stages in plot construction customarily followed in the Elizabethan age. As followed in the period, the exposition or introduction, the complication or rising action, the climax or turning point, the resolution or falling action, and the catastrophe have been well accomplished in the five Acts included in the play.

Act I

Scene i.

The first scene is very significant since it is inseparably related to the rising action, and the ground is well set for further action. With exception

to Edgar and the Fool, all the major characters are introduced, and the main and sub-plots with their possible interaction have been hinted. However, the most important episode comes up when Lear decides to divide the kingdom among three daughters by the name of Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia, provided how much they could show love for father in words. As Goneril and Regan speak in the superlative, Cordelia simply declines saying that she loves father as the bond permits, neither too much nor too less. "Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave/My heart into my mouth: I love your Majesty/According to my bond- no more nor less." At this, Lear gets enraged and disinherits her from the part that is due to her. Like Cordelia, Lear's faithful ally, the Earl of Kent is also banished when he tries to remind the king of the lack of far-sightedness in the decision.

Scene ii.

Here the sub-plot centering the Earl of Gloucester and his legitimate Edgar, and illegitimate Edmund, begins with Edmund's long soliloquy. He appears a determined fellow who would like to follow his villainy by persuading Gloucester with a forged letter. Going by the letter, he informs Gloucester of the conspiracy hatched by Edgar to kill him and take hold of the property. The scene also introduces Edgar in person, but in a different mood. His open-mindedness simply defies the image as presented to Gloucester by Edmund, and it, on the contrary, proves the villainous nature of Edmund quite convincingly.

Scene iii.

Lear's eldest daughter, Goneril expresses her ease at enjoying authority, and her conversation with Oswald, her steward, reveals the attitude towards Lear. She is so blind having got an authoritarian position that the bond between father and daughter is completely shattered. She does not mind ordering Oswald to behave cold with Lear. Even the knights attending him are expected by Goneril to go against his interest.

Scene iv.

Being faithful, Kent re-appears in disguise and intends to serve Lear for the rest of his life. As Kent has been in faith and service for Lear, Goneril's steward Oswald presents himself as a contrasting personality, largely

because of Goneril's instigation. As such, Oswald behaves cold with Lear. The scene bears special significance with the entry of the Fool, who acts the chorus or stands for the conscience of Lear throughout the play. Although the Fool is designed for entertaining the public, most often he speaks sense. He is straightforward, and no element of fear distracts him from speaking the needful. Goneril and her husband Albany also appear at the scene showing their distinctive, but different mindset. As Goneril's evil nature is quite distinct, Albany acts the opposite. His disregard at partiality is something that gives much weightage to his personality. He is very candid, saying, "I cannot be so partial, Goneril."

Scene v.

The scene is based on the conversation between Lear and the Fool. Here the Fool foretells the way Lear would be treated by Regan. Like Goneril, Lear's second daughter, Regan would appear cold, and that is what the Fool apprehends at the earliest. The Fool wants Lear well-prepared to confront with the mischievous nature of Regan. However, Lear also repents at the treatment meted out to Cordelia saying, "I did her wrong-."

Act II

Scene i.

A court in the Earl of Gloucester's castle is seen with Edmund and a courtier having a conversation. The courtier is informative since he tells Edmund about the impending battle between the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany. The statement establishes the growing differences between Cornwall and Albany, which are known to most people. However, the most striking feature in the scene is the development of the sub-plot since Edmund succeeds persuading Gloucester against his legitimate son, Edgar. Although categorised as sub-plot, it has its union with the main plot, which has come into reality because of Edmund with all out support from Cornwall, Goneril, and Regan.

Scene ii.

Here Kent's straightforward and courageous nature becomes clear. As Oswald's villainy, owing to Goneril's instigation, is well known, Kent hardly bears with this and he does not mind using foul words to him. Kent is so

enraged that he draws the sword to punish him, but with a little success. The sudden arrival of Edmund and later on of Cornwall, Regan and Gloucester is a kind of rescue for Oswald. Considering Kent's defensive and uncompromising attitude, Cornwall and Regan give order to keep him in stocks. As Gloucester feels sorry for that, Kent tells him that he has learnt the magnitude of misery from Cordelia. He says, "But misery: I know 'tis from Cordelia."

Scene iii.

Edgar makes it public that conspiracy has been hatched to turn him a criminal and an outlaw. He finds himself fortunate since constant vigilance of the guards fails to trace him. As he flees the unjust guards, he takes the resolve to take up the baser form of life. "I will preserve myself; and am bethought/ To take the basest and most poorest shape/ That ever penury, in contempt of man/Brought near to beast;" With this, he would be regarded as a Bedlam beggar with roaring voice. An assumed madness is something that he intends to carry out for the rest of his life.

Scene iv.

Being loyal to Lear throughout his life, Kent informs him of the treatment he gets from Goneril and the servants at the time of delivering the letter. Goneril's indifference is quite worrying for Kent since he hardly bears the sight of humiliation inflicted upon his respected master. At this, the Fool speaks logic reiterating the fact that parents, when economically sound, are the dearest ones for children. However, economic impairment makes them unworthy of love and affection for children. "Fathers that wear rags/ Do make their children blind/ But fathers that bear bags/ Shall see their children kind." The most significant phase gets under way when Lear confronts with Regan, who is no less venomous than Goneril. When Lear informs her of Goneril's rudeness, she defends her sister and asks Lear to entreat her forgiveness. "Therefore I pray you/ That to our sister you do make return/ Say you have wrong'd her." Lear gets angry because he would not like to reduce his image by asking for mercy, hence he appears defiant. A considerable part of the scene draws upon the question of authority, which both Lear and his two daughters, Goneril and Regan are intended to

possess. Interestingly, no one of them likes to give up the claim, and being humiliated, Lear declares, indeed repeatedly, that he will go mad.

Act III

Scene i.

Started in the preceding chapter, the storm still continues with Kent and a gentleman discussing the whereabouts of Lear. The gentleman is informative, and he lets Kent know that Lear is also in the storm accompanied by the Fool. Indeed, Lear wants the storm to blow away all the "fretful" elements from earth since he has been irreparably fed up by the inhuman manners of the daughters. The storm symbolises the turbulent mental condition of Lear. Kent takes the gentlemen into confidence and tells him the possible invasion by France, to which Cordelia is now a queen.

Scene ii.

As the storm continues, Lear and the Fool are seen in another part of the heath. Enraged as he is, Lear is found in support of the inclement weather. "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!/ You cataracts and hurricanes, spout/ Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!" The Fool cracks irony and reminds Lears's helplessness that has largely to do with his over-dependence upon the daughters. Of course, realization comes up with Lear saying, "…here I stand…/ A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man." But he takes the resolve to be patient, and wants to remain a model of endurance. When Kent arrives, Lear becomes more vocal and talks about crime, loss of justice and his utter victimization. "I am a man/ More sinn'd against than sinning."

Scene iii.

Disappointed at the unnatural condition in the kingdom of Britain, Gloucester intends to come of help for Lear. It is in conversation with Edmund that Gloucester expresses his intention. The growing rift between the Duke of Albany and the Duke of Cornwall is also a matter of deep worry since taking this opportunity the country might face challenge from a foreign nation. Giving a clue that the gross injustice meted out to Lear would be avenged in due course, Gloucester seems to have given a warning to those associated with doing misdeeds to Lear. Gloucester's intention of coming to the help of

Lear reduces the gap between the main plot and the sub-plot, and helps each other moving the action of the play. Having learnt Gloucester's interest, Edmund decides to inform the Duke of Cornwall, and also of the letter so that he could earn maximum benefit from his father's estate.

Scene iv.

With his sense of servitude towards Lear, Kent persists him in taking shelter in a safer place so that the ravaging storm cannot do harm. At this, Lear says that his inner turmoil is passing through such a stage in which inclement weather condition or any other natural disaster can hardly have its impact upon him. Indeed, the thought over Goneril and Regan's ill-treatment is eating him like venomous insect. Despite his repeating remarks, traumatic as they are, that he would shun the episode, in reality there is no respite from this. "… let me shun that/ No more of that." The scene turns out more interesting when Edgar enters in guise of a Bedlam beggar affected by madness. Edgar's feigned madness gives an added vent to Lear's real madness. To offer help to Lear, Gloucester also arrives at the place. It is through Gloucester's utterance that Edgar, calling himself Tom, gets to know the game played out by Edmund. That Edgar has been victimised, and made an enemy to his beloved father is something that really hurts him.

Scene v.

The scene, short as it is, draws upon the conversation between Cornwall and Edmund with the latter being declared the Earl of Gloucester. Hence, Edmund's intrigue becomes successful because Cornwall believes that Gloucester has been a faithful ally of France. Cornwall becomes angry and asks Edmund to find out his father for immediate arrest. Edmund also wins to gather much accolade from Cornwall, who assures that all out support would be accorded to him. Cornwall says, "I will lay trust upon thee; and thou shalt find a/ dearer father in my love."

Scene vi.

Lear's mental disorder continues and he holds a mock trial on Goneril and Regan, who have done wrong to him. With the help of Kent, Edgar and the Fool, the trial is sought to inflict punishment on daughters. Lear's vengeance gets a symbolic satisfaction out of the trial. Edgar too is

haunted by invisible fear saying that his enemy always follows him. Of course, he sympathises with Lear, and this is what gives weightage to his personality. Lear's wrath goes to an extent that he wants to dissect the body of Regan and see what foul elements have given such a nasty form and a mind. He says, "Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds/ about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that/ make these hard hearts?" Then Gloucester informs Kent of the danger awaiting Lear. A plot has been hatched to kill him, and that is what Gloucester has overheard. To save Lear, he entreats Kent to go to Dover. With the help of the Fool, Kent manages to escape the possible danger in the life of Lear. When all of them depart, Edgar realises the grief and pain Lear is passing through. As Lear's grief is the result of his daughters' indifference, his is a case because of father misguided by Edmund, and he takes the resolve to unmask everything as time passes on.

Scene vii.

All the mischievous persons such as Cornwall, Regan, Goneril, and Edmund are seen together holding Gloucester as traitor to the country. As the French invasion is imminent, they would like to punish Gloucester since he has been alleged with the charge of being a faithful spy of the French. This is further accentuated, perhaps for the worst, when Oswald informs that Gloucester has led Lear and a few of his close associates to Dover. Following orders, the servants bring Gloucester as a captive. This time both Cornwall and Regan appear very ferocious and the latter tells Gloucester that Edmund has told everything about his treachery. This makes him realise the misunderstanding that has unnecessarily cropped up between him and Edgar. Gloucester's eyes are plucked out by Cornwall with the help of Regan.

Act IV

Scene i.

Edgar is all alone in the heath revealing his thoughts that it is better to be despised openly, rather than to be flattered with no fervour of intimacy. If someone falls upon evil days, the lamentable thing is the change or shift from once happy stage of life. Then Gloucester is led by an old man. He seems to be repentant because of Edmund's deception and expresses his

willingness whether he could meet Edgar. In fact, Gloucester accepts the all-powerful destiny that plays upon human beings as it pleases. “As flies to wanton boys, are we to th’Gods;/ They kill us for their sport.” With his warm regards for father, Edgar helps Gloucester go to Dover, where the latter intends to meet the final phase of his troubled life.

Scene ii.

Goneril and Edmund arrive at the palace of the Duke of Albany thinking that the Duke is not present at the moment. However, Oswald informs them of the Duke’s presence and his disinterestedness in different matters including those of Gloucester’s alleged treachery and Edmund’s ‘faithful’ service to the kingdom. Albany has strong dislike for Goneril, and he observes that she is hardly a human being. She has lost all human qualities for which her image has been reduced considerably. Albany says, “O Goneril!/ You are not worth the dust which the rude wind/ Blows on your face.” Replying to this, Goneril also accuses him of lacking in quality to run administration. In her eye, he is a passive character that remains unmoved by the impending French army. As the debate goes on, a messenger enters and informs them of the death of Cornwall. For Albany, the news has nothing to worry about since it establishes the idea that wrong doers can hardly escape punishment at the court of God. What Albany is worried about is the loss of Gloucester’s eyes. Goneril has mixed response to the news. Although Cornwall’s death has paved the way for her absolute authority, it carries sadness because of Regan becoming a widow.

Scene iii.

Kent gets to know from a gentleman that the King of France has gone back without completing the mission of invading Britain. He has some urgent work to do in the estate. However, he leaves the charge to the Marshal of France at Dover. Then Kent is informed of Cordelia and her reaction to the letter describing the condition of Lear. She gets disheartened, but tries to control her passionate outburst. She holds the sisters responsible for the present stage of her father. In her eye, Goneril and Regan are a curse to humanity and the ladies in particular. Cordelia says, “Sisters! Sisters! Shame of ladies! sisters!” Kent has the apprehension that Lear might not meet

Cordelia, if opportunity arises, because of his sense of guilt towards the deprived daughter.

Scene iv.

The French camp near Dover sees Cordelia giving orders to find out her father immediately. His acute madness is a matter of agony and she entreats the doctor to collect the best of herbs that could redeem his pitiable condition. In the meantime, a messenger tells Cordelia about the approaching British army. To this, she says that the French army is well prepared. But it is because of Cordelia's prayer not to do any harm to her father that the French have retreated. She says, "O dear father!/ It is thy business that I go about;/Therefore great France/ My mourning and importun'd tears hath pitied."

Scene v.

Regan asks Oswald whether the army of the Duke of Albany has started the battle. Oswald responds in the affirmative and talks about Goneril's eagerness for the same, which hardly matches Albany's mental set up. What Regan considers a great mistake is the failure at putting Gloucester to death. She thinks that Edmund might have been distressed and repentant at the present condition of his father. Having known Goneril's letter to be dispatched to Edmund through Oswald, she exposes her utmost desire to get Edmund as life partner. To her, Goneril should not seek Edmund since she has her husband, Albany still alive. Regan says, "My Lord id dead; Edmund and I have talk'd/ And more convenient is he for my hand/Than for your Lady's."

Scene vi.

Gloucester, accompanied by Edgar, is bound for the top most peak at Dover, primary objective being to commit suicide. Betrayal of Edmund, misunderstanding regarding Edgar, the ill-treatment leading to the loss of eyes and his inability to save Lear are indeed some of the causes that do not make his life worth living. However, Edgar does not let him die saying that the holiest gods have saved him. With this, Gloucester gives up the idea of committing suicide and takes the resolve to endure affliction at the best of his capacity. Then Lear enters, still recognising himself as king, and

is found to be haunted by the misdeeds of his daughters. He is straightforward in revealing the effect of nature upon him that has helped find out the real image of every action. “When the rain came to/ wet me once and the wind to make me chatter/ when the thunder would not peace at my bidding/ there I found’em, there I smelt’em out.” Although Lear’s madness is at its extreme point, at times he speaks sense. For instance, he tells Gloucester to see things with ears when blindness affects him. Looking at Lear’s extremity, Gloucester and Edgar feel sorry and they fall short of words in uttering their disturbing feelings. What Lear observes is that human beings take birth in the world of ignorance, and there is hardly any rescue from such a disappointing condition. Lear says, “When we are born, we cry that we are come/ To this great stage of fools.” In the meantime, a gentleman, in company of a few attendants, finds out Lear following the order of Cordelia. That he would be treated like a king is what interests Lear and he runs saying that they would follow him. Oswald attempts at killing Gloucester, but of no result as such. Edgar interferes and kills Oswald in a fight between the two. Then he gets the letter of Goneril relating the plot of killing her husband, Albany. She recognises herself the wife of Edmund in the letter.

Scene vii.

At a tent in the French camp, the union between Lear and Cordelia becomes a reality. With her gratitude, Cordelia thanks Kent in warm words. The way he has devoted his life to the service of Lear is enough to win over Cordelia, which she acknowledges at the earliest. Broken-hearted as she has been, Cordelia mourns the condition of her father, most particularly when he hovered through the storm. The injustice meted out to him by the daughters never lets him stay balanced. All through his madness, the traumatic experience looms large upon him. However, interesting point is that he recognises Cordelia, who has, as Lear maintains, unlike Goneril and Regan, noble cause to despise him. Cordelia’s depravity and subsequent banishment is taken by Lear as hidden cause for which she could appear indifferent to him. Lear says, “I know you do not love me; for your sisters/ Have, as I do remember, done me wrong/You have some cause, they have not/No cause, no cause.”

Act V

Scene i.

Regan has the apprehension that Edmund is really in love with Goneril. As Regan loves him the most and intends to get as life partner, especially because of Cornwall's death, she hardly bears with Edmund ignoring her genuine feeling. In fact, Edmund forbids her to be skeptical since his love for Goneril is inseparably based on honour and respect. With the arrival of Albany and Goneril, discussion gets shifted to impending war and the approaching French army. Paying no heed to individual differences, Goneril entreats everyone to stand united in the wake of war. As all of them, except Albany, depart, Edgar enters and gives Goneril's letter, addressed to Edmund, to Albany. When Edgar goes away, Edmund comes and updates Albany of the situation made accessible by the spies. Edmund is found in a dilemma because of the pall of love he has created upon Goneril and Regan both. The envy that the two sisters have for each other is a matter of worry because it would stand as an impediment to Edmund fulfilling their quest for love. He also thinks of hatching a plot to kill Albany once the war is over.

Scene ii.

As the war goes on, of course out stage, Edgar requests Gloucester to pray for the victory of the side fighting for a noble cause. Gloucester finds it encouraging and wishes the best ever for Edgar. However, after a while, he tells Gloucester about the victory scripted by the British army taking Lear and Cordelia as prisoners. Considering the critical stage, Edgar wants Gloucester to depart. But Gloucester does not like to escape since he wants to die there. At this, Edgar forbids him to think over the negative side of things.

Scene iii.

The victorious British camp near Dover sees Edmund as an absolute authority saying that the fate of Lear and Cordelia depends upon the judgment of great personages. In defence, Cordelia says that she does not mind pain and suffering. What she could hardly bear is the humiliation of her father at the hands of mischievous persons. But the re-union with Cordelia makes Lear bold and strong. Instead of being disheartened, he tells Cordelia that

they would life in prison as most people usually do in day-to-day life. He says, "…so we'll live/And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh/At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues/Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too." Following Edmund's disgust, Lear and Cordelia are taken away under guards. With this, Edmund does not stand still, rather gives secret order to a captain, which has not been made public. When Albany asks Edmund to hand over the prisoners including Lear and Cordelia so that justice could be done, Edmund tells him that they have been detained. Edmund is afraid that people would react against the authority if Lear and Cordelia are found as prisoners. Showing the extreme form of jealousy, Goneril poisons Regan with a view to removing an obstacle to the love of Edmund. With his noble intention, Albany would like to prove Edmund's treachery and hence provokes him for a fight. At that moment, Edgar arrives and fights with Edmund, the sole objective being to punish him for the misdeeds he has done to many people. As Albany presents Goneril's letter, she loses control and departs in despair. Being injured, Edmund undergoes change and confesses his villainy. Edgar reveals his identity and consoles the loss of Gloucester's eyes saying that it is a consequence of bastardy he committed to Edmund. He relates the story as to how he hid himself from the enemy, affected madness, served his father etc. Then a gentleman enters and gives the news of Goneril's suicide. Following the secret order by Edmund, the guard hanged Cordelia, in fact out of the stage, and the dead body is brought into the stage. Grief-stricken, Lear also succumbs to the agony. However, Kent reveals his identity before Lear's death. With the death of so many people, especially his master, Lear, Kent also intends to face the end saying, "I have a journey, sir, shortly to go/My master calls me, I must not say no." At the end of all, Albany seeks the co-operation of Edgar to run the kingdom.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: What is the significance of Act I Scene I?

7.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR*

Shakespeare's *King Lear* has been widely received in the domain of criticism, and various critics have interpreted the play touching upon different aspects. With their critical reading, the critics have opened up new vistas of understanding that come of immense help for the readers. Let us take a look at the reception as made by some critics over the years.

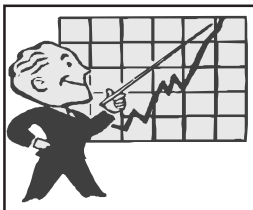
Back in 1810, Charles Lamb made a controversial study on *King Lear* saying that the play is so "painful and disgusting", and much difficulty arises in stage performance. Lear's physical appearance is not important; rather it is his intellectual or mental fabric that holds well throughout the play. "While we read it (play), we see not Lear, but we are Lear, we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms." What Lamb emphasises upon is the unfolding of the mental set up of Lear, and it gains momentum to an extent that simply undoes the physicality in the play. As such, episodes like the storm scene do not carry much significance for the critic. Another significant point missing from the play is the love scene, which is not usual in most of Shakespeare's plays. All the characters that are expected to nurture the feeling of love fail to do so. Instead, they are found directed towards sustaining hidden agenda throughout the play. Moreover, Lamb is equally critical about the unhappy ending of the play since a second thought could have been given to such a development. The way Cordelia leads her life with abject absence of a lover is what Lamb dislikes too. Although she is shown to have got married to the French King, it is not certain whether she has come under the pall of lovemaking.

William Hazlitt was another critic to have put comments on the play. In fact, he was mild in his arguments, and was of high praise for the way Lear showcases passion throughout. While talking about the tragic downfall, Hazlitt finds Lear's uncompromising attachment to "filial piety" as the root cause of all complicacy. To quote Hazlitt, "It is his (Lear) rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates

his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him." Of course, all this inculcates tragic overtone as intended. Hence, Lear appears as a successful character in playing out his part. Like Lear, his daughter Cordelia also has her useful part to play, and both of them accomplish the task. Although Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are categorised as villains and malcontents, they are not similar. The two sisters have great inclination towards the evil for which they would not like to treat Lear well, while Edmund adjourns villainy towards the end, though it is too late. Hazlitt finds it a type of "religious honesty". The importance of the Fool has been considered on the ground of inculcating lighter touch to the otherwise hard pace of action in the play. When the Fool disappears all of a sudden, the feigned madness of Edgar seems to have attained much proliferation. Opposed to the famous storm scene, Hazlitt showers praise upon the moralising scenes with mad Tom, Kent and Gloucester.

In his insightful and in depth study on the famous plays of Shakespeare, A.C. Bradley points out a number of seminal issues embedded in the play. As in other plays, Bradley finds *King Lear* as one of the greatest creations, but not of the standard credited to *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Macbeth.* This is more so for general readers. The play is a great achievement, but not the best as such. As a piece of drama, he finds *King Lear* inferior to *Hamlet.* The tragic dimension in *King Lear* is something that he takes it similar to that of *Othello.* The villainy and mischief of Edmund reminds Bradley of Iago. Like Iago's, Edmund's villainy has done much in the play. Of course, it is the tragic effects of ingratitude that have formed the central point of interest in the play. Although the first scene is strange, Bradley defends the same saying that everything is pre-planned, just the announcement is to be made by Lear. He takes the decision on his own, which showcases his sense of power and authority. His intention to live with his daughters is absurd since he has sufficient energy left to continue the rest of his life. As the unhappy ending of the play has been the subject of interest for the critical world, Bradley makes two different approaches. If we read the text as the specimen of drama, the happy ending is all-imperative. However, in terms of poetic imagination, the happy ending does

not hold good. Compared to plays like *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, the battle shown in *King Lear* is ludicrous. Although the play introduces main plot and sub plot, and the tragic strength of the former has been highlighted by a contrast in the latter, Bradley does not find sub plot dramatic.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: In what ways, has the play *King Lear,* been received?

Q 4: What does A C Bradley has to say about the play *King Lear*?



7.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have come to learn that Shakespeare's *King Lear* is one of his greatest tragedies, the other three being *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Macbeth.* Shakespeare drew upon a number of sources for writing down *King Lear.* But, he approached the sources with novel touch and ingenuity. The summary of the play must have helped you to remember the sequence of events and action right from the beginning till the end. Besides the sequence of events and action, the summary is also helpful to frame some ideas regarding various characters in the play. You have learnt that Shakespeare's *King Lear* comprises two plots—the main plot and the sub plot. The main plot includes Lear, his three daughters namely Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia with a few close associates. The sub plot centres on Gloucester and his two sons, Edgar (legitimate) and Edmund (illegitimate). However, the plots are well juxtaposed and they help each other in continuing the action of the play. In his critical study, Charles Lamb categorises the play as painful and disgusting. The intellectual back up is very strong than the physical appearance. William Hazlitt does not like the famous storm scene. He is in praise of the moralising scenes with Gloucester, Kent, and Tom.



7.7 FURTHER READING

Booth, Stephen. *'King Lear', 'Macbeth', Indefinition, and Tragedy.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth.* London: Macmillan and Co. ; London and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1905.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Lamb, Charles. "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare" (1811) excerpted in *The Romantics on Shakespeare. (ed)* Jonathan Bate. London: Penguin, 1992.

7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: One important source is *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*… …But, Shakespeare deviated from the source at certain points… …going by the chronicle play, he introduced Leir, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella as Lear, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia with some digressions.

Ans to Q No 2: The first scene is very significant since it is inseparably related to the rising action, and the ground is well set for further action. With exception to Edgar and the Fool, all the major characters are introduced, and the main and sub-plots with their possible interaction have been hinted. However, the most important episode comes up when Lear decides to divide the kingdom among three daughters by the name of Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia, provided how much they could show love for father in words.

Ans to Q No 3: Charles Lamb in 1810, said that the play is so "painful and disgusting"… …he was equally critical about the unhappy ending of

the play… …William Hazlitt on the other hand was of high praise for the way Lear showcases passion throughout… …A.C. Bradley found *King Lear* as one of the greatest creations.

Ans to Q No 4: A.C. Bradley found *King Lear* to be one of the greatest creations, but not of the standard credited to his other tragedies… …he found *King Lear* inferior to *Hamlet…* …although the first scene is strange, Bradley defends the same saying that everything is pre-planned, just the announcement is to be made by Lear.



7.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What were the sources Shakespeare made use of in writing down *King Lear*? Do you think that he lost his originality in taking recourse to various sources? Justify your views.

Q 2: Evaluate the use of the main plot and sub plot in *King Lear*. How much do they contribute to the development of the action in the play?

Q 3: How can you situate *King Lear* in the domain of criticism? What are the novel ideas that could be derived from the critical reading made by various critics?

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UNIT 8: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *KING LEAR* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Reading the Play

- 8.3.1 Critical Commentary of the Play
- 8.3.2 Major Themes
- 8.3.3 Major Characters
- 8.3.4 Shakespeare's Art of Characterisation

8.4 Let us sum up

8.5 Further Reading

8.6 Answers to check your progress (Hints Only)

8.7 Possible Questions

8.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- take a close look at *King Lear* as one of his greatest tragedies
- read *King Lear* from various critical viewpoints
- identify the major themes in the play
- make a list of the major characters and explain their roles
- frame some ideas regarding Shakespeare's art of characterisation
- discuss William Shakespeare's great mastery over his works of tragedy

8.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, a discussion has been done on the different aspects of the play *King Lear*. As you know, one of the basic philosophical formulations by William Shakespeare was that pain and suffering are inseparable parts in human life. Suffering has its own way to the life of an individual, and there is no denial of this ever-present reality. For instance, the medieval times

considered suffering as an indomitable element that people could hardly defy. However, the trend got changed in the Elizabethan period, and a positive significance was accorded to suffering in human life. Here, the Roman dramatist, Seneca became instrumental in postulating such a renewed interest in the tragic side of human beings. In the wake of the Renaissance, human life was sought to be analysed in its entirety, viz. both the tragic and comic dimensions. Instead of viewing tragic consequence in one's life as a natural course of action, people would like to discern the causes that affect suffering, and also the impact suffering creates upon human beings. Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605-06) is based on the individual tragedies of Lear himself and his three daughters, and also on the tragic dimension of the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons.

8.3 READING THE PLAY

As Shakespeare wrote his plays for enactment, and primarily for theatre goers, reading the same might not bring out every aspect as intended by the dramatist. There are certain effects that could be produced in stagecraft, not simply through one's reading. However, reading introduces fresh look at the existing issues, while on the other, it may explore the hitherto unexplored issues and themes. In this way, the text is received with renewed interest and focus. Keeping all this in mind, we assume that *King Lear* has been read and re-read across the centuries, each time with novel perspective and different agenda in mind. The following subsections will help you to discuss the different important aspects of the play.

8.3.1 Critical commentary of the play

Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a well thought-out dramatic composition unfolding the tragic consequences the major characters face at different phases of life. Here tragedy seems to be a never-ending phenomenon. Any consideration of the play would unfailingly engage Lear's decision to divide the kingdom among his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. The decision itself is the root cause of all suffering and pain since it does not get materialised

as expected by Lear. His expectation to hear the warmest words from the beloved daughter, Cordelia meets a dead end because of her adamant nature in continuing the bond between a father and a daughter. Although Goneril and Regan show gratitude, which is indeed flattery, Lear does not accord priority because he knows their nature very well. In contrast to them, Cordelia has genuine feeling for him, and Lear wants her to show it in the highest degree. Lear's only fault is that he expects the love of Cordelia in the sublime. When the aspiration fails to get the deserving response, Lear goes into rage, and his subsequent treatment at the hands of Goneril and Regan makes him go mad. Depending on his daughters too much and that is so at an age not ripe for the same, points out to Lear's weakness and his failure of understanding himself. In theoretical parlance, we may recognise the act as "hamartia" or error of judgment, which Aristotle aptly described as one of the root causes of one's tragic downfall.

Although Lear's decision to divide the kingdom seems to be hasty, there are certain critics including S.T. Coleridge who find the act as the offshoot of pre-conceived idea. Lear might have thought about the decision much in advance since taking such a momentous decision does not come overnight, especially from a person holding a serious position. As Lear's decision lacks far-sightedness and it does not stand in accordance with the demand of time. He would not like to give a second thought to it. When Kent reminds him of the possible consequences, indeed for the worst, Lear does not pay heed showcasing his sense of pride or what Aristotle would call "hubris" as a dominant factor in his personality.

It is true that Goneril and Regan behave rude with Lear, and he suffers a lot because of the ill-treatment. When Cordelia denies flattery and declares that she loves her father neither much nor less, all his expectation meets a serious jolt. Reluctantly he diverts the expectation towards Goneril and Regan with a view to undoing his disappointment, a result of Cordelia's indifference. However, the ill-

treatment Lear receives from Goneril and Regan is less disheartening compared to his shock at Cordelia's announcement. As the part of the kingdom meant for Cordelia is more "opulent", Lear's love for the youngest daughter could easily be discerned. This establishes the idea that Lear's love is not proportionate for the daughters. Cordelia's indifference is more appealing to Lear than that of Goneril and Regan. However, much of critical reading is directed vehemently towards Goneril and Regan's hypocrisy according less consideration into Cordelia's adamant and uncompromising position.

Looking at the growing rift in the relationship between Lear, and Goneril and Regan, we tend to question as to what leads them to such a conflicting zone. Why do Goneril and Regan appear so rude to Lear? What is the primary bone of contention between them? To respond such interrogations, we may consider a number of issues. Of all, sense of power and authority plays a major role that has much to do with growing chasm between Lear and his two elder daughters. Although Lear divides the kingdom, he would not like to give up kingship. Instead, he wants to sustain it because of its easy access to power and authority. His insistence on possessing the knights and attendants validates this position. This is what Goneril and Regan go against, and they show reluctance at responding to Lear's willingness. They find no logic in keeping so many attendants with Lear in view of the division of the kingdom and, hence, his power. What they expect from Lear is the sustenance of a normal course of life, devoid of unnecessary desire and gusto. However, Lear's inclination towards kingship or power and authority may be taken as a claim he could stand upon. When he loses his most beloved Cordelia and the kingdom, unexpectedly, to Goneril and Regan, he has nothing left. Hence, the word "nothing" is so redundant in the play. With this nothingness, one can hardly lead life. But Lear has to live his life. He is not to be swept away completely with his 'nothingness'. Unfortunately, he finds nothing, but kingship, that could sustain the rest of his life. He needs something to stand by him at

such a critical juncture. As such he claims kingship or power and authority, which turns out a point of deep worry for Goneril and Regan. Having received the parts of the kingdom, their sense of kingship also grows and it comes into conflict with that of Lear.

The storm scene is one of the most significant episodes in the play covering sizeable space. Symbolic as it is, the scene stands for the turbulent mental condition Lear is passing through. His humiliation at the hands of Goneril and Regan leading to madness comes to the view of spectators or readers. To showcase this, introduction of the scene imparts much dramatic effect to the play since it is through external objects that the inner working of the mind of Lear is made more vivid and convincing. Much action takes place within its ambit, and most of the characters including Lear, Kent, the Fool, Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund become a part of the scene. In addition to this, the most important aspect of the scene lies in Lear coming into contact with nature in her raw form. Before his contact with the storm, he is completely dominated by a type of cultural ambience having little to do with perceiving things naturally. He also starts realising the misfortunes of others, a development quite absent from his once kingly position. Doing this, Shakespeare envisions that people could be taught the best of lessons through their contact with nature.

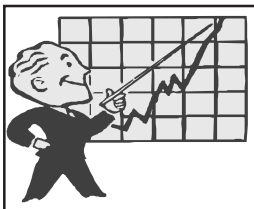
Although a flat character meant for fun and entertainment, the Fool is no less significant than the round characters in the play. His role is not simply confined to making fun and entertaining the public. In fact, he speaks sense and stands for the conscience for Lear. Most of his remarks are well directed towards Lear's actions and the way the old man takes things for granted. However, we may observe that the Fool's fun at Lear does not distract or disturb the latter as he usually does in the company of others. Instead, he likes the company of the Fool. Hence, the Fool may be taken more as a dramatic necessity to provide lighter touch to the otherwise grim and serious play. To augment this, we may also refer to the Fool's

mysterious disappearance and his subsequent hanging, though done offstage. When the curve of action is intended to have much tragic dimension, the Fool is simply removed from the scene. Perhaps, the effect of the storm scene is thought to be too functional for Lear to need the Fool as a constant companion.

The sub-plot is striking because it also shows the humiliation and ill-treatment a father receives with his illegitimate son, Edmund pursuing villainy. This seems to be consonant with the main plot in which Lear gets the same treatment at the hands of his daughters. But they are not identical. Lear's pain and agony is the result of his ignorance, while that of Gloucester in the sub plot owes to his innocence. The way he is persuaded by Edmund against Edgar establishes his easy-going nature lacking in logic and reasoning. However, nobody has urged Lear to divide the kingdom. What he has done is entirely on his own. As Edmund's villainy has been in line with his revengeful motif, there lies a justification to this. The humiliation he suffers primarily from bastardy bears every possibility of growing vengeance and that is what comes into effect in his action. He is not Hamlet thinking about the pros and cons before taking up a resolute decision and work accordingly. He likes to act**,** not to think much. Besides this ground, Edmund's repentance towards the end of the play succeeds in drawing sympathy from readers to a great extent. Indeed, it is too late since his villainy has already cost much damage, most specifically the killing of Cordelia in the prison following his order. Edmund also acts as a mediator between the main plot and sub plot. Though the Earl of Gloucester does maintain affinity with Lear, the relation gets affected after the division of the kingdom and Lear's turbulent phase in life. As Lear's kingdom falls into the evil hands of Goneril and Regan, Gloucester's estate becomes subject to Edmund's manipulation. Both the plots at this stage seem to be the reign of villainy and mischief. Simultaneously, Goneril and Regan's adultery with Edmund gives a further fillip to the close connection between the two plots.

Although the play introduces a number of deaths, Shakespeare turns out a conscious artist not to make the stage littered with dead bodies. Most of the casualties are presented off stage, and it is through information that readers and spectators get to know them. Doing away with macabre and grotesque scenes, Shakespeare seems to have catered to the taste and expectation of people, which underwent radical change in the Jacobean period. Another point to consider is that the character of Albany, indeed good and noble, has been reduced too much. Being a kind-hearted person, he protests against his wife, Goneril because of the wrong course of action. He defies the gang of mischievous people including Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund. The group becomes so powerful that people like Albany have no place in it. If he had not been sidelined, then the course of action might have taken a new shape. However, to facilitate a sound platform for attainment of tragic downfall, the mischief and hypocrisy of the Gonerils or Edmunds is more important than the good advice of Albany. Hence, the role thrust upon Albany is more of a dramatic necessity intended by the dramatist.

Much speculation is also on in regard to the unhappy ending of the play. If the play is to achieve the tag of tragedy, there is little to worry about the ending as such. In addition, there is no doubt that the play has been a successful rendition in the said category. However, the issue to consider is that tragedy may not be conceived as something unfailingly connected with death. Attainment of tragic dimension through one's death may not be taken an acceptable formulation all the time. The critical phase replete with pain and agony that Lear and Cordelia suffer from seem somehow enough to attain the brunt of tragedy. However, their death towards the end of the play appears unnecessary, given the completion of tragic downfall before their pathetic death. Hence, most of the readers and critics find it hard to accept the ending of the play without raising speculation and contention.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you think that Lear's decision to divide his country among his daughters was wrong?

Q 2: What is Lear's 'Hamartia'?

Q 3: Describe the symbolic significance of the storm scene?

Q 4: Do you think that the Fool never speaks sense?

Q 5: Why do Goneril and Regan appear so rude to Lear?

8.3.2 Major Themes

Shakespeare's *King Lear* makes a useful reading for critics and readers of general interest, and the text is gaining momentum with every passing day. Considering this, it is worth discussing the themes as follows:

Appearance and Reality:

When Lear divides the kingdom, he takes the appearance or showy nature of Goneril and Regan as a mark of reality. Their act of flattery pouring love and affection on Lear is nothing but a strategy to pocket maximum benefit. Lear fails to understand the true nature or reality of Cordelia and Kent as well. In fact, they mean what they say, and it is completely out of reach for Lear. We may say that appearance and reality go simultaneously in their personality, which is just the opposite of Goneril and Regan. Going this way, Lear showcases his ignorance that is not permissible for someone in charge of running a kingdom or any position of responsibility. He appears more as an agency of emotion in taking decisions. In the sub plot too, Gloucester gets convinced at the appearance of Edmund, who misguides him to meet the tragic downfall. With his easy-going and simple nature, Gloucester believes in the forged letter of Edmund, and takes his legitimate son, Edgar as someone going against the interest of his father. It is true that Gloucester's innocence leads him to the direction manhandled by Edmund, but the consequence it faces is disastrous, and it invalidates the positive

nuance of innocence. Appearance seems to have been treated both on negative and positive fronts. In case of Goneril and Regan, the appearance has scaled its worst connotation, while that of Kent and Edgar is treated at a satisfying level. It is through their disguise, appearance as it is, that they serve Lear and Gloucester to the best of their capacity.

Power and Authority:

The play involves power and authority as a dominant theme, and shows the complicacy it might brought to one's life. In fact, the tragedy of Lear, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund has a greater deal to do with this. Because of their major inclination towards this, they go indifferent to other aspects that are helpful to make life worth living. When Lear divides the kingdom, Goneril and Regan think that they have gained absolute power and authority. Their growing sense comes into conflict with Lear since he would not like to give up kingship. Lear's intention of keeping kingship presupposes his weakness for power and authority to be sustained in life. Indeed, Cordelia's banishment brings an irreparable loss in the life of Lear, which he could not expect to mend with the help of Goneril and Regan. He could have known their nature; hence he preserved the most "opulent" part for Cordelia. Of course, his love for the younger daughter has also appeared instrumental to the matter. Having lost Cordelia and the kingdom to Goneril and Regan, Lear does not find anything substantial to continue the rest of life. It is in power and authority that he finds the real cause of leading life. His insistence on keeping knights and attendants with him validates this position, which Goneril and Regan find quite disappointing. With the kingdom in hand, they would like to have their rule pronounced without any interference from Lear. This does not stand in consonant with Lear, who intends to make his presence felt as an agency of power and authority. As Lear has not preserved any part of the kingdom, his claim to sustain authority seems half-hearted to Goneril and Regan. The sub plot also has the theme of power and authority involving

Edmund and Gloucester. It is in the name of avenging the tag of bastardy and depravity that Edmund succeeds in taking hold of the earldom, a base to enjoy power and authority. Gloucester's plan to accord the position to his legitimate son, Edgar does not come into effect because of the trick played out by Edmund. Although Edmund's villainy has been conditioned largely by the treatment he gets because of bastardy, his motif of possessing power and authority may not be ruled out altogether.

Compassion and Reality:

Though much action takes place with less trace of understanding and compassion, the play is not completely missing the side. If a few of the characters are lagging behind this, there are certain others like Kent, Edgar, Cordelia, and even Lear, to some extent, do have the positive side, and act accordingly. With this, they form a reality of their own. Despite his banishment, the Earl of Kent entails compassion at the highest degree. As he is very resolute in serving Lear, he gives it the form of reality throughout his life. What he is interested in is the well-being of Lear, and he could hardly bear with his master passing through a critical phase of life. When Oswald, the steward of Goneril, intends to behave rude with Lear, Kent opposes to it vehemently. In fact, he understands the attitude of Goneril and Regan. As such, he re-appears in disguise after banishment, and gives company to Lear till the end. His servitude towards Lear is shown in excess, perhaps dramatic to a great extent. After Kent, the next important person to have shown compassion is, undoubtedly, Edgar. A victim to Edmund's villainy, Edgar also faces the condition as Kent does. However, Edgar would like to hide himself to escape the searching eye of the authority. Throughout this, he never loses compassion and gives it a solid functioning when he disguises himself and re-appears at the scene. His compassion makes him a strong personality in serving his father, Gloucester. Moreover, he is also considerate towards Lear, and he decries the mischief of his elder daughters. Even after her

banishment, Cordelia never loses compassion for Lear and waits for the opportunity to serve him to the best of her capacity. Hence she laments the ill-treatment meted out to Lear by Goneril and Regan when she comes to know about all this at the French camp. Though not completely, Lear is also compassionate towards the Fool. As he likes the company of the Fool, the readers or spectators can have access to the conscience of Lear since the Fool may be taken as the spokesperson along this line. Besides the lighter touch as given to the play, the Fool performs the vital task of unfolding the course of action.

Madness:

Shakespeare seems to have given a real thrust upon the theme of madness in his plays. Indeed he is very successful in presenting the inseparable part of life, something that nobody could deny. Interestingly, he represents both the real and feigned forms of madness in his plays. As in *Hamlet*, we get the real madness of Ophelia, and the feigned madness of Hamlet himself. Feigned or affected madness could be taken as a strategy to attain a given goal or objective. Hamlet's feigned madness is primarily of taking revenge upon his murderous uncle. He succeeds, but the course of action also kills him. However, the intensity of a revengeful motif is not of that proportion in *King Lear.* Here in contrast to Lear's real madness, Edgar has feigned madness. Although the motif of taking revenge upon Edmund is not absent altogether, this does not seem to be the *only* motif in his affected madness. In fact, he is more concerned with serving his father, Gloucester. A sense of gratitude towards his father makes him opt for affected madness, while at the same time it also helps him to find out the villainy of Edmund. His resolve to prove Edmund's mischief in front of his father comes out successful and it is his madness that helps him accomplish the task. He could have been arrested by the attendants of Edmund unless there had been feigned madness. Of course, Edgar's madness constitutes the elements of pathos and gloom to a great

extent. Like Lear's, his is a madness that moves the readers in an unprecedented way. In contrast to Edgar's feigned madness, Lear has real madness. Deprived as he is of due recognition and treatment, Lear loses the sanity of mind, a development that has much to do with his emotional back up. He is so emotionally attached with his daughters that he could not bear with their indifferent attitude, especially that of Goneril and Regan. Most strikingly, Cordelia's resolute character does have the most serious implication on him because of his strong likeness for her. It is perhaps of his extreme and uncompromising love and its unexpected return from his daughters that have pushed him to the feat of madness. Though the sight of his madness is pathetic, it turns out functional in making him understand the real condition of human beings, which is missing from him during kingship. As in the storm scene, his madness does not stand as an obstacle to establish a close rapport with nature and her different objects.

Sight and Blindness:

The theme of sight and blindness constitutes a major part in the play, which is somehow related to the previously mentioned theme of appearance and reality. While discussing the theme of sight and blindness, we may refer to Lear and Gloucester, the two important characters in the main and sub plots. It is true that Lear never loses eyesight, and he does have visual experience as usual. However, the theme holds significance in its metaphorical parlance, not in its physical sense. Interestingly, Lear is blind in spite of his experience of sight. To justify this, reference could be made to his failure at seeing the real motif underlying the flattery by Goneril and Regan. They pour words upon him that have little to do with reality. But Cordelia says what she means, and this is what Lear does not like. Lear's fascination for warm rhetoric makes him blind to the real nature of things. Gloucester's case is a bit different from that of Lear. As Lear does to Goneril and Regan, Gloucester also fails to see the villainy of Edmund. He is completely trapped in the web

hatched by Edmund, and takes Edgar as enemy. The misunderstanding that has cropped up between him and Edgar is primarily related to his inability to see things logically and rationally. Like Lear's, the eyesight of Gloucester is meaningless. Perhaps he gets the punishment for this when his eyes are plucked out by Cornwall and Regan at the instigation by Edmund. Having lost his eyes, he starts realising the fault, and comes to know the hand of Edmund behind the scene. Unfortunately, he has no eyes left to see the newly perceived things. Hence, Gloucester's inability to see things seems to be an inseparable part in his life.

8.3.3 Major Characters

The following are the most important characters that you must read about in the context of the play.

Lear:

Lear is the most significant of all characters presented in the play. If *King Lear* is to be categorised as a piece of tragedy, it is primarily because of Lear and his critical phase of life he has gone through. There is no denying the fact that the arrogant and wrathful nature of Lear causes downfall. However, the fatal end he meets does not seem proportionate to the act he has done at the beginning. His decision to divide the kingdom among his daughters may be taken as a turning point in the play in initiating the phase of tragedy. Besides, his over-dependence upon the daughters and the motif of exchange are instrumental to the enunciation of tragedy. He wants to get back the love that he has for the daughters. The division of the kingdom may be accepted as a trial of affection. Like Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth, Lear inherits fatal weakness. However, unlike most of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Lear appears as passive sufferer. He lets himself down in the vortex of circumstances with no intention of doing something substantial to orient the course of action. His passionate hatred for Kent and Cordelia may also be noticed in his character. In fact, he wants to see things in accordance

with his expectations. If anyone goes against this, he would not tolerate. When Kent finds no justification in his action, Lear goes mad and punishes him in the strongest measure. Even Cordelia's resolute nature is something that Lear does not like and inflicts punishment. Lear hardly understands his limitations, but does not like others to point out to those. However, it is the Fool, who stands as an agency of reminding the wrong course of action. Interesting, he endures the Fool and likes his company. His association with the Fool unfolds the conscience, which is missing from the normal course of action. The readers or spectators get to know much of Lear in the storm scene and his mental condition. His exposition to the storm relates convincingly the turbulent mental condition, which is a result of the ill-treatment he has receives at the hands if Goneril and Regan. Besides this, his close contact with nature in its volatile form teaches the lesson of humanity and enriches him with the understanding of others. Here nature turns out powerful and it defies the all-pervading character of culture.

Goneril:

Goneril is the eldest daughter of Lear, and wife of the Duke of Albany. She is one of the most mischievous characters in the play, and is involved in various misdeeds causing utmost damage to others and to her as well. The most unpardonable feature in her character is, undoubtedly, the ill-treatment meted out to Lear. Having taken hold the part of the kingdom showing flattery, she treats Lear very rude. Indeed, it is a question of power and authority that fabricates her nature throughout, and it hardly tolerates Lear's interest in sustaining kingship after the division of the kingdom. What she likes, as does Regan, is the uncompromising authority that she does not like to be shared by others, especially Lear. Through her activity, we may assume her active and resolute personality, which stands in contrast to that Cordelia. He is very quick in taking decisions, and this helps initiate rapidity in action of the play. As there is no question of her villainy and mischief, the sense of jealousy is also very

redundant in her character. Given Regan's love for Edmund, she turns out jealous of the development. She could hardly bear with Regan marrying Edmund at the death of Cornwall. In the extremity of jealousy, she poisons Regan, and in course of time commits suicide. This relates to her uncompromising nature at the expense of all humanely feelings and emotions. She is so blind to her self-assuring nature that she fails to be a good wife as well. Being a good human being, Albany keeps repeating her evil design with a view to rectifying her, but of no result. Instead of paying heed, she follows life on her own.

Regan:

Regan is the second daughter of Lear, and wife of the Duke of Cornwall. Indeed, she may be taken as a true copy of Goneril. Throughout the play, we find her following the path of Goneril. Like Goneril, she also involves in flattery to earn the maximum benefit from Lear. Although flattery is not acceptable, her major thrust upon this establishes her understanding of the psyche of Lear and also of his expectation. Here she comes very close to Goneril in the trial of affection that Lear holds. However, her understanding, as that of Goneril, has been directed towards achieving a vested interest, i.e. to pocket much of the property of her father. With this evil design at hand, she appears ruder than Goneril in her dealing with Lear. Having ill-treated at the hands of Goneril, Lear's pain and agony goes manifold with Regan. Besides this, her abject cruelty may also be noticed in the act of plucking out the eyes of Gloucester with the help of Cornwall. Although both of them would like to follow similar course of action, that affinity costs damage to their relationship relating to the affair with Edmund. Regan faces the brunt of Goneril's jealousy and meets her sad end. Here she does not appear as active as Goneril does. She is a receiver of punishment inflicted upon her by the rival.

Cordelia*:*

Cordelia is the youngest daughter of Lear, perhaps the most lovable of the rest. It is true that she has genuine feeling for Lear, but

she is very selective in showing it. Indeed, she makes division of her love and affection preserving it for respective quarters of his close associates. That is why she talks of bond, and does not like to move away from the same. Her adherence to the bond makes her uncompromising and resolute as well, which proves fatal to most of the characters. Being the youngest, and embodying the purity of heart, she wins the favour of Lear. Hence the most "opulent" part of the kingdom is reserved for her. Lear is so much affectionate to her that he cannot bear with her not expressing warm regards, and coming under the pall of agony, he banishes her from the kingdom. Hasty as the decision is, Lear takes it as a guilt that proves instrumental to his madness. It is not simply the humiliation at the hands of Goneril and Regan; rather the sense of guilt, centering Cordelia's banishment that proves detrimental to Lear's succeeding periods of time. Another significant feature is her truthful nature and sense of dignity. Once she adheres to an ideal, she does not like to adjourn it, whatsoever situation arises. While following all this, she never loses humane feeling coupled with simplicity and tenderness. To validate this, it may be referred that she continues her warm regard to Lear even after her banishment, and serves him when opportunity arises. However, she acts as a passive character most of the times. The enthusiasm and zeal of Goneril and Regan seem to be missing from her.

Albany:

The Duke of Albany is one of the noblest characters in the play. In opposition to the Duke of Cornwall, he stands in favour of justice and humanity. He never supports Goneril in pursuit of her evil design, and tries to make her give up inhuman nature. To justify his simplicity and sense of justice, we may refer to him saying, "I cannot be so partial, Goneril/ To the great love I bear you." As he is a man of principle and dignity, people like Lear and Kent shower high praise on him. However, he seems to be sidelined, given the magnitude of misdeeds Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund have

attained. As such, his protest against Goneril proves vain since she does not give up her vested interests. He acts more as passive character in this connection. Instead of trying something substantial, he turns towards Lear and Gloucester. Their suffering moves him a lot, and extends sympathy with them. Another significant aspect to his character is the strong sense of patriotism and genuine concern for the country. His active participation in the fight against France to safeguard the country validates this position. After their victory over the French and the deaths of Lear, Cordelia and others, he wants to restore the throne with Kent and Edgar. Here it is not the thirst for power and authority, but that of responsibility for the countrymen, who need to be guided along a safe administrative line.

Cornwall:

The Duke of Cornwall is the husband of Ragan, and has been constantly in touch with Goneril and Edmund to carry out nefarious activities. In fact, less information is provided regarding him. However, we may assume that he is a cruel and callous person, who likes to accomplish evil design at the cost of others. With Goneril, Ragan, and Edmund, he constitutes the vicious circle directed towards achieving their goal. His various acts such as putting Kent in the stocks and plucking out the eyes of Gloucester establish the level of cruelty he sustains. However, it must be admitted that his role as a malcontent helps the play scale tragic dimension to a great extent.

Gloucester:

Gloucester is a central figure in the sub plot, and his misfortune and suffering seems very close to that of Lear. The close rapport could be established between Lear and Gloucester in terms of their critical phase conditioned by their children. In fact, Gloucester is a very simple and foolish kind of personality, who is easily persuaded by others. It is his innocence that makes him believe in the story hatched by Edmund. In his utter disregard at logic and reason, he goes against his legitimate son, Edgar. Taking everything

for granted with the least consideration is a major defect in his character for which he suffers a lot. Although Edmund's villainy is not permissible on humanitarian ground, his is a condition that inflicts much pain on him. Because of his bastardy, he has to live as an outcast in the society. Edmund's bastardy relates to Gloucester's wild and licentious habit of the past. As most of the times he lets himself to be driven by others or unseen force, often he shows courage in protesting against injustice. When he is produced to Goneril and Regan on the false charge of being a spy for the French, he does not hesitate condemning their cruelty to Lear. He says, "Because I would not see/Thy cruel nails pluck out his poor old eyes/ Nor thy fierce sister in his anointed flesh." In addition to this, he also has superstitious beliefs to some extent. Under such notion, he sees suffering as a cruel sport conditioned by the gods. Even his wrong information regarding Edgar's plot against him has been attributed to the heavenly bodies that are taken as active agents on earth. Of course, this connects Gloucester to the Elizabethan society that believed in superstition as an inseparable part of life.

Kent:

The Earl of Kent is somehow the most attractive character in the play. Like Edgar, he is also known for his servitude and sense of duty to the master. Loyalty, servitude, vehemence are the real hallmarks to his personality. He is so loyal to Lear that he likes to continue his service after the banishment as well. Although his loyalty is praiseworthy, it costs his personal life. Hence his personal life has not been given due focus in the play. He champions Cordelia, and finds justification in her dealing with Lear. It deserves mention that his uncompromising loyalty to Lear does not make him blind to his fault. Hence, in the opening scene, he is opposed to Lear's move in the division of the kingdom. With his wisdom and foresight, he could see the dark side to the decision. He could understand the ignorance of Lear and take the resolve to serve the master to the best of his capacity. What we get is that his service to Lear is more

of sympathy than of the sense of responsibility. His stay till the end of the play, along with Albany and Edgar, justifies the survival of the good and noble after a critical phase in life.

Edgar:

Edgar is the legitimate son of Gloucester known for his loyalty, and noble nature. His nobility of character is so strong that Edmund also speaks high of him. Indeed, he is a stark contrast to the mischievous nature of Goneril and Regan. He is one, who wages relentless effort at coming to the help of his father, while Goneril and Regan decry their parent all the time. The thing to be worried about Edgar is that he has been easily trapped by Edmund's story of his father's ill will towards him. He could have made an enquiry before accepting Edmund's story, but he does not. In fact, he knows the credulity of his father. However, the situation created by Edmund has so much of its magnitude that he dares not approach his father and talks about the villainy of Edmund. Fortunately, he does not get disappointed, and takes the resolve to undo the misconception brewed up between him and his father. Like Kent, he is driven to disguise himself with a view to succeeding in the mission. With feigned madness, he tries to pursue his course of action, and comes out successful. While doing this, he remains calm and deliberate even in the feat of madness. His feigned madness contrasts with the real madness of Lear, and this has made the theme more vivid. However, Lear's madness is given so importance in its treatment that it affects that of Edgar to some extent. His oft-quoted phrase "Ripeness is all" reminds us of Hamlet's "Readiness is all". Here Edgar's preference for experience and wisdom in one's pursuit of leading life may be observed.

Edmund:

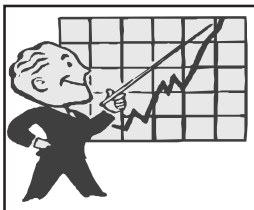
Of the villains in the play, Edmund enjoys the upper hand. He is the illegitimate son of Gloucester, and has to suffer a lot in the society. Despite his association with the Earldom, he fails to lead a normal course of life because of bastardy. It is unfortunate that he

has to live as an outcast. Moreover, his information regarding Gloucester's intention to make Edgar a legal heir to his property inflames his revenge motif in its worst form. Indeed, he deserves praise because of his tactful handling of the conspiracy intended for Gloucester and Edgar. He manages things skilfully and succeeds. Besides this, he also inherits licentiousness of Gloucester and applies it to Goneril and Regan. His lovemaking turns the two sisters hostile to each other, and he enjoys it. Like Albany, he also shows velour and courage in the battle and leads the troops of Regan. His acceptance of the combat with Edgar proves his readiness to face challenge whenever it arises. It is understood that his villainy and mischievous nature have done much damage in the play, but the confession he makes of the same towards the end gives dignity to his character. It has reduced the degree of villainy to a considerable point. His accumulation of both "wit and wickedness" places him very close to a few of Shakespeare's unforgettable creations such as Richard III and Iago.

The Fool:

In Shakespeare's time, the Fool was a very familiar figure, and people regarded him as an inseparable part in dramatic performances. Even one's reading of the play would ensure the significant role the Fool accomplishes. It is worth remembering that the Fool appears as a connecting agency between actors or actresses and audience. As he is well aware of the developments in the play, often he conveys them to the audience in advance. However, the primary objective is to provide fun and enjoyment with the audience. In *King Lear,* the Fool enjoys an important position, and most of the times he acts as a traditional jester targeting whom he likes. He does not hesitate to make comments, and the liberty of expression gives him a distinctive place. What is striking is that Lear also tolerates him. In fact, he is very straightforward and revelatory. If he finds Lear making mistakes, he would point out them without sparing time. He is a conscience of Lear. His worldly wisdom

provides us much information with regard to various matters. Indeed, he acts as mirror seeking to show Lear his real image. At the division of the kingdom, he tries to make Lear realise the mistake saying, "Thou mad'st thy daughters thy mother". Although such a statement provokes laughter, there lies logic behind the apparent meaning. As such, his remarks have double meaning. By pointing out the mistakes of Lear, the Fool makes effort at giving right direction to his course of action, but with little result. When Lear goes mad and loses the sanity of mind, the Fool vanishes from the scene. His subsequent hanging remains a mystery in the play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What is the difference between Lear and the other Shakespearean tragic heroes?

Q 7: How does Cordelia take her relationships?

Q 8: In what way, Lear and Gloucester similar characters?

8.3.4 Shakespeare's Art of Characterisation

In *King Lear,* Shakespeare shows excellence in the art of characterisation to a great extent. Almost all the characters have been skilfully developed, but not simply for their own sake. One may see their conformity to the plot or the situation they are placed upon. This strategy has made the characters more vibrant and fascinating. However, much of characterisation seems to have been intended emotional involvement of the readers and spectators. Perhaps of all the major characters, Lear, Cordelia, and Gloucester do have much emotional appeal in the vortex of which their follies and weaknesses go scot-free. The critical phases they are passing through seem to be enough in placing them in positions of deep emotional entanglement. Lear's ill-treatment at the hands of Goneril and Regan, and his resulting misfortune move the readers to an immeasurable degree. It takes up such a proportion that the readers

go indifferent to the mistakes he has committed, and fail to see his weakness.

Cordelia's adamant nature could be taken as one of the root causes of her tragic downfall, and also much of Lear's disappointment and mental breakdown. She could have compromised to some extent on showing warm regards for Lear, albeit not of the level Goneril and Regan have done. Her failure at realising the expectation of Lear makes her character weak. It is a question of responsibility, in which she fails. Strikingly, she never tries to mend, and remains a passive character. In case of Gloucester too, the overdose of emotional appeal seems more redundant. Taking advantage of his innocence, Edmund turns him against Edgar for the fulfilment of his nefarious design. Gloucester allows himself to be driven by Edmund, with no sense of giving second thought to the latter's course of action. He is trapped so completely that he could hardly make use of logic in taking Edgar along the line as such. This is what could be taken as blame to his character. Of course, all of them, viz. Lear, Cordelia, and Gloucester are more sinned against their sinning, and this has helped achieve tragic effect in the play.

Unlike Cordelia, Goneril and Regan are very active, though their stance is directed towards the evil and the ignoble. They are very much focused on the objective at hand, and leave no stone unturned to attain it. As we notice in the first scene, they show their cunning nature to the highest possible degree. They have proper understanding about Lear's expectation. Hence, they shower flattery with abject absence of real feelings. If flattery helps them pocket the maximum benefit, they would do it manifold. Their money-mindedness coupled with power and authority brings into effect a huge gap with Cordelia, and also the loss of warm feeling for their father. Of course, their villainy and mischief has been given a vent because of their union with Edmund and Cornwall. On the one hand, their association with Edmund helps them continue the misdeeds, while, on the other; it brings the main plot and the Gloucester plot

very close. Their characterisation equally contributes to achieving a sound structural pattern.

Like Edmund, Cornwall is also a malcontent, and he helps Goneril and Regan on every front. However, most often he seems to be a follower to the design hatched by Goneril, and, to some extent, Regan. Edmund also follows them, but his intent is to materialise the vested interests of his own. In contrast to these characters, Albany is a less developed character. He speaks sense and likes to stand for justice and humanity. However, this is hardly allowed against the backdrop of villainy and mischief conditioned by Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund. Hence, he has been sidelined, particularly in view of preparing the setting for most of the characters to meet their tragic downfall. Given Albany's stay until the end of the play, the agenda of sustaining the philosophy of honesty and nobility gets established. Along with Kent and Edgar, he is left to accept responsibility prevailing in the kingdom.

As opposed to Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund, Kent and Edgar stand tall in their servitude, and both of them would not like to move even an inch from their resolve meant for the good of the concerned. Looking at Kent's genuine concern for Lear, we may assume this as a compensatory measure filling up the void left out by Goneril and Regan. In addition to his usual kindness for Lear, Kent takes Goneril and Regan's indifference as instrumental to the growing sense of servitude and responsibility. Hence he re-appears in disguise after the banishment, the sole objective being to come of help to Lear. His constant company to Lear till the end proves helpful to the fettered personality. However, it must be mentioned that Kent's loyalty is so extreme that it diminishes his personal life to the fullest. Edgar's role in the life of Gloucester is a contrasting portrayal to that of Goneril and Regan. The technique of contrast has given much credibility to the theme. Indeed, it must be confessed that Edgar is one of the most wretched figures in the play. As a victim to Edmund's villainy, he falls upon a critical phase, but mending

to the best of his ability. During the phase, he never loses patience, and adopts madness as a strategy to succeed in the desired goal.

The Fool is another successful creation in the play. Although a flat character, the Fool does much than providing fun and amusement. His remarks, witty as they are, have much to do with the baser aspects of reality. The company he gives to Lear is laudable since he stands for his conscience and speaks sense. Lear's lack of far-sightedness is what the Fool points out, which help the readers and spectators, know some of the hidden aspects. Interestingly, Lear tolerates the Fool all through. However, it deserves mention that he has been dropped suddenly in the middle of the play, and the information of his subsequent hanging is provided. When Lear attains madness at its extreme point, the Fool might have thought his presence as insignificant. As the pace of action takes heavily upon tense and grim condition, the importance of fun might not be a logical inclusion. These are some of the assumptions that prove instrumental to the exclusion of the Fool. But his stay in the life of Lear for the concerned period makes an interesting study of the hidden aspects in the latter's personality.



8.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have come to know that William Shakespeare considered tragedy as an inseparable part of life. As opposed to the medieval times, the Elizabethan society accorded positive significance to the suffering of human beings. Renewed interest was given in unfolding the causes and consequences of suffering. Shakespeare's reputation as a dramatist rests, to a great extent, on the four of his tragedies such as *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear,* and *Macbeth. King Lear* is one of Shakespeare's best creations centering on a host of characters that include Lear, Cordelia, Gloucester, Edgar, Kent, Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and a few others. Besides the main plot, the play includes a sub plot involving Gloucester, Edgar, and Edmund. The play comprises a number of significant themes: Appearance and reality,

power and authority, madness, compassion and reality, sight and blindness are some of the most recurring and widely read themes. At the same time, the dignity of his characterisation could be noticed in its close rapport with the demand of situation the characters are placed upon.



8.5 FURTHER READING

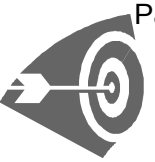
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8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Yes… …the decision is the root cause of all suffering and pain… …Lear's aspirations fail to get the deserving response from Cordelia because of her decision to continue her filial bond with her father… …Goneril and Regan show gratitude, but as part of flattery… …Lear's only fault is that he expects the love of Cordelia in the sublime… …, Lear goes into rage and he divides the kingdom and banishes Cordelia.

Ans to Q No 2: Lear's weakness and his failure of understanding himself. In theoretical parlance, we may recognise the act as "hamartia" or error of judgment, which Aristotle aptly described as one of the root causes of one's tragic downfall.

Ans to Q No 3: The storm stands for the turbulent mental condition Lear is passing through… …His humiliation at the hands of Goneril and Regan lead to madness in Lear… … it is through external objects like the storm that the inner working of the mind of Lear is made more vivid… …most of the characters including Lear, Kent, the Fool, Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund become a part of the scene.

Ans to Q No 4: No… …in fact, the Fool speaks sense and stands for the conscience for Lear… …most of his remarks are well directed towards Lear's actions and the way the old man takes things for granted… …the Fool may be taken more of a dramatic necessity to provide lighter touch to the otherwise grim and serious play.

Ans to Q N 5: Power and authority plays a major role to play in the growing rift between Lear and his two elder daughters… …Lear divides the kingdom, but not willing to give up kingship… …his insistence on possessing the knights and attendants validates this position… …this is what make Goneril and Regan so angry.

Ans to Q N 6: unlike most of Shakespeare's tragic heroes like Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth, Lear appears as passive sufferer. He lets himself down in the vortex of circumstances with no intention of doing something substantial to orient the course of action.

Ans to Q N 7: Cordelia has genuine feeling for Lear, but she is very selective in showing it… … she makes a division of her love and affection preserving it for respective quarters of his close associates. That is why she talks of bond, and does not like to move away from the same.

Ans to Q N 8: Gloucester is a central figure in the sub plot, and his misfortune and suffering seems very close to that of Lear. The close rapport could be established between Lear and Gloucester in terms of their critical phase conditioned by their children.



8.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How would you justify Lear's division of the kingdom? What are the consequences he faces because of the division?

Q 2: Can you say that the main plot and the sub plot have been well knit? How do they help each other in the advancement of action in the play?

Q 3: What is your opinion on the unhappy ending of the play? Do you think that the deaths of Lear and Cordelia have been too dramatic to attain the tragic effect? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 4: What are the major themes in the play? How do they help the characters get due focus?

Q 5: Give an account of the parent-child relationship in the play? What are the major issues affecting the relationship?

Q 6: Sketch the character of Lear with illustration from the text. How would you validate his madness in context of the circumstances?

Q 7: Compare and contrast the characters of Cordelia, and Goneril and Regan. How do individual interests affect their relationship with others?

Q 8: Write a comprehensive note on Kent and Edgar. Could you say that their unrestrained loyalty has affected personal life to a great extent?

Q 9: Do you find any justification in the course of action Edmund takes up? How does he prepare himself to attain his desired goal?

Q 10: How do you comprehend the role of the Fool? Is the Fool's sudden disappearance from the scene more of a dramatic necessity? Give a reasoned answer.

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UNIT 9: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *TWELFTH NIGHT* OR *WHAT YOU WILL*

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Shakespearean Comedies

9.4 Sources of the Play *Twelfth Night*

9.5 Reading the Play *Twelfth Night*

9.6 Act wise Summary of the Play

9.7 Critical Commentary on the Play

9.7.1 Major Themes

9.7.2 Major Characters

9.8 Let us Sum up

9.9 Further Reading

9.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.11 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- form an idea about Shakespearean comedies
- have necessary information about the source of the play *Twelfth Night*
- trace the development of the plot of the play *Twelfth Night*
- discuss the relevant themes and in connection with *Twelfth Night*

9.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will get an opportunity to discuss one of Shakespeare' finest comedies—*Twelfth Night* probably written between 1599-1601.It is almost a consensus among the critics that *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will* was the last of Shakespeare's three mature comedies, the other two being—*Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*. This play is very

important in the development of Shakespeare's dramatic art because, from this time onward, all Shakespeare's plays are marked by a rich and subtle complexity. It is easily observable that much of the play's comedy comes from the sub-plot dealing with the members of Olivia's household: Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, his friend, Malvolio, Olivia's Steward, Maria, and her waiting gentleman. The plot resolves itself in the ironic and satiric exposure of Malvolio, the Puritan and his humiliation. It is important to note that this comic sub-plot is entirely Shakespeare's invention, and many outstanding critics have noted this. In spite of its purely comic nature, the play seems to have been characterised by melancholy and a lyrical fervour which have been captured in two of Feste's beautiful songs – "come away, come away death", and "when that I was and a little ting boy." You will soon realise that the play *Twelfth Night* celebrates the triumph of love, and yet it is distinguished by a troubling undertone of melancholy, which suggests the playwright's tendency to enter into the deeper realms of the human psyche.

9.3 SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDIES

Shakespeare wrote as much as seventeen comedies and from the point of their growth and development, four distinct phases are discernible. They are as follows:

1. His early comedies include *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Screw*, *Love Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *A Mid-summer Night's Dream.* In these comedies, there can be found considerable verbal wit but no remarkable probing into the inner workings of the human nature as result of which the plot enjoys some dominance over the character.
2. Shakespeare's middle comedies, commonly known as purely romantic comedies, are *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As you Like it*, *Twelfth Night,* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In these plays, Shakespeare seems to be at his best as a comic playwright though the influence of Robert Greene is noticeable in some of them. There is a good harmony between plot and characterisation and a

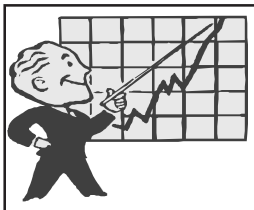
nice blending of romance and realism and more importantly, they are marked by masterly portraiture of human character. A characteristic feature of these comedies is indeed the comic exploration of the nature of love.

3. Then there is another group consisting of *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*. In these plays, some painful and distressing complications of human life are treated in a highly serious manner and forceful happy endings have been given to *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*. Therefore, they are called 'dark comedies' or 'problem comedies'.
4. The comedies like *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* form the last group of Shakespearean plays. These comedies too show a distinct development; they reveal sobriety, serenity and a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. They are also called romances because their actions challenge psychological credibility.

Taken as a whole, Shakespeare's comedies show certain characteristic features. Except *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, all the other comedies may be called romantic. These two comedies have more local touches than the others, they have scenes and characters more closely related to life and their actions, and dialogues are less coloured by the romantic sentiment whereas, the purely romantic comedies are a continuation of the pre-Shakespearean tradition. Shakespeare's fertile imagination makes ordinary things of life romantic and the improbable characters and events realistic. In fact, a perfect harmony of realism and fantasy, naturalism and supernaturalism, fact and fiction is the distinguishing mark of Shakespearean comedies.

It is also important to note that the real excellence of a Shakespearean comedy lies in its strength of characterisation. The creation of living characters against a background of romance, marvel and magic, distinguishes Shakespeare's early plays from similar attempts made by his contemporaries. In a sense, a Shakespearean comedy is an art of exploration in opposition to the classical comedy, which is mainly an art of

exposure. He places his characters in certain situation in which they learn the deeper secrets of their own hearts. Another notable point is that the heroine is often superior to the hero in the comedies and this is clearly noticeable in the middle comedies. Moreover, many of the Shakespearean comedies also introduce a Fool or Clown. He is drawn partly from life and partly from literature. He may be called the direct development of the Vice of the Morality Plays, and he is also the theatrical version of the professional comic fool or jester. The Clown keeps the comic interest of the play alive though often he bears no integral relation to the main plot. Music is another significant characteristic of a Shakespearean comedy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you agree that the real strength of Shakespearean comedy lies in his art of Characterisation?

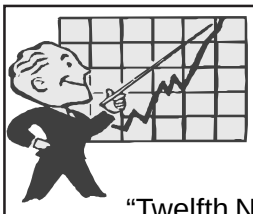
Q 2: What are the characteristics of Shakespearean comedy?

9.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *TWELFTH NIGHT*

John Manningham, the contemporary diarist saw a performance of the play *Twelfth Night* in the month of February 1602. It was first printed in the Folio of 1623. Its immediate source might be, asnoted by many critics, is the story of 'Apolonius and Silla' in Barnabe Riche's *Farewell to Military Profession.* This is an adaptation of Francoise Belleforest's French version of a novella by Bandello. And Bandello's novella was based on an Italian comedy *Gl Inganniti* (the Deceived). Thus, the remotest possible source of this play is an Italian play, particularly for the Olivia-Orsino-Viola-Sebastian plot. However, it is important to remember that Shakespeare's knowledge of the Italian language was not so great and it was highly unlikely that he could read this Italian play and there is no evidence that translations of such Italian plays were available to him. However, Shakespeare might also have been well-conversant with Bandello's and Belleforest's collections. He might have made some subtle artistic changes here and there from the

original sources but it is almost a consensus among the scholars and critics that the sub-plot and its characters are Shakespeare's own creation.

Shakespeare's title for the play is quite significant. The main title, *Twelfth Night* may refer to the night of the twelfth day after Christmas on which the Church celebrates the religious festival of Epiphany, the Manifestation of Christ. As many critics have noted, this particular play was prepared for an entertainment of that night since the festival was one of rejoicing and good fellowship. The play was probably performed for the first time on the night of Epiphany February 2, 1602. Manningham has made an entry in his diary in this way – "At our feast, we had a play called 'Twelfth Night' or 'What You Will.' There was another evidence that the play was acted before a gathering of lawyers soon after Christmas in that year. Shakespeare, who felt the pulse of his audience, too correctly seems to have taken enough care to make his play suitable for Christmas entertainment. He has given the play a cosmopolitan aura. We see that Sir Toby is a typical hard working, foxhunting English squire while the Duke and Olivia have Italian flavour. The composite nature of the play seems to point towards the second title, "What You Will." We see that different elements are cleverly presented and artistically blended; there is the spirit of romance of comedy, of force, of satire, even of morality. The curious readers or the audience may take it as a whole and call it "Twelfth Night" or "What You Will." In fact, the play is endowed with a rich complexity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Comment on the significance of the title "Twelfth Night"?

9.5 READING THE PLAY *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Twelfth Night has always been accorded a high place among Shakespeare's comedies. You will see that the charm and exquisite delicacy of the character of Viola saturate the play with a romantic tone. However, the great appeal of the play seems to lie on the comical side, that is, in the

immortal characters of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, in Feste, a peculiar but typical Shakespearean clown, in Maria, in the glorious fooling of the plot against the steward and the minor comedy of errors put upon Viola and Sebastian. Many critics have put forward the opinion that *Twelfth Night* is perhaps the most graceful and harmonious comedy Shakespeare ever wrote.

9.6 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Act I

Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, speaks of his deep love for the countess, Olivia Valentina who has turned down his offer of love as she has sworn to retire into private life for seven years in memory of her late brother. Orsino is somewhat surprised at her dedication but hopes that she will change. Viola, the daughter of a noblemen, has been shipwrecked, but has safely landed on the coast of Illyria. She does not know the fate of her brother, Sebastian who was also in the ship. The captain of the ship consoles her saying that her brother might be safe somewhere. He also informs her that Duke Orsino governs there and that he is courting a lady who has entered seclusion. Viola decides to serve Orsino being disguised as a page, and pays the captain to make the arrangement. At Olivia's residence Sir Toby Belch, Maria and Andrew Aguecheek are having a conversation. Sir Toby complains of the vows Olivia has made. Maria, Olivia's chambermaid, suggests that Sir Toby and his visiting friend, Andrew Aguecheek, who hopes to woo Olivia, should lead less riotous lives for her mistress dislikes their drinking behaviour. Aguecheek who is very despondent at seeing so little of Olivia and knowing Duke Orsino's interest in her, decides to return home the following day. But sir Toby manages to persuade him to remain a little longer by telling him that Olivia disdains the Duke. Viola, being disguised as Cesario, has been for three days in the Duke's service and Valentine tells her that the Duke has been very pleased with her. The Duke appears and sends Cesario to try to persuade Olivia to marry him. Once alone, Viola muses on her distress; she has fallen in love with the man in whose behalf she must woo. Maria rebukes Feste, Olivia's jester, for his absence. Olivia appears with her steward, Malvolio. She seems to be angry with Feste for

playing truant but Feste regains her confidence by some witty remarks. Olivia also criticises Malvolio for his egoistical nature and behaviour. Maria announces that a messenger from Illyria has arrived. Olivia, at once, sends Maria and Malvolio to keep him away but Malvolio comes back and says that the boy-messenger is unwilling to depart. Olivia ultimately decides to meet the youth who is Viola in the guise of Cesario. Cesario makes a spirited but unsuccessful attempt to plead the cause of the Duke. However, interestingly enough, Olivia is attracted by the good looks of Cesario and falls in love with the supposed page. She makes a pretext of seeing that Cesario has dropped his ring and sends Malvolio after him with a ring of her own thinking that this will give her a chance to meet Cesario again.

Act II

Viola's brother, Sebastian has been rescued from the wreck but he thinks that his sister has been drowned. He bids goodbye to Antonio and sets out for the court of Orsino. Although Antonio has enemies there, he decides to follow Sebastian to help him in times of possible danger. Malvolio gives Olivia's ring to Cesario, (the disguised Viola) and Viola realises that Olivia has fallen in love with her (Cesario). She reflects on the complexity of the situation: she loves Orsino, Orsino loves Olivia, and Olivia loves her, and she observes that only time will have to untie this triangle which she herself cannot. Toby, Andrew and Feste are making merry in a wild scene of drinking and revelry when Maria enters and tries to unite them. Soon after Malvolio comes and chides them for their unruly behaviour. All of them do not like the manners of Malvolio. And, when he is gone, Maria proposes that they should play a trick on him to humiliate him. She will write a love-letter to him in Olivia's handwriting and hopes that he will make a fool of himself when he responds to the supposed love of his mistress. Viola (disguised Cesario) informs the Duke that Olivia's attitude towards him remains unchanged. The Duke has a long conversation with her on the subject of love and she delicately speaks of her affection for someone who resembles the Duke. Orsino fails to understand this as his mind is too much pre-occupied with the thoughts of Olivia. He then sends Cesario on another mission to Olivia with a present. At Olivia's garden the opportunity

comes for Maria to put into execution her already proposed practical joke on Malvolio. She conceals Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian in the box-tree so that they can spy on the steward. She also plants a letter at a convenient place so that Malvolio may find it and assume that it has been dropped accidentally. The letter is written by Maria and is ambiguously worded in such a way that it is a message of love from Olivia. Malvolio comes and imagines to have married Olivia. He envisions a future when as her husband he will chastise Sir Toby. Then, he reads the letter and responds as predicted. He will follow the instructions given in the letter behaving oddly and wearing peculiar clothes to signify that he has received the message from Olivia. Malvolio then leaves and the 'conspirators' rejoice in the success of their scheme.

Act III

Viola (as Cesario), is having a witty conversation with Feste. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew take her to Olivia whom she is visiting on behalf of Orsino. When she discharges her errand to Olivia, Olivia confesses her love to Cesario who rejects her suit and she accepts the rejection as her melancholy lot. Sir Andrew expresses his desire to abandon his suit to Olivia as she has become inclined to Cesario. However, Sir Toby and Fabian reassure him asserting that Olivia's behaviour towards the young man is intended to create jealousy in his mind. In a spirit of fun, Sir Toby encourages Sir Andrew to challenge Cesario in a duel. Sir Andrew leaves to prepare for the challenge to the youth. Maria appears with the news that Malvolio is ridiculously dressed in response to the spurious love-letter and is about to meet Olivia. They all run to watch. Antonio has become worried about Sebastian's wandering alone in the city and has followed him for his protection. Sebastian thanks him. Antonio, however, tells Sebastian that it is dangerous for him to be seen in Illyria as once he was an enemy to Duke Orsino. So, he decides to seclude himself in an inn and meet Sebastian there later on.Olivia summons Malvolio to come to her and Maria tells her that Malvolio's conduct has become rather strange. Malvolio comes dressed in an extraordinary manner (as has been suggested in the forged letter). Being garishly costumed he leers and flirts with Olivia, which mystifies her.

She concludes that Malvolio might be mad and instructs Sir Toby to look after Malvolio. Sir Toby, carries the joke even further. He treats Malvolio as a lunatic and has him locked up in a dark room. Sir Andrew appears with a comical letter challenging Cesario to a duel. He then departs as Olivia and Viola (as Cesario) appear. Olivia repeatedly offers her love and Cesario insists that she should grant it to Orsino. Olivia leaves and sir Toby and Fabian remain to stir up the duel between Andrew and Cesario. Just at this critical moment, Antonio appears. He thinks that it is Sebastian who is involved (being deceived by Viola's likeness to her brother) and wishes to fight Sir Andrew himself. At this juncture, however, the Duke's officers appear and arrest Antonio for his former exploits against the Duke. As he is being taken away, he asks Viola for the purse, which he has given to Sebastian and her naturally, denies any knowledge of it. As she is called Sebastian by Antonio, she realises that her brother must be alive.

Act IV

Olivia has sent Feste to bring Cesario. He meets Sebastian and being deceived by the resemblance brings him before Olivia. On the way, however, Sebastian is attacked by Sir Andrew who still thinks that he is dealing with timid Cesario. Sir Andrew strikes Sebastian who responds by beating him. Sir Toby intervenes as Olivia appears ordering everyone else to leave, she wants to talk with Sebastian whom she also believes to be Cesario. She apologises for the assault and invites him inside with her. Sebastian is amazed at what was happening around him and goes with Olivia to her chamber. Feste disguises himself as one Sir Topas, a Puritan clergyman and meets Malvolio in prison. He insists that Malvolio is mad and disapproves the steward's assertion and his performance, but says that it is the high time to end the joke. Feste again visits Malvolio, this time undisguised. Malvolio asks him for pen and paper so that he can write to Olivia about his predicament. Feste teases him before agreeing to help. Sebastian is musing rather happily over the bewildering fact that he is apparently loved by a beautiful noblewoman. Olivia appears with a priest and suggests that she and Sebastian should immediately go through a marriage ceremony.

Act V

Orsino calls on Olivia with Viola (disguised as Cesario) and other followers. Antonio appears in the custody of the officers and is identified as the Duke's enemy. He tells of Sebastian's disloyalty referring to Viola's behaviour when he called on her at a street in the city. Orsino does not believe him because he knows that Cesario has been with him during that time. Olivia arrives and again rejects Orsino. Orsino becomes hysterical and says that he will kill Cesario not only because he knows Olivia's fondness for him but also because he loves the youth himself, and he seeks the pain of sacrifice. Viola declares herself to die for the Duke and Olivia cries out to her husband, as she believes Cesario to be. Viola denies this and Olivia summons the priest who performed her marriage two hours earlier. As the Duke berates Cesario, Sir Andrew and Sir Toby appear, wounded, claiming to have been assaulted by Cesario. They are followed by Sebastian whose appearance confounds everyone. Sebastian and Viola identify each other and rejoice in their union. The Duke then declares that he will marry Viola. Malvolio is summoned and he shows Olivia the letter which he believes, she has sent to him. Olivia realises that Maria has written it. Fabian defends Maria, saying that the plot was Sir Toby's idea and that Toby has already married Maria. Feste teases Malvolio who storms out vowing revenge. The Duke declares that a double wedding shall soon occur and all go indoors to celebrate except Feste who is left alone to sing a song.

In this final scene, as expected in a Shakespearean comedy, the misunderstandings on which the play has been built are now cleared up. For the first time, all the characters come together, Viola and Sebastian being side by side, the misconceptions are removed. The play thus winds up happily for everybody except Malvolio.

9.7 CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE PLAY

It is important to note that *Twelfth Night* was the last of Shakespeare's mature comedies. In this play, Shakespeare assembles some stock features of contemporary comedy like separated twins, disguises, obstacles

to love, and freshly arranges them in a sequence of events. And all these are accompanied with a sub-plot with a comic villain. The characters look like exaggerated examples of human nature placed in comically preposterous situations, which we willingly accept as necessary for the retelling of a familiar tale. Malvolio deserves his lot simply because he arrogantly and egoistically refuses to enter the fun or rather wants to destroy the fun. However, it should be noted that Malvolio is simply a nuisance and not a potential threat to the comic atmosphere of the play. The strong opposition to this comic atmosphere seems to have come from Orsino and Olivia, two of the lovers themselves who inhibit the fulfilment of love assuming wholly impractical self-images as a romantic lover and a mourning lady respectively. Their self-defeating posture suggests that there is something wrong in the idyllic and romantic world of Illyria. Some other important characters also inspire a certain disquiet or disturbance as well. Viola, the most clear-sighted and honest figure, is nevertheless tangled in the lie of her disguise which prevents her from expressing her love. Sir Toby, for all his humour, is a parasite and a victimiser of the hapless Sir Andrew as well as of Malvolio. Even the apparently frivolous Feste betrays a weary cynicism at times as his final song suggests. More importantly, Malvolio's imprisonment and humiliation seem so out of proportion to his offence that they lend the comic sub-plot a vicious air, which adds to our uneasy sense that the play's comedy is darker than it seems at first.

It may also be observed that this disturbing quality is subtly reinforced by the repeated motif of madness. Olivia asserts that Sir Toby "speaks nothing but madness" (I.v.107) and Feste pretending to excuse Toby's drunkenness allows that "he is but mad yet and the fool shall look to the madman" (I.v. 138-139). When Sebastian arrives at Illyria only to be pointedly assaulted, he cries out, "Are all these people mad" (IV.i.26), and when Olivia mysteriously treats him as her lover, he exclaims: "Either I am mad or else this is a dream" (IV.i.60). Malvolio is especially associated with lunacy. His ludicrous behaviour towards Olivia induced by Maria's letter is received as "midsummer madness". And later on, he is imprisoned as a lunatic, which was the commonest treatment for mental disorder in Shakespeare's time.

These elements have led some critics to regard the play as a social commentary resembling in spirit *Troilous and Cressida* or the satirical comedies of Ben Jonson. Olivia and Orsino may be taken as comic portraits of egoists—Olivia for her comic withdrawal from life and the Duke in his absurd pose as a romantic lover. Most of the Illyrians can be seen as socially ambitious and thus fit subjects for satire. Toby is a vulgar glutton who seeks a continued life of ease in Olivia's household; Malvolio, Sir Andrew and Maria each seeks a profitable marriage. Only Viola alone offers honest love in a society where affectation dominates.

However, the satirical tone does not dominate the play, as Viola is very carefully made free from the acid taste of satire. There is no doubt that she too is vulnerable to love's irrationality to some extent but unlike the others, she recognises and acknowledges her blindness. She admits that the situation is beyond her control as soon as the three loves – her love for Orsino, Orsino's for Olivia, and Olivia's for her have become evident – "O time thou must untangle this, not I/It is too hard a knot for me to entire." She knows what she wants, that is, Orsino's love and she maintains her disguise as the Duke's page and waits for a miracle. In doing so, she becomes a splendid example of the Shakespearean comic heroine, resourceful and aggressive in the pursuit of her man. Viola's effect on her fellow lovers is positive also. As the spirited Cesario, her youthful good looks and imaginative compliments to Olivia bring out the would-be recluse's capacity to love. Similarly, her devotion and loyalty to Orsino slowly and gradually make him prepared for genuine love. In fact, she rescues the two leading figures of Illyria from their own illusions and this paves the way for the happy ending.

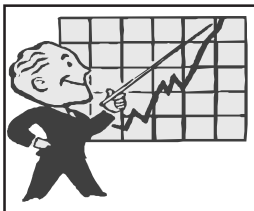
However, the tremors of unease accompany the development of the comic complication that reaches its breaking point only in the final scene. Then equally disturbingly, it generates some potential violence in some fronts. Orsino hysterically threatens to 'sacrifice the lamb that I do love' (5.1.128) by killing Cesario. The crisis is heightened by the appearance of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby both of whom have been wounded in actual violence. Sebastian's entry provides Viola her missing brother, the arrival of Olivia's new husband and the correct identification of Cesario. It also makes possible

the final alignment of the lovers. Sebastian's first encounter with Olivia in IV. i. confirms his power to dissolve the network of ambiguity that has entrapped the other lovers. In fact, more subtly and more significantly, Sebastian represents fulfilment in the incomplete lives of the other characters. He embodies the positive capacity for love that has been needed to calm down the disquieting aura which has been disturbing Illyria.

Yet our feeling of uneasiness is not totally dispelled as there remains the difficult resolution of the sub-plot. The 'Problem of Malvolio', as it has long been termed, has attracted the attention of the critics. In the 17th century, the play was sometimes known as 'Malvolio' and in the 19th century Charles Lamb found 'tragic interest in the catastrophe of this character'. Of course, this seems to be an over statement for Malvolio who lacks the grandeur of a tragic hero. Malvolio's unjust imprisonment definitely raises a moral question; in fact, his undeniably shabby treatment or his unrepentant final response cannot be properly reconciled with the happy ending. It is true that Malvolio is a comic character, the villain of a rollicking sub-plot powered by the wit of Maria and the lusty excesses of Sir Toby. He seems to have deserved his punishment and it has been delivered in a comical fashion. Nevertheless, his anger at his humiliation makes him humanly sympathetic and his raging departure, though looks ugly, and seems justified leaving us with an ongoing sense of disturbance. Shakespeare's purpose here seems to be subtle but effective. Our appreciation of the loving aura that closes the play is strengthened by our simultaneous sense of sadness that happiness is never pure.

Feste provides the play's anti-romantic undertone in his bitter song (V. i. 388-407) which outlines the sad life of a drunkard. For him, the loving resolution of the main plot seems to count for nothing: "The rain, it rained every day." Feste's song expresses the world. But it also reminds us of the limitations of comedy, which has been part of Shakespeare's message in other ways. Though the words leave us with an echo of the harmony of a happy ending, the final stanza of the song has another function; to end the play formally and send the audience on its way. Like an epilogue, it makes a bid and promises that "actors will strive to please you every day." (V.

i.407). The denouement suggests that although the play has unsettling aspects, the triumph of love is *Twelfth Night's* major theme.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Comment briefly on the motif of madness in the play

Q 5: What do you think about Malvolio's humiliation in the play? Is it just?

Q 6: What is the love triangle in the play?

Q 7: What are the characteristics of Shakespeare's comedy available in this play?

9.7.1 Major Themes

Majority of the critics tend to ascertain that an important characteristics of Shakespearean comedy is the comic exploration of the nature of love. It is often said that love leading to marriage is the persistent theme of Shakespearean comedy. Of course, lovers are made to suffer because the course of true love never runs smooth in Shakespearean comedy. However, the end is invariably happy. In this context, it seems important to note that Shakespeare presents both the happy and darker aspects of life. As far as *Twelfth Night* is concerned, it may also be called a typical Shakespearean comedy having the theme of love as the main point of interest. It is significant to note that the play opens with a reference to love made by Duke Orsino, a love-sick melancholy young man infatuated to Olivia, a countess who is unwilling to reciprocate: "If music be the food of love, play on,/Give me the excess of it, that surfeiting/The apperite may sicken and so die."

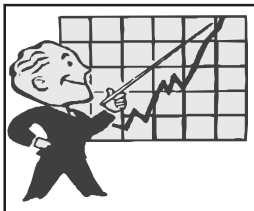
Olivia seems to be a bit egoistical; rather inimical to love as she takes her emotional stance of mourning her dead brother for comparatively a long period of time. Interestingly enough, Viola herself, falls in love with Duke Orsino though she cannot express

her passion and feelings, and on the other hand, Olivia falls in love with Viola (disguised as Cesario and looking like a beautiful youth), and is looking for chances to meet her and her passion becomes deeper and deeper as time goes on. Thus, a difficult love-triangle develops as Viola herself assesses her situation saying, “O time thou must untangle this not I/It is too hard a knot for me to untie” (II.ii. 39-40). However, as the action of the play moves forward, Olivia makes a bold declaration of love for Cesario and when she meets Sebastian (Viola’s brother who bears a strong resemblance to his sister), she at once takes him to the altar of marriage though she recognises the irrationality of her course—‘Blame not this haste of mine.’ Similarly, Orsino being wrapped up in his self-image as a melancholic rejected lover and becoming impressed with Cesario’s devotion and sincerity, develops a fondness for him and when Cesario’s actual identity is revealed he does not hesitate to take Viola as his deserving wife. Thus, we see that Olivia and Sebastian, Orsino and Viola are united in wedlock satisfying Shakespeare’s comprehensive comic design. It is also reported that Sir Toby and Maria are also going to be married soon.

However, it might be an over simplification to state that *Twelfth Night* is simply a romantic comedy on the theme of love. One may also be justified to say that it is also a mild satirical comedy to a certain extent. In this context, it seems worthwhile to mention that in Shakespeare’s time, there were two conceptions of comedy. The more popular conception was that a comedy started in trouble and ended in happiness. The other conception was that a comedy was an imitation of the common errors of human life presented in a scornful and ridiculous way. These two conceptions were obviously romantic and satirical respectively. Shakespeare seems to have been conscious of both these types of comedy when he was writing his own. We can easily notice that much of the play’s comic interest comes from this sub-plot dealing with the members of Olivia’s household - Sir Toby Belch, her uncle, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Toby’s

friend, Malvolio, Olivia's pompous steward, Maria, the waiting gentle woman and the clown, Feste. Though a trusted domestic servant, Malvolio is a stern enemy to all kinds of merriment and joyful pursuits representing the spoil-sport spirit of intolerant Puritanism embracing its hypocrisy. Such people were the targets of satire as they were open enemies to the contemporary theatrical activities along with enthusiasm. So, the gulling or hoodwinking of Malvolio may also be said to be an important theme in *Twelfth Night*. Being disgusted with Malvolio's contempt for revelry and merry-making, the other members of Olivia's household improvise a crude stratagem to expose Malvolio in his true colours. Maria, the intelligent waiting woman, who had a remarkable insight into the steward's character, contrives the plot. In fact, Malvolio's behaviour becomes so odd and alarming that ultimately he is subjected to the primitive shock treatment reserved for Elizabethan lunatics – "cast into a cell as dark as ignorance and is compelled to lie in a bed of straw." Malvolio is again humiliated by Feste in prison in the guise of Sir Topas. However, very soon it was realised that Malvolio's punishment and humiliation were excessive and ultimately he was released though he swears revenge against such humiliation.

Thus, *Twelfth Night* seems to be in some degrees at least an imitation of the common errors of human life presented in a ridiculous and scornful way. In other words, Malvolio's intolerant Puritan attitude towards the healthy pleasures of life, his hypocrisy and pompousness are put into satiric exposure. And this ultimately leads to the 'appearance and reality' theme which is also a common feature of Shakespearean comedies.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Is *Twelfth Night* only a romantic comedy?

Q 9: What attitude does Malvolio represent?

9.7.2 Major Characters

The following are the important characters in the play *Twelfth Night.*

Viola:

Viola seems to be the most important character of the play *Twelfth Night*. She shows admirable loyalty in pressing Orsino's suit to Olivia even when it goes against her love for him. She displays no boastful courage when threatened with a duel but shows the shortcoming and natural weakness of a feminine nature. Apart from her loyalty and sincere love for Orsino, she seems to act like a guardian angel for him. When Orsino, being hysterical over Olivia's continued rejection, proposes to kill Cesario, she says to him: "I... to do you rest, a thousand deaths to die." (V. i. 130-131). It is noteworthy that Viola's attitude towards love is much more wholesome and dignified than that of Orsino and Olivia, and her influence on both these characters seems to be positive. Similarly, Orsino being wrapped up in his self-image as a melancholic rejected lover, becomes impressed with her devotion and sincerity and then develops a fondness for her, which ultimately transforms into husbandly affection. In fact, Viola liberates Olivia and Orsino from their misconceived notions and actions and thus brings out the happiest of conclusions to the play. Viola is one of Shakespeare's most attractive heroines. She is plucky, adventurous and committed to the pursuit of love. Her modesty, mental strength and determination ensure us every moment that her love will surely triumph. She is full of energy and vitality by which she has been able to remove the passivity of Orsino and Olivia.

Olivia:

Olivia is a wealthy lady of Illyria who mistakenly falls in love with Cesario (disguised Viola) and ultimately marries Sebastian, Viola's brother. She is loved by Duke Orsino but she rejects him and other suitors simply because she prefers a scheduled life for some time

to allay the grief of her dead brother. Like Orsino she seems to obstruct the course of the triumph of love as depicted in the play. She moves from one illusion to another beginning with a wilful withdrawal into seclusion and denial of love and then falling into a passion, which is based on a mistake. Only the course of events beginning with the appearance of Sebastian correct matters for her because she is never aware of her mistakes. Olivia seems to be a bit whimsical and irrational who likes to have ones way in many matters. In this regard, she seems to have something in common with her steward, Malvolio who also scorns pleasure and love. However, it will be a mistake to say that she is temperamentally melancholy all the time. She displays her sound common sense and healthy outlook on life when she says to Malvolio: “O you are sick to self-love, Malvolio and taste with a distempered appetite.” (I. i. 89-90) We also see that she forgets her brother as soon as she falls under the charm of Cesario and her pent-up instinct for love plunges her into a frenzy though her passion is misplaced. It may be said that like most of the characters of Shakespeare, Olivia’s character is also in a process of growth as the dramatic action moves forward. However, Olivia is a clear-sighted, cultural, sensible and intelligent woman to a great extent and is fully aware of her status and honour having a sound commonsense.

Orsino:

Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, at first, loves Olivia, the countess and then repeatedly rejected by her, finally loves and marries Viola. Orsino seems to be an image of the melancholy lovers of Shakespearean comedies. He cannot easily accept the fact that his passion for Olivia is misplaced. When we first see him in the play, he displays an amusing distortion of a melancholy lover. In an absurd romantic pose, he demands music to satiate his love-sick soul and insists that a particular phrase should be repeated and then immediately orders that music should be stopped saying: “It is not so sweet now as it was before.” (I.i.8)Thus, Orsino likes to remain

absorbed in his own fantasies. His whimsical and egoistical nature is again observed when he talks of killing Cesario in a frenzied mood after being repeatedly rejected by Olivia. However, towards the end of the play, his instincts direct him to the right path and once Viola's identity is revealed, he becomes ready to love and marry her. Viola also sees in him something worthy of her love. By all means, Orsino is an interesting character through whom Shakespeare illustrates the capacity of man, if he so wishes, to find a positive meaning of life through love.

Malvolio:

Malvolio is undoubtedly one of the most interesting characters of *Twelfth Night*. He is definitely the focal point in the comic sub-plot comprising Malvolio himself, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, Feste and Olivia. He is such a strongly drawn character that in the 17th century, sometimes the play was known as Malvolio. He seems to be an ordinary comic villain, an obvious misfit who mistreats others and in the end is humiliated by a crude stratagem. As we see in the play itself, Malvolio seems to be an austere, serious-minded person who rejects humour and love in favour of stern coldness and a consuming personal ambition. His dislike of merriment and his rigorously sober dress and behaviour seem to justify his name, which in Italian means "Ill-will." These features were typical of the 17th century Puritans who were rather inimical to art, literature and theatre and other healthy amusements. He sternly opposes the frivolity of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste in Act II. Scene iii. inspiring sir Toby's protesting retort: "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous. There should be no more cakes and etc." (II. Iii. 114-115). This was a strong assault on his dignity which makes Malvolio angry. He threatens Maria, the maid of Olivia, thereby triggering the plot that brings him down. However, we should acknowledge that Malvolio does his best to instill some kind of domestic order into his employer's household. But his stern method and Puritan attitude antagonised sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Feste and Maria who are also active members of Olivia's household.

However, it may be said that Malvolio's punishment and humiliation have become excessive in comparison to his offence. Despite all his unwholesome traits and features, he is not a serious threat to the hilarity of the comedy.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek:

Sir Andrew Aguecheek is an important character of the play so far as the comic sub-plot of the play is concerned. He stays in the household of Olivia foolishly cherishing a secret ambition to marry her. He is easily gulled and exploited by his friend, Sir Toby who professes to help him in his suit to Olivia. In fact, he is a foolish knight and a ridiculous figure who does not inspire any feelings of pity and sympathy. We see that Sir Andrew fancies himself as a wit but actually he is a dolt. He thinks that he might be popular among the ladies but in reality he is skinny and disgusting. He poses himself to be a fighter though proves to be a coward. He is gulled by Sir Toby in arranging a challenge to Cesario (disguised Viola) but is then terrified by Sir Toby's fictitious accounts of his valour and fencing skill. He meets Sebastian and strikes him mistaking him for Cesario and is badly beaten as a result.

Sir Toby Belch:

Sir Toby Belch is the drunken uncle of Olivia. He establishes himself as a mentor to Sir Andrew Aguecheek who regards him as an ideal gentleman. As we see in the play, Sir Toby is a self-indulgent gentleman who drinks heavily for the sake of pleasure and with Maria, Sir Andrew and Fabian he represents the jocular, festive spirit of life which ultimately triumphs over the cold humourless rigidity of Malvolio. His joyful temperament is easily discernible in his very first speech when he complains of Olivia's mourning for her dead brother, saying "what a plague means my niece to take the death of a brother thus? I am sure care is an enemy to life." (I.iii.1-3)However, one can easily observe a darker side in Toby. His selfishness is easily noticeable when he exploits both his friend, Sir Andrew and his niece, Olivia.

He spends the foolish Andrew's money pretending that he is promoting his ambitious proposal of marriage to Olivia. However, Sir Toby is not totally devoid of generosity and human sympathy. He realises that the teasing of Malvolio in the prison was going to the extreme and so he says: "I would, we were well rid of this Knavery" (IV. ii. 60-62). We feel happy and satisfied when in Act V it is reported that he has been married to Maria, an intelligent and spirited young woman. Sir Toby has his faults, but is, also a symbol of the values of humour and joyous living and is therefore, a representative of the triumphant spirit of comedy.

Maria:

Maria is endowed with a remarkable insight into human nature. Her utterances regarding Malvolio seem to be absolutely correct when she describes him as "So crammed as he thinks, with excellences that it is his ground of faith that all look on, love him." In the play, Maria functions as the chambermaid of Olivia who performs her duties sincerely. In fact, with Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Faliban, Maria represents the spirit of fun that opposes the humourless severity of Malvolio in the comic sub-plot. She contrives the plot against Malvolio, writing the love-letter in Olivia's hand and leaving it where he will find it. It is she who suggests to Olivia that Malvolio's strange behaviour might be the result of his madness and it is she who persuades Feste to impersonate Sir Topas and torment Malvolio in the prison. At the conclusion of the play, we learn that Sir Toby has married Maria on being impressed by her wit. We feel that this is a befitting marital union, not simply the pairing of characters at the conclusion of a comic play. Maria contributes significantly to the comic spirit of the play.

Feste:

Feste is a jester or a professional fool in the household of Olivia. He represents the play's spirit of festivity which eventually triumphs over the steward Malvolio's chilly ill humour. Feste is a ready-witted, entertaining rogue who has an enviable capacity for looking into the

reality of things. He frequents the courts of both Olivia and Orsino, encounters both Viola and Sebastian, challenges the first appearance of Malvolio, and takes part in the revelry of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. He also advances the comic sub-plot by teasing Malvolio in the prison while being disguised as Sir Topas. As an officially designated Fool, he performs his obligations admirably. He accurately diagnoses Orsino's melancholy and Olivia's obsessive mourning.

Sebastian:

Though slightly sketched, Sebastian is an important character in the comic resolution and happy ending of the play. He is the twin brother of Viola and the husband of Olivia. The character of Sebastian may be seen as a strong contrast to the other characters of the play. There is a downright simplicity and directness about him, which stand out, in refreshing contrast to the current of intrigue which runs elsewhere. We see that Sebastian is capable of offering strong and viable friendship to Antonio. His direct and simple mental make-up is seen when Olivia mistakes when a beautiful stranger offers him unexpected and violent love but soon he accepts her as his wife with calmness. When he is baited by Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, he returns their blows as readily as he returned Olivia's love. No doubt, he has a strong resemblance to Viola as a twin, but he has even a stronger resemblance to her honesty of purpose.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Who is Feste? What does he represent?

Q 11: What is the significance of Sebastian in the play?



9.8 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you have seen that in *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare seems to have achieved a wonderful harmony between romance and

comedy. This play has also been regarded as one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's comedies. It has some amount of satire, but it is aimed at the ludicrous rather than the ridiculous. It makes us laugh at the follies of humankind and never allows us to bear any ill will against them. Moreover, the play is enriched with a gentle melancholy and lyrical atmosphere, which is captured in two of Feste's beautiful songs: "Come away death" and "When I was a little boy." You can enjoy the play in many different ways for its genial humour, for its lyrical grace, for its mixture of fun and seriousness, and, above all, for its positive affirmation of love and human sympathy. It seems as if Shakespeare is saying to us "Enjoy what you will." Furthermore, by a judicious mixture of prose with verse in the dialogue, Shakespeare has made the talk of the characters seem natural and convincing in comparison with the stilted and monotonous rhyme of his first efforts as a playwright.



9.9 FURTHER READING

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9.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Yes… …Shakespeare's creation of living characters against a background of romance, marvel and magic is a distinguishing mark of Shakespeare as a comedy writer… …out of the situation in which they are portrayed, the characters learn the deeper secrets of their own hearts.

Ans to Q No 2: Most of his comedies may be called romantic… …they show a perfect harmony of realism and fantasy, naturalism and supernaturalism, fact and fiction… …the strength also lies in Shakespeare's characterisation… …his characters learn the deeper secrets of their own hearts in certain situations… …introduction of Fool or Clown.



Ans to Q No 3: The play's title is really significant… …*Twelfth Night* refers to the 12th night after Christmas in which the Church celebrates the religious festival of Epiphany… …One possible explanation is that this play was written for an entertainment at one such night to rejoice at good fellowship.

Ans to Q No 4: The motif of madness actually serves as a social commentary… …The word madness is used quite a number of times in the play… …but Shakespeare may also have intended a satire on the Illyrians who are socially ambitious.

Ans to Q No 5: Malvolio's imprisonment and humiliation adds impetus to the comic sub-plot… …Malvolio's unjust imprisonment definitely raises a moral question… …but his anger at his humiliation and vows for revenge seem justified… … he is a sensitive man and a rounded character.

Ans to Q No 6: Viola loves for Orsino… … Orsino loves Olivia… …and Olivia loves Viola who is disguised as Cesario.

Ans to Q No 7: The *Twelfth Night* is the last of Shakespeare's mature comedies… …the features of comedies like separated twins, disguises, obstacles to love are clearly prevalent in this play… …and all these are accompanied with a sub-plot with a comic villain.

Ans to Q No 8: Not exactly… …Shakespeare, in this play, presents both the happy and darker aspects of life… …but this play is a typical Shakespearean comedy having the theme of love as the main point of interest.

Ans to Q No 9: Malvolio presents the Puritan attitude towards the healthy pleasures of life.

Ans to Q No 10: Feste is a jester or a professional fool in the household of Olivia. He represents the play's spirit of festivity which eventually triumphs over the steward Malvolio's chilly ill humour.

Ans to Q No 11: Sebastian as a character is a strong contrast to the other characters of the play… …there is a downright simplicity and directness about him… …we see that Sebastian is capable of offering strong and viable friendship to Antonio.



9.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: *Twelfth Night* seems to be a drama of love. Justify your views.

Q 2: What are the important characteristics of Shakespearean comedy? Discuss *Twelfth Night* as a typical Shakespearean Comedy.

Q 3: Write a critical note on Shakespeare's interfusion and integration of the elements of romance, satire and pure comedy in *Twelfth Night*.

Q 4: Comment on Shakespeare's handling of the sub-plot, and the role played by the minor characters in *Twelfth Night*.

Q 5: Discuss the significance of the title *Twelfth Night* with reference to its various sources.

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UNIT 10: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *THE TEMPEST* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 William Shakespeare: The Playwright

10.4 Sources of the Play *The Tempest*

10.5 Act wise Summary of the Play

10.6 Let us Sum up

10.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.8 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- identify the important sources of the play *The Tempest*
- make a summary of the play
- describe the importance of the play *The Tempest* in the context of the period discussed
- assess the significance of Shakespeare as a playwright on the basis of the play *The Tempest*

10.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which is the fourth, final, and the finest of Shakespeare's late romances. It is a complex work whose plot structure serves to draw attention to wider aesthetic and philosophical themes. King Alonso of Naples and his entourage sail home for Italy after attending his daughter's wedding in Tunis, Africa. They encounter a violent storm, or tempest. The ship in which they are sailing is wrecked and the crew are washed ashore on a strange island inhabited by the magician Prospero who has deliberately conjured up the storm. Prospero is in fact the rightful Duke of Milan who had been put to sea to die with his

three-year-old daughter Miranda by his brother, Antonio, who was in league with King Alonso of Naples. When Prospero and Miranda finally reached the island they found it inhabited by Ariel, an airy spirit, and the ugly, half-human Caliban. Caliban deeply resents Prospero as he believes that he is the rightful ruler of the island. It is because this island had a sinister history up till then for a witch named Sycorax had been banished there. She gave birth to a monster Caliban and enraged with Ariel who was an airy spirit, had imprisoned him in a tree. She had died without setting him free. Prospero freed Ariel and he became his servant thereafter. Though Prospero tried to educate and civilise Caliban, he developed into a vengeful creature, hating his benefactor but forced to obey him. After you finish reading the unit, you will learn that Caliban plots with King Alonso's confidants to murder Prospero. But, the play finally ends with almost all the offenders repenting, Prospero regaining his dukedom, Ariel being set free, the island is left to Caliban. Thus, a happy ending was brought to the play.

10.3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: THE PLAYWRIGHT

In the first unit of this Block, you have read in detail about the life and works of Shakespeare. This is just a recapitulation of what you have already read. You find that except for the records of his baptism in 1564 and his burial in 1616, there is very little substantial evidence for William Shakespeare's life. Shakespeare is mentioned occasionally, in official records, in the records of the lives of his relations and friends, and in the writings of his fellow actors and dramatists, and that is all. His life and career have been more extensively researched than those of any other writer. Still, the evidences remain elusive. Shakespeare's professional life in London was marked by a number of financially advantageous arrangements that permitted him to share the profits of his acting company—the Lord Chamberlain's Company, which later came to be known as the King's Men, and its two Theatres, the Globe Theatre and the Black Friars. Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories until about 1608, when he wrote his tragedies—*Hamlet, King Lear, Othello* and *Macbeth.* In his last phase, he

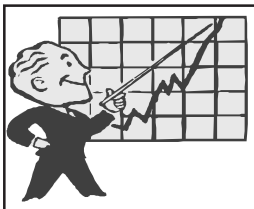
wrote tragi-comedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights. After about 1608, Shakespeare's dramatic production waned and it seems that he spent more time in Stratford.

By 1592, he was quite well known in London theatre. The first recorded works of Shakespeare are *Richard III* and the three parts of *Henry VI*, written in the first phase when historical drama was in vogue. Besides plays, he also wrote 154 Sonnets dedicated to one Dark Lady and Mr. W. H. Shakespeare's plays are difficult to date. However, the studies of the texts suggest that plays like *Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet* etc. belong to Shakespeare's earliest period until 1594. The period 1594-98 saw the production of the middle comedies like *Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice*, and history play *Richard II*. Shakespeare's mature comedies include *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night* about which you have already studied in the previous unit. In the early 17th century, Shakespeare wrote the darker comedies, sometimes called the problem plays, like *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*. Many critics believe that Shakespeare's greatest tragedies like *Hamlet*, *Othelo*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* represent the peak of his dramatic career. In his final period, Shakespeare turned to romance or tragicomedy, and completed three major plays: *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. It is heard that Shakespeare also collaborated on two other plays, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, probably with John Fletcher.

10.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *THE TEMPEST*

The Tempest was probably written in 1610–1611 and published in the first Folio of 1623. The play became very popular possibly because it was a great success at Court when presented in the winter of 1612-13, gracing the betrothal and nuptials of the Princess Elizabeth with the Prince Palatine Elector. You find that *The Tempest* is most likely the last play and it is remarkable for being one of the only two plays (the other being *Love's Labor's Lost*) whose plot is entirely original. No single source has so far

been established and this also supports the argument of those who claim that in writing what he might have felt to be his last stage work, he was consciously denouncing his theatrical art. Therefore, those looking for a source to the plot of this play are sure to get disappointed. Yet, one Thomas Warton in a note in his book *History of English Poetry* (1781), wrote that he had been informed by the late Mr. Collins of Chichester that Shakespeare's *Tempest* was based on a popular romance *Aurelio and Isabella* in Italian (1586). But this is not free from criticism. Others have followed the clue of a German play, *Die Schone Sidea* written by one Jacob Ayrer, in which there is a magician who is also the Prince Ludolph of the play. He has a daughter and keeps a demon. It may be that Shakespeare used Ayrer's play, for the English comedians of his time might have seen the German play *Die Schone Sidea,* and brought home the story. There are secondary sources and analogues ranging from Ovid to travel documents most notably the accounts of a tempest off the Bermudas that separated and nearly wrecked a fleet of colonial ships sailing from Plymouth to Virginia in around 1609. That Shakespeare used at least some of the pamphlets dealing with this wreck can never be disputed. The English colonial project seems to be on Shakespeare's mind throughout *The Tempest,* as almost every character, from lord Gonzalo to the drunken Stephano, ponders how he would rule the island if he were its king. Shakespeare seems also to have drawn on Montaigne's essay "Of the Cannibals," which was translated into English in 1603. The name of Prospero's servant-monster, Caliban, seems to be an anagram or derivative of "Cannibal." Thus, you will find that there is no dominant source for this play. Although many works are named there is not any particular known work in which the plot of the play can be positively traced.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What would you like to say about the source of the play *The Tempest*?

Q 2: What resemblance does *The Tempest* has with the German play *Die Schone Sidea?*

10.5 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Act 1

The Tempest opens with a terrible storm at sea when a royal party is on board a ship. The sailors struggle to save the ship, and enraged and worried boatswain orders Alonso and his company to go below the deck. The king's councillor, Gonzalo, reminds the boatswain that he is speaking to the King, but the boatswain pays little heed to what Gonzalo said. Despite all efforts, the ship is lost. Prospero and Miranda are watching the ship caught in the storm. Miranda knows that the storm is a creation of her father and begs him to end the storm, as she cannot watch the crew suffer. Prospero assures his daughter Miranda that his actions are meant to protect her future. He also tells her the story of her birth and of their lives before they came to the island. Prospero informs that he is the rightful duke of Milan and Miranda is a princess. He also tells that he had assigned the rule of his kingdom to his brother Antonio, as he was more absorbed in studies. However, Antonio formed an alliance with the king of Naples to oust Prospero and usurp his kingdom. Prospero and his daughter were placed in a small rickety boat to die at the sea. It was with the help of a sympathetic Neapolitan, called Gonzalo, that they could escape unhurt. Eventually, Prospero and Miranda arrived on the island, where they have remained ever since. When he finishes the tale, Prospero uses his magic to put Miranda to sleep. The spirit Ariel enters to report on the storm, the ship, and the crew who are separated into smaller groups and stranded on different parts of the island. Ariel then demands his freedom as Prospero had promised. However, Prospero tells that his freedom will be delayed. When Ariel leaves, Prospero awakens Miranda and calls Caliban, the son of the witch, Sycorax. Prospero has enslaved Caliban who is adamant, arrogant and rebellious and is controlled only through Prospero's magic. Caliban claims the island to be his own while Prospero claims that Caliban is corrupt, having tried to rape Miranda. After Caliban leaves, Ariel enters with Ferdinand, who sees Miranda, and the two fall instantly in love. Although this is what Prospero intended, he does not want it to appear too easy for Ferdinand, and accuses him of being a spy, according to his plan.

Act II

This act opens with Gonzalo praising God for their survival and King Alonso lamenting the loss of his son Ferdinand. In the meantime, Antonio and Sebastian whisper among themselves and belittle both Alonso's grief and Gonzalo's cheer. Instead of making attempts to pacify him, they tell Alonso that he should not have permitted his daughter to marry the African. Ariel enters, unseen by the group, and makes them fall asleep, except for Sebastian and Antonio. Subsequently, these two are seen to work out a plot by which Sebastian will seize Alonso's crown, the way Antonio had years back seized Prospero's title and possessions. Subsequently, they would try to kill the sleeping king and his party. Just at this moment, Ariel awakens Gonzalo and prevents the murders. Then the royal party starts searching for Ferdinand. In the next scene of this act Caliban curses Prospero. When he hears someone approaching, he assumes that it is one of Prospero's spirits, coming to torture him once again. Trinculo, the King's jester is looking for shelter and encounters Caliban who seems to be half man and half-fish. Trinculo takes shelter under his cloak. The king's butler, Stefano also enters, clearly drunk. Stefano stops at the sight of the object on the ground, covered with a cloak and with four legs sticking out. Like Trinculo, Stefano immediately understands the financial possibilities that such a creature can offer back home. But, alarmed Caliban thinks that he is about to experience a new form of torture. Stefano pulls the cloak from Caliban's head and pours wine into his mouth. Trinculo is happy to find another survivor of the storm on the island and joins them in drinking wine. Drunken Caliban now watches the happy reunion of Stefano and Trinculo and imagines Stefano to be a god, dropped from heaven. Caliban swears devotion to this new "god," and promises to find Stefano the best food on the island.

Act III

Ferdinand enters carrying a log, which he claims is an odious task but the thoughts of Miranda make the work effortless. Miranda enters and offers to take up his task so that she might force him to rest, but Ferdinand refuses. Although she was instructed by her father not to reveal herself, Miranda out of emotional impulse reveals it to Ferdinand. Ferdinand admits

to having never seen and known as perfecta woman as Miranda. Miranda too confesses that she has known no other women, nor any other man, except her father. Now, she would want no other man except Ferdinand. After exchanging some words of love, Miranda tells Ferdinand that she is unworthy of him but will marry him if he wants her. Prospero has been watching and listening to them secretly. He acknowledges Miranda and Ferdinand's natural match as being "Of two most rare affections", but he has other plans that need his immediate attention. The attention of the audience now returns to Stefano, Trinculo, and Caliban—all of whom are now heavily drunk. Caliban has a plan to kill Prospero so he needs helpfrom his new friends. As Caliban explains that he is the rightful owner of the island, Ariel arrives and listens to everything. Caliban explains that they must burn Prospero's books, and after Prospero is dead, Stefano can marry Miranda, which will make her his queen of the island. Ariel resolves to tell Prospero about the plot against him. When the drunken men sing, Ariel accompanies them with a pipe. They are afraid, but Caliban reassures them that such sounds are frequently heard on the island. The royal party finishes their futile search for Ferdinand. In a short while, a number of ghostly figures arrive, and with them, a lavish dinner. The royal party is hungry and ready to eat while Ariel appears disguised as a harpy. He makes the banquet disappear and accuses Antonio, Sebastian, and Alonso of being the instruments of sin. Although they draw their swords, they are frozen in place by magic and unable to lift up their arms. The king is shaken by what he has seen and heard, and he flees, as do Antonio and Sebastian. Worried that they might do themselves harm, Gonzalo sends Adrian and Francisco to watch them.

Act IV

Prospero, acknowledging that he has been harsh towards the young lovers and now promises a reward. Recognizing Ferdinand and Miranda's love for each other, he offers Miranda to Ferdinand as his wife. Prospero calls Ariel to arrange a celebration of their betrothal. The celebration includes a masque, presented by the spirits of the island. Suddenly Prospero remembers the three conspirators who have set out to murder him and

calls a halt to the masque. Ariel reports that he led the three men, all of whom are very drunk, through a briar patch and into a filthy pond, where he left them wallowing. Soon Caliban, Stefano, and Trinculo appear, wet and smelling foul. Stefano and Trinculo lament the loss of their bottles but are much cheered when they see the clothing hanging nearby. The two ignore Caliban's pleas to continue on their mission. At that moment, Prospero and Ariel enter with spirits, disguised as hunters and hounds. The three conspirators flee, with the spirits in pursuit. Prospero, acknowledging that the power now holds over all his enemies, promises Ariel that he will soon be set free.



LET US KNOW

Masque: These are mini plays consisting of songs, poetry and dances performed by brightly costumed players, often represented by mythological characters. In this masque of the play *The Tempest*, three goddesses Iris (the goddess of rainbow), Juno (the wife of Jupitar) and Ceres (the earth goddess) are seen bestowing their blessings on the young couple. You should know that such masques were very popular during Shakespeare's time. The royal people used to watch them sitting, playing chess. Ferdinand and Miranda, too, see them and Miranda speaks the memorable off quoted lines:

"O wonder !How many goodly creatures are there here
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new World"

Act V

This act opens with Prospero's decision to finish his project. Ariel reveals to Prospero that Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio are remorseful, worried, and desperate. Prospero reassures Ariel that he will be compassionate in dealing with his enemies and asks him to bring the group to him. Then in a soliloquy, Prospero reveals what he has accomplished with magic and promises that he will now give up his magic, bury his magic staff, and drown his magic book at sea. Ariel enters with the royal party,

who appear to be in a state of trance, and places them within the magic circle that Prospero had earlier drawn. Prospero, clothed in the attire of the duke of Milan, appears before them. In a gesture of reconciliation, Prospero embraces Alonso, who is filled with remorse. Gonzalo is also embraced in turn, and then Prospero turns to Sebastian and Antonio. Prospero tells them that he will not charge them as traitors, at this time. Antonio is forgiven and is required to renounce his claims on Prospero's dukedom. While Alonso continues to mourn the loss of his son, Prospero relates that he too has lost his daughter. But he means that he has lost her in marriage and pulls back a curtain to reveal Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess. Ferdinand explains to his father that he is betrothed to Miranda and that this event occurred while he thought his father was dead. At the sight of the couple, Gonzalo begins to cry and thanks God for having worked such a miracle. Ariel enters with the master of the boat and boatswain. Although the ship lay in harbour and in perfect shape, the puzzled men cannot explain how that had occurred. Alonso is also mystified, but Prospero tells him not to trouble his mind with such concerns. Ariel brings in Caliban, Stefano, and Trinculo, who are still drunk but fear struck. Prospero explains that these men have robbed him and plotted to murder him. Caliban immediately repents and promises to seek grace. Then Prospero orders Caliban to go back to his cell and decorate it. He invites his guests to spend the night with him, where he will tell them about his adventures and of his life during these past 12 years. Ariel's last duty to Prospero is to provide calm seas and favourable winds as they sail back to Naples next morning.

Act V Epilogue

At the end of Act V, Prospero offers an Epilogue. Prospero, who is now alone on stage, requests that the audience free him. He states that he has thrown away his magic and pardoned those who have injured him. Now he requires that the audience release him from the island, which has been his prison so that he might return to Naples. The audience's applause will be the signal that he is freed. Prospero indicates that his forgiveness of his former enemies is what all men crave. With the audience's applause, Prospero leaves the stage.

Plot Construction:

There is really very little in the plot of *The Tempest*. There is a love story, and then there is story of two younger brothers who usurp their older brothers' titles and possessions. And finally, there is the story of Caliban's plot to murder Prospero. However, none of these plots are given much attention or substance; instead, the play is about the complexities of human nature and about reminding the audience that the division between happiness and tragedy is always fragile and must be carefully maintained. *The Tempest* ends with the promise of a wedding; it could just as easily have ended with tragedy followed by the two murder plots and betrayals. However, Prospero's avoidance of tragedy reveals his character's decency and contradicts some critics' arguments that he is an amoral demigod exploiting the natural inhabitants of this island.

The play *The Tempest* is unique in its adherence to the three unities. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle argued that *unity of action* was essential for dramatic structure. This meant that a dramatic work should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. The *unity of time* is derived from Aristotle's argument that all the action should occur within one revolution of the sun—one day. The *unity of place* developed later is a Renaissance idea, which held that the location of the play should be limited to one place. These unities added verisimilitude to the work and made it easier for the audience to believe the events unfolding on the stage. Shakespeare rarely used the three unities in other plays, but he fully adheres to them in this play. All the events that occur on the island are limited to three hours period. Shakespeare needed the three unities, especially that of time, to counter the incredulity of the magic and to add coherence to the plot.

The Tempest, although it is one of Shakespeare's shortest plays, still maintains the integrity of the five-act structure. In fact, most Elizabethan theatres adhere to the five-act structure, which corresponds to divisions in the action. The first act is the Exposition, in which the playwright sets forth the problem and introduces the main characters. In *The Tempest*, the first act establishes the nature of Antonio's betrayal of Prospero, and it explains how Prospero and Miranda came to live on the island. This first act also

opens with a violent storm, which establishes the extent of Prospero's power. Most of the play's remaining characters also make an appearance in this act. The second act is the Complication, in which the entanglement or conflict is developed. In *The Tempest*, the conspiracy to murder Alonso is developed, which establishes that Antonio is still an unsavoury character. In addition, the audience learns more about Caliban, with Stefano and Trinculo preparing the groundwork for a second conspiracy to be formed. The third act is the Climax; when the action takes a turning point and complications occur. It is important that the way to love is not too easy, and so in *The Tempest*, Prospero has forbidden contact between Miranda and Ferdinand, although the audience knows this to be pretence on his part. In this act, the conspiracy to murder Prospero is developed, although the audience knows that Ariel is listening, and so there is no real danger. Finally, the essential climactic moment occurs in this act when Prospero confronts his enemies at the ghostly banquet. The forth act is called the Falling Action, which signals the beginning of the play's resolution. In this act, the romance between Ferdinand and Miranda is acknowledged and celebrated with a masque, and Prospero deals with the conspiracy to murder him by punishing Caliban, Stefano, and Trinculo. The fifth act is called the Catastrophe, wherein the conclusion occurs. As the term suggests, this act brings closure to the play, a resolution to the conflict, and the plans for a wedding. As the play draws to a close, Prospero is victorious over his enemies, Ferdinand is reunited with his father, Antonio and Sebastian are vanquished, and Caliban regrets his plotting.



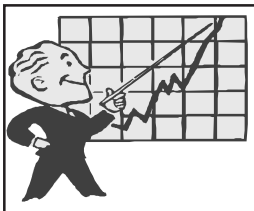
LET US KNOW

The Two Groups of Characters in the play *The Tempest*

The first group is represented by Antonio and Sebastian who do not inspire admiration. Alonso, believing his only son Ferdinand to be dead is overwhelmed with grief and is distractedly looking for him, but Antonio and Sebastian, far from sympathising with him and consoling him, are conspiring against his life. Antonio had once overthrown his own brother

and brought his own native land under foreign domination by conspiring with Alonso. Once a traitor, always a traitor and he now conspires with Sebastian to overthrow Alonso. They plan to kill Alonso when he is sleeping but Prospero averts this disaster by making Ariel wake up Gonzalo just on time.

There is another group, that of comic characters like Stephano and Trinculo. These two excite the admiration of Caliban, who takes them for gods and swears allegiance to them. These three then hatch a plot against Prospero. This plot too is foiled by Prospero's watchfulness through Ariel. You can see that this is a parody of the plot against Alonso by Antonio and Sebastian.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How many stories are there in the play *The Tempest*?

Q 4: What is the nature of Ferdinand's love for Miranda?

Q 5: What is so unique about the play *The Tempest*?



10.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read about the play *The Tempest* and the context of its production and the different possible sources from which the plot of the play was drawn. However, you have also seen from the reading of the play that it is one of Shakespearean plays where the plot was perhaps Shakespeare's own, and it is difficult to trace one single main source for the play. *The Tempest* is a story about love, revenge, and greed. Set on a mythical island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, Prospero comes up with a plan to avenge a treachery done against him, reclaim the title of dukedom his brother had stolen, and in the process helps his beautiful daughter find a true and royal match. Through the use of magic and the spirit Ariel, he also uncovers the plot of the villains to kill the king Alonso and himself. Unlike some other romantic comedies of Shakespeare, *The Tempest* is less focused on the love story, and more on the plots of murder and revenge.



10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q No 1: *The Tempest* is a play whose plot is entirely original… …No single source has so far been established… …yet Thomas Warton refers to a popular Italian romance *Aurelio and Isabella* (1586) and others seek to trace the source in a German play *Die Schone Sidea…* …Shakespeare might also have used some pamphlets dealing with the wreck of colonial ships near Barmuda in 1609.

Ans to Q No 2: Just like Prospero in *The Tempest,* in Jacob Ayrer's German play *Die Schone Sidea* too there is a magician… …he too has a daughter and keeps a demon.

Ans to Q No 3: There is a love story between Ferdinand and Miranda… …there is the story of two younger brothers, Antonio and Sebastian, who usurp/seek to usurp their elder brothers' titles and possessions… …and finally there is the story of Caliban's attempts to murder Prospero.

Ans to Q No 4: Ferdinand's love for Miranda passes through a lot of hardships… …he needs to prove his worth as an would-be husband in front of Prospero… …but Ferdinand is a worthy lover as he has great devotion to his love for Miranda.

Ans to Q No 5: The play is unique in its adherence to the three unities which Shakespeare rarely used… …following 'unity of action' this play has a clear beginning, middle, and end… …'unity of time' is observed in its completion of the action in one day… …'unity of place' is seen as the play is limited to one place only (the island).



10.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What is the nature of Prospero and Miranda's relationship? How does Miranda's character change over the course of the play?

Q 2: In what ways, can the play *The Tempest* be called a narrative of colonialism? What are the aspects of colonialism available in the play?

Q 3: What is Prospero's sense of justice? Do, you think that his sense of justice and mercifulness have let Prospero emerge as the most admirable character of the play?

Q 4: What are the marked differences you find in the characters of Caliban and Ariel?

Q 5: Write a note on the different sources that Shakespeare adhered to in writing the play *The Tempest*.

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UNIT 11: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *THE TEMPEST* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Critical Commentary on the Play

11.4 Major Themes

11.5 Major Characters

11.6 Critical Reception

11.7 Let us Sum up

11.8 Further Reading

11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.10 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- take a close look at *The Tempest* as one of Shakespeare's greatest plays
- read *the play* from various critical viewpoints
- identify the major themes which make the play so important
- make a list of the major characters and explain their roles
- frame some ideas regarding Shakespeare's reputation as a playwright

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of this Block on Shakespeare. In this unit, a discussion will be provided on the play *Tempest* which is also supposed to be the bard's last play. This play is believed to have been written in 1610–11, and is thought by many critics to be the last play that Shakespeare wrote alone. It is set on a remote island, where the sorcerer Prospero the rightful Duke of Milan plots to restore his daughter Miranda to her rightful

place using illusion and skilful manipulation. Prospero is served by a spirit named Ariel, whom he had rescued from a tree in which he had been trapped by the cruel witch Sycorax, after he had refused to obey her. Prospero ensures Ariel's loyalty by repeatedly promising to release it from servitude. Sycorax' son, Caliban, a deformed monster and the only inhabitant before the arrival of Prospero, was initially adopted and raised by him. Prospero with the help of Ariel conjures up a storm, the eponymous tempest, to lure his usurping brother Antonio and the complicit King Alonso of Naples to the island. There, his machinations bring about the revelation of Antonio's lowly nature, the redemption of the King, and the marriage of Miranda to Alonso's son, Ferdinand and so on. The story of the play draws heavily on the tradition of the Romance, and it was influenced by the courtly masque and also the Italian Commedia dell'arte. By the time you finish reading the unit, you should be able to appreciate the play in totality.

11.3 CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE PLAY

The play can be read and analysed in terms of its different aspects. Following is an attempt to discuss the text keeping some of the issue and aspects in mind. You should realise that this is just one way to look at the text. However, you are advised to read some of the recommended books for a better understanding and interpretation of the themes and issues prevalent in the text.

It should be stated that the term 'romance' is a label commonly attached to this play by some critics. However, in the early 17th Century, these plays would have been read as 'tragicomedies' though it is actually classified as a comedy in the First Folio. It remains, however, a useful observation that this play shares many of the conventions of romance and seeks to illustrate a moral point. Shakespeare's romances also make a statement of some sort and the play *The Tempest* demonstrates an awareness of the improbability of its own story. The combination of myth and fantasy, characteristic of a romance, gave Shakespeare, now at his last phase of career, two tempting opportunities – one, it gave him a pretext to reflect on the way art and the imagination operate in understanding of the

world; and second, it provided an appropriate context in which to show the world not only as it is but as it could be.

20th century critics often discuss *The Tempest* as a narrative of colonialism as Shakespeare's source materials are clearly drawn from recent adventures of an English fleet in Bermuda. Moreover, and the play was written in a period when considerable investment and settlement were taking place in the English colonies in the New World, particularly in Virginia (now the southern USA). Though geography indicates a Mediterranean location (for example, Alonso's ship is *en route* from Tunis to Naples), Caliban's name resembles 'Carib', the name of the original West-Indian islanders wiped out by European disease and genocide. Thus, a New World colonial setting is often assumed by critics while reading the play. Others suggest that the play is actually set in an area, which was a point of conflict between Catholic Europeans and Muslim Turks. There was also, at the same time, the continuing struggle to establish English rule in Ireland, over a people regarded by many English writers and colonisers as 'Masterless men'. However, in the same colonial enterprise there are also the temptations of the wilderness, which might lead the virtuous and saintly European astray. This wild and anarchic utopia is figured as a female in the symbolic function of Miranda. Prospero knows that his power may at any moment dissolve into nothingness. Yet his nagging fear seems to be that he will lose control over his own daughter's sexuality (IV. i. 14–23, 51–4). Prospero admits that he has only his dead wife's word that Miranda actually is his daughter (I. ii. 56–7). This is one of the most interesting mysteries of the play.

Prospero controls the island by inflicting violence with his magic. His is a language that contains the violence as Caliban immediately reminds them: "You taught me language, and my profit on't/Is, I know how to curse. The red-plague rid you/For learning me your language!" (I.ii. 363–5).When Prospero and Miranda first came to the island, Caliban had no knowledge of their language, yet they treated him with affection and in return they received love and care from him. The attempted rape seems to have happened only after their concepts and ideas had been imparted to him more fully. Prospero and Miranda gave Caliban a language which replaced

his 'brutish … gabble'. However, they blame the rape attempt on his own savage nature, not on his view of the world, which their language could have given him. What Prospero has failed to do is to destroy Caliban's capacity to think for himself. Stephano and Trinculo might sing that 'Thought is free'(III 2 123), but it is Caliban who knows what that means, even if Ariel knows it as well. Even under the surveillance of Prospero, Caliban is not totally trapped by the system of hierarchy and oppression the invaders have brought to his island. Prospero is a usurper in Caliban's kingdom just as much as Antonio is in Milan, but it is still Caliban who appreciates the beauty of his home and can speak for future peace and happiness. Take the following lines for example

"Be not afeared, the isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about my ears; and sometimes voices,
That if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again." (III.Ii. 135–43)

The play seems to tell us how different is the 'savage' Caliban from the 'civilised' invaders. Caliban has his own distinctive view of the world, his own sense of beauty and of what it is to be alive. Caliban's ideas of freedom are placed in sharp contrast against the structurally oppressive language and ideas of the invaders. For example, Prospero's language is full of threat, aggression, violence and demands. Ferdinand says, Prospero is 'composed of harshness' (III 1 9). Yet Caliban (and also Ariel) speaks out for liberty, and we are given an even more startling perspective on freedom in the face of physical realities in the play's first scene. As the storm created by Ariel threatens the King of Naples' ship, the courtiers come up on deck only to be firmly put into their place by the boatswain:

Alonso: Good boatswain, have care. Where's the master?
Play the men.

Boatswain: I pray now, keep below.
Antonio: Where is the master, bos'n?
Boatswain: Do you not hear him? You mar our labour.*
Keep your cabins – you do assist the storm.
Gonzalo: Nay, good, be patient.
Boatswain: When the sea is. Hence! What care these roarers
for the name of king? To cabin! silence! Trouble us not.
Gonzalo: Good, yet remember whom thou hast aboard.
Boatswain: None that I love more than myself. You are a councillor;
if you can command these elements to silence, and
work the peace of the present*, we will not hand a rope
more. Use your authority. (I.i 9–21)

The royal party presumes that their superiority is natural, and perhaps have not realised that they do not apply over the professional seafarers struggling to save the ship and its crew. The scene shows such superiority to be far from natural, and prepares for the other challenges of the play that hierarchy is another form of violence, not a God-given right to rule. The ending of the play is even more interesting. Prospero strives to have excused himself from his own involvement in the injustice of the world in which he lives. However, many critics even suggest that Gonzalo's speech about his ideal kingdom, and Sebastian and Antonio's response to it in act III, foreground a paradox about power in the play. Prospero seeks to bring about liberty and justice through his use of absolute hierarchical power, but without any notion of his responsibilities to a wider community. By the last part of the play, however, he knows his power is arbitrary. In his speech after the end of the masque he reminds us of the insubstantial fictionality both of what we are watching and of his authority (IV. i. 146–58), an estrangement device in itself. He calls on the audience, to release him from the island and his role because he too seeks freedom from guilt which can be achieved only outside his roles as the duke and the magician in the play:

*Prospero:*As you from crimes would pardoned be,
Let your indulgence set me free. (Exit)
(V. Epilogue 19–20)

Prospero knows that his brother is guilty of treachery and intended murder (for Antonio had tried to kill Prospero and Miranda, however indirectly). He must be made to repent, for the good of his own soul. The issues of sin, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation are serious issues that have given a religious dimension to all the last romances of Shakespeare. You must note here that the play ends happily. We see Prospero getting his dukedom back. Ferdinand and Miranda are united and their union also unites the two kingdoms of Milan and Naples. Prospero however realises that his magical powers should play no part in the life he is going to lead as the ruler of Milan. Therefore, before he meets the culprits and forgives them, he renounces his magical powers. In the epilogue, Prospero looks forward to the days in future which he will spend as the Duke of Milan: "…will retire me to my Milan where/ Every third thought shall be my grave."

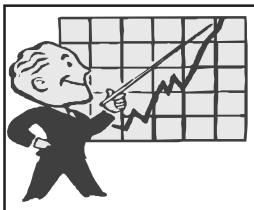
Caliban's enslavement to Stephano through drink can be seen as an undercutting parody of the magic power by which Prospero enslaves him. It mocks Prospero's power through a comic replication of the main action, as happens in the history plays. But Prospero (acting through Ferdinand), Caliban and Stephano all see Miranda's body as a piece of property to be cultivated, from which each hopes both to produce a future for himself and to establish his own identity. Miranda, then, stands symbolically for the island itself. This maiden is the virgin territory that is to be conquered so that the conqueror may establish his identity and authority over other parts of the world.



LET US KNOW

Women and their relationships with men are central to this play, especially because in a romance, it was a common belief that the errors of the older generation will be redeemed. Though women are seen either as unruly and uncontrollable individuals (as in Sycorax), or as beautiful and fertile objects (as in Miranda), they nevertheless possess qualities that will make the world better. They only save men from the harshness and injustice of power and domination.

By showing how time can undermine all deeply held beliefs and structures, this play has a utopian vision, which looks forward to a more equal and fair world.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does the play combine art and imagination?

Q 2: Refer to some of the actual records that contribute to the theme of colonialism in this play?

Q 3: How does Caliban react to the teachings of Prospero?

11.4 MAJOR THEMES

The preceding subsection has provided necessary hints on the possible themes of the play. The following is however a discussion on some of the most important themes of the play.

The Theme of Freedom:

This is one of the dominant themes of the play. At the superficial level, there is the thirst for freedom evinced primarily by Ariel and to a lesser degree by Caliban. The concept is produced in the second scene of Act I when Prospero asks "How now! Moody?/ What is't thou canst demand?"Ariel replies "My liberty". Although this theme seems to run through the whole of *The Tempest*, it is the thought that the true freedom of man consists in servitude. The characters, each in his own way, discover this truth. Ferdinand finds that in service that will bring him closer to Miranda: "This is my mean task/Would be as heavy to me, as odious, but/The mistress which I serve quickens what's dead/And makes my labours pleasant." (III. i. 4-7) He gains freedom not only from this temporary slavery but also gains Miranda by serving Prospero in a willing and obedient manner. Then, once again he acknowledges his servitude to Miranda like this: "The very instant that I saw you, did/My heart fly to your service, there resides/To make me slave to it." (III. i. 75-78) Miranda also is not ready to share his present servitude but also expresses her willingness to serve him throughout her life: "I am your

wife if you will marry me;/If not, I'll die your maid." (III. i. 98-99) Their willingness to undergo service is finally rewarded. Ferdinand not only gets Miranda but his father, and Miranda becomes, besides the wife of Ferdinand, the future queen of Naples, with the joyous approval of her father-in-law, Alonso. Another example of freedom is to be found in Gonzalo's description of an imaginary common wealth. This is to be a society totally free from all servitude or force. There is to be total freedom in this utopia imagined by him. You can see that the concept of freedom extended even to nature. Gonzalo says that there should be no use of force in any way. Even nature should produce without any force: "All things in common nature should produce/Without sweat or endeavour…" Prospero also talks of freedom in the epilogue. So, you can see that there are three kinds of freedom that are present in the play: firstly it is freedom from servitude as represented by Ariel, freedom in servitude as in the case of Ferdinand and Miranda, and thirdly total freedom as is conceived by Gonzalo for his utopia.

The Theme of Natural Life:

According to Frank Kermode, in *The Tempest* Shakespeare has taken up the theme of Nature and the influence of Man (or Art) on her. Let me tell you that this is a common theme in Elizabethan literature. Man is shown in his relationship with nature and this is looked upon from two viewpoints. From one viewpoint, the vision of nature is pure, innocent and benevolent, and man introduces corruption into this innocent world. From the other, nature is wild and barbarous and would benefit by man's careful art. Shakespeare presents both the views. The play describes an uninhabited island, which is not a hostile one. For example, Gonzalo finds everything in it that man may need to live simply and peacefully. He really finds this place to be an ideal one for utopia. We come to know through Caliban that there are pleasant and fertile spots in the island. He had shown them to Prospero and Miranda when they had come to the island, and he is ready to show them to Stephano and Trinculo as he accepts them as gods dropped from the moon. You should note that this is the positive, ideal and pastoral aspect of nature. Shakespeare also points out the negative aspects through the character of Caliban who represents nature. Caliban is savage and wild.

No amount of effort on Prospero's part to nurture him has been successful. You can see that Caliban represents that aspect of nature which is wild and has to be tamed. Shakespeare perhaps leaves it open whether Nature triumphs over Art or vice versa.

The Theme of Regeneration:

Like in the three other romances, in this play too we find two generations and the older generation, being replaced by a purer and younger generation. The corrupt and ambitious brother of Prospero is punished. Prospero after long twelve years of self-analysis and repentance changes to a better person. This Prospero is different from the Prospero of twelve years ago. There has been complete regeneration of his own character. Ferdinand and Miranda, the embodiment of purity and innocence, try to make the world a better place. Therefore, you can see that this play shows regeneration, not only through a younger generation, but through a process of regeneration in Prospero himself. It is not that he does not retire from the worldly life but he renounces his magic powers and accepts the duties of dukedom. This new Prospero is one who has realised the importance of working among and through other human beings in ordinary society. Thus, you can see that this theme of regeneration assumes great importance because it is apart of life and nature.

The Illusion of Justice:

The Tempest tells a fairly straightforward story involving an unjust act, the usurpation of Prospero's throne by his brother, and Prospero's quest to re-establish justice by restoring himself to power. However, the idea of justice that the play works toward seems highly subjective, since this idea represents the view of only one character who controls the fate of all the other characters. Though Prospero presents himself as a victim of injustice working to right the wrongs that have been done to him, his idea of justice and injustice is somewhat hypocritical—though he is furious with his brother for taking his power, he has no qualms about enslaving Ariel and Caliban in order to achieve his ends. At many moments throughout the play, Prospero's sense of justice seems extremely one-sided and mainly involves what is good for Prospero himself. Moreover, because the play

offers no notion of higher order or justice to supersede Prospero's interpretation of events, the play is morally ambiguous.

As the play progresses, it becomes more and more involved with the idea of creativity and art, and Prospero's role begins to mirror more explicitly the role of an author creating a story around him. With this metaphor in mind, and especially if we accept Prospero as a surrogate for Shakespeare himself, Prospero's sense of justice seems to have worked. Moreover, the means he uses to achieve his idea of justice mirror the machinations of the artist, who also seeks to enable others to see his view of the world.

The Theme of Power:

The nearly uninhabited island presents the sense of infinite possibility to almost everyone who lands there. Prospero has found an ideal place to school his daughter. Sycorax, Caliban's mother, worked her magic there after she was exiled from Algeria. Caliban, once alone on the island, now Prospero's slave, laments that he had been his own king (I.ii.344–345). As he attempts to comfort Alonso, Gonzalo imagines a utopian society on the island, over which he would rule (II.i.148–156). In Act III, Scene ii, Caliban suggests that Stephano kill Prospero, and Stephano immediately envisions his own reign: "Monster, I will kill this man. His daughter and I will be King and Queen—save our graces!—and Trinculo and thyself shall be my viceroys" (III.ii.101–103). Stephano particularly looks forward to taking advantage of the spirits that make "noises" on the isle; they will provide music for his kingdom for free. Thus, you find all characters envisioning the island as a space of freedom and unrealised potential. Such views of the new comers to the island focus on the themes of colonialism as discussed by many 20th century critics.

While there are many representatives of the colonial impulse in the play, the colonised have only one representative: Caliban. We might develop sympathy for him at first, when Prospero seeks him out merely to abuse him, and when we see him tormented by spirits. However, this sympathy is made more difficult by his willingness to abase himself before Stephano in Act II, scene ii. Even as Caliban plots to kill one 'colonial' master Prospero in Act III, scene ii, he sets up another master Stephano for himself. The

urge to rule and to be ruled seem inextricably intertwined. The play can be seen to explore, with various degrees of explicitness, the issues of colonisation and legitimacy of government current at Shakespeare's time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Discuss briefly the three different forms of freedom present in the play *The Tempest*.

Q 5: What does critic Frank Kermode say about the theme of nature in the play?

Q 6: Is there any scope to sympathise with Caliban.

11.5 MAJOR CHARACTERS

In the following, an attempt has been made to discuss the important characters of the play.

Prospero:

Prospero is the rightful Duke of Milan. Twelve years earlier, he and his daughter Miranda found refuge on this island after his younger brother, Antonio usurped his dukedom. Prospero was better fitted for an intellectual life than an administrative one, for he loved to study. He took no interest in ruling his kingdom but immersed himself in intellectual pursuits and left the governing of the kingdom in the hands of his brother. He had thus made two mistakes at this stage of his life. He had neglected his duties toward his subjects and entrusted the ruling of the kingdom to Antonio, thereby placing almost an irresistible temptation in front of his brother. Now Prospero, after twelve years of isolation and suffering, has attained great mental placidity and wants to bring his present condition to an end. He also aims at enabling Miranda to lead a normal life among other human beings in a normal society. Prospero is a complex personality. Although he refuses to free Ariel and enslaves Caliban, he is really a beneficent ruler, never intending to injure even his enemies. Early in the play, Prospero appears callous and cruel, especially in his treatment of Ariel and Caliban. He is also tyrannical in his treatment of Ferdinand, but Prospero realises

that Ferdinand and Miranda will value one another more if there are a few hindrances to their courtship. Prospero's humanity is clearly obvious in his treatment of Antonio, whom he calls traitor but declines to treat as a traitor. By the play's conclusion, it is clear that Prospero is just and fair, in addition to his being intelligent.

Miranda:

Miranda is Prospero's daughter. She was only three years old when she and her father left Milan. Now, some twelve years later, when she is fifteen, she has become a beautiful young woman. She is innocent, having never seen another woman or man and having no knowledge of any other human being, except her father. She knows about Caliban but is perhaps unaware of the existence of Ariel. She is unaware of her beauty because she does not know what feminine beauty means. Miranda's kindness is evident in the first act, in her concern for the suffering crew caught in the storm. She is filled with grief over the supposed drowning of the crew on the ship thinking that there surely must be some noble creature in it. Her tenderness is also evident when she begs her father not to use magic to control Ferdinand, whom she loves. She is an obedient daughter, as proved by her sadness when she forgets herself and reveals her name to Ferdinand, but she is also a young woman in love, and when her father is occupied, she immediately looks to release Ferdinand from his pains. When Ferdinand tells her that he loves her, Miranda weeps. In all that she does, Miranda is sweet and pure, honest and loving. She is beautiful, innocent, compassionate, self controlled and spontaneous.

Ariel:

Ariel is an airy spirit. Because he refused to serve the witch, Sycorax, he was imprisoned in a tree until rescued by Prospero. Ariel willingly carries out Prospero's commands because he is eager to be free. Although he wants his freedom in exchange, Ariel performs his tasks with enthusiasm, promptly reporting any activities that he does or observes. Early in the play, Ariel reports the plot against Prospero, and later, he assists in punishing Prospero's enemies. Ariel's obedience to his master is an important symbol of Prospero's humanity, because he to a large extent humanises the action

that Prospero takes against his old adversaries. Finally, Ariel's willing obedience to Prospero's wishes stands in stark contrast to Caliban's cursing and plotting against the same master. But Ariel's gender remains to be a mystery. Ariel's graceful and yielding nature, and fairy like qualities are typical of a woman, but his delight in harsh work, treatment of his victims and trickery made on the characters, are more typical of a male. Ariel reminds us of Puck in Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

Caliban:

Caliban is the offspring of the witch Sycorax who had been banished from Algiers for her union with the devil. Prospero has made Caliban his servant or, more accurately, his slave. Throughout most of the play, Caliban is savage-like, insolent, rebellious, and is only controlled with magic. As we find in the play, he is half fish and half man, but with human head and limbs. Prospero calls him a tortoise and Trinculo states that he looks and smells like a fish. Caliban claims the island as his own, and maintains that Prospero has tricked him in the past. Because Prospero has conquered him, Caliban plots to murder Prospero in revenge. It is clear, though, that Caliban is a poor judge of character. He embraces Stefano as a god and trusts the two drunken conspirators to help him carry out a plot to murder Prospero. In many ways, Caliban is an innocent, reacting to emotional and physical needs without the ability to think and fully understands the events and people who surround him. He is truly a child of nature, uneducated and reacting to his surroundings in much the same way that an animal does.

Ferdinand:

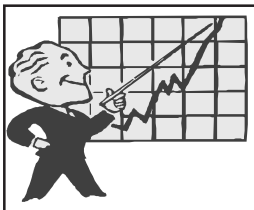
Ferdinand is the son of Alonso the king of Naples. During the storm, he is separated from the rest of the king's party. Once ashore, he meets Miranda and falls madly in love with her. He easily reassures Prospero that he will respect Miranda's chastity and would not violate his trust. Ferdinand also respects and loves his father. He makes a commitment to marry Miranda while thinking that his father is dead. However, when he finds that his father is alive, he immediately acknowledges his father's authority and informs him of his obligation to Miranda. Although we know very little about his past life, we are convinced that he is noble, courtly and intelligent.

Alonso:

Alonso is the king of Naples. He is grief stricken believing that his son has drowned. Later, he is overjoyed to find Ferdinand alive. Alonso bears some responsibility for the events in Prospero's life, because Antonio would not have acted without Alonso's agreement. However, when confronted with his responsibility, Alonso is genuinely repentant for the pain he caused to Prospero in recent times. Alonso's concern for his son's safety and his deep grief followed by the assumed death of his son help to create an image of Alonso as a good and loving father but who has made mistakes in the past. The quickness with which he accepts Miranda as his daughter, as well as his attempts to apologise to her, also reinforce the image of Alonso as a good and just king.

Antonio:

As you have already read, Antonio is Prospero's younger brother. He is motivated by envy and a desire to create trouble. He is now the deceitful Duke of Milan and is still actively engaged in plotting rebellion. His actions against Prospero were not sufficient to satisfy his ambitions, and now, he convinces Sebastian to murder his brother Alonso. Although he may be frightened when confronted with the spirits and Prospero later, he reveals no sign of remorse for the actions he has committed. He is not only ambitious, but treacherous as well. Taking the help of the king Alonso of Naples, he usurped the kingdom but dared not kill Prospero because of his popularity, which might lead to popular uprising. Instead, he thought of a devilish plan for killing Prospero slowly but inevitably, in such a way that no one will ever know. Antonio is never seen repentant the way he should be, at the end of the play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: State the two major mistakes in the early life of Prospero?

Q 8: Who are the women characters of the play?

Q 9: Comment on the character of Ariel?

11.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

As Boris Ford explains, the criticism of the play has been influenced by the notion of its being Shakespeare's 'Last Play', the summation of a lifetime of experiences. However, the assumptions from which such conclusions are drawn are not proven yet. They play exhibits the author's mature reflection on the nature and the limitation of the dramatic illusion. The turbulent sea, although a creation of Prospero, is associated with the larger forces of life. Most interestingly, the characters, whose stage life Prospero controls and moulds come together at a time when Prospero is ready to receive them. In addition, it is the island in which their action has to be worked out. In a sense, the island presents various aspects. For example, to Gonzalo the island presents anarchy founded on the spontaneous overflow of natural instincts in a community of people untainted by competition or ambition. However, the cynics like Antonio and Sebastian make Gonzalo's dream almost unreal. The fact that men like Antonio and Sebastian are portrayed also proves that cultivation of humanly qualities is necessary. Men must try to outgrow 'primitive nature' to find their human potentiality.

There is perhaps no doubt about the fact that *The Tempest* is most likely the last play written entirely by Shakespeare, and it is remarkable for being one play whose plot is entirely original. The first record of its performance tells us that it was produced at Court on 1 November, 1611. During the Restoration, however, audience demanded a different treatment, so Dryden and Davenant reformed the play giving Miranda a sister and providing her with a partner. In the 17th and the 18th centuries, the philosophical aspect of the play was ignored. The critics had Ben Jonson in their mind, and so they thought that Shakespeare did not have classical learning. Subsequently, they stressed the inventive power of his imagination. Again, with the Romantics, the focus shifted. They looked upon the play as an expression of deep and subtle ideas, too subtle for the stage and hence they laid more emphasis on its poetic beauty than on stage effect. In fact, this continued until the Victorian period. You can see that these critics became conscious of the importance of chronology and gave

autobiographical interpretation of the play. In the 20th century, critics began to analyse the play in different aspects. The theme of the play has provoked serious thought among them. For example, E.M.W. Tillyard relates this play to the tragic pattern and finds the completion of a cycle in which tragic disorder reaches final harmony. In fact, many new theories have come into existence in the second half of the 20th century like Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Reception theory, Post-colonialism and so on and Shakespeare's works are interpreted in the light of these theories. Let me tell you that the interpretation that looks upon Prospero as the usurper of Caliban's Kingdom in *The Tempest* is a Post-colonial one.



11.7 LET US SUM UP

As you finish reading this unit, we hope that you are now in a position to discuss the play in its totality. *The Tempest* is supposed to be the bard's last play. Set on a remote island, where the magician Prospero plots to restore his daughter Miranda to her rightful place using illusion and skilful manipulation, this play is an artistic marvel. The story of the play draws heavily on the tradition of the Romance, and it was influenced by the courtly masque and also the Italian Commedia dell'arte.



11.8 FURTHER READING

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11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: Being a romance, this play demonstrates an awareness of the improbability of its own story… …It combines myth and fantasy and reflects the way art and imagination operate in our understanding of the world.

Ans to Q No 2: The play was written when settlement was taking place in the English colonies in Virginia, now the southern USA… …Caliban's name resembles 'Carib', the name of the original West-Indian islanders wiped out by European disease and genocide… …it also refers to the conflict between Catholic Europeans and Muslim Turks… …we can also trace in the play the continuing struggle to establish English rule among the 'masterless men' in Ireland.

Ans to Q No 3: Prospero's teaching of language fails to change Caliban's own distinctive view of his world.. …he feels that his sense of freedom is in sharp contrast with the teachings of Prospero whom he calls an invader.

Ans to Q No 4: Freedom from servitude… …freedom in servitude… …and total freedom.

Ans to Q No 5: According to Frank Kermode, in *The Tempest* Shakespeare has taken up the theme of nature and the influence of Man (or Art) on Nature… …from one view point Nature is presented as pure, innocent and benevolent and man introduces corruption into this innocent world… …from another point of view nature is wild and represents the savage requiring to benefit man's careful art.

Ans to Q No 6: Both Yes and No… …Yes, because Prospero torments Caliban like anything and seeks him out merely to abuse him, and we see him tormented by spirits… …No, Caliban has failed to learn

from Prospero's teachings, and instead, he plots to kill Prospero and sets up the worthless Stephano as the new master for himself.

Ans to Q No 7: First, he had neglected his duties toward his subjects as a ruler, as he always remained absorbed in studies… …second, he entrusted the ruling of his kingdom to his brother Antonio, who finally usurped his kingdom out of ambition.

Ans to Q No 8: The women characters are Miranda, the daughter of Prospero… …Miranda's absent mother and Sycorax, the mother of Caliban… …the later two are not physically present in the play.

Ans to Q No 9: Ariel is an airy spirit… …Ariel's thirst for freedom makes him willingly carry out Prospero's commands… …Ariel is dutiful and promptly reports to Prospero… …Ariel's obedience to Prospero also reflects on Prospero's humanity.



11.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Do you consider the play a romance? If yes, what are the characteristics of a romance available in the play?

Q 2: Compare the plot to murder Prospero with the plot to murder Alonso. What is the significance of the two plots? How important are social status and rank in evaluating these two murder plots?

Q 3: What role does language play in explicating the theme of power and domination in the play? Discuss with reference to Prospero's use of language in the play.

Q 4: Discuss the themes of freedom and servitude in your own words?

Q 5: How, has the play, *The Tempest* been received throughout times especially in the context of the 20th century?

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