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M.A (English Literature)
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Shakespeare and his age

The first task of one who sets out to write briefly on Shakespeare and his age must be to move the focus back from the life of the playhouse and say something about the greater world of national politics. One dominant concern in that world throughout the Tudor period was the precariousness of the royal succession. If this now seems a relatively remote and unimportant matter, it is worth recalling that Shakespeare's history plays, a good quarter of his entire output, dealt with anxieties, indeed with civil wars, about succession, and even portrayed the events leading up to the dubiously valid accession of Henry VII, Queen Elizabeth's grandfather. The succession was a matter of concern to everybody, not only because the monarchy then had more personal power than it has been able to keep, but because in Tudor times the whole issue was bound up inseparably with religious differences, and religion could mean war. The expansion of the empire under the Protestant Elizabeth inevitably caused conflict with Catholic Spain and allowed her the triumph over the Spanish Armada; but there were still English Catholics who had been instructed by the Pope that Elizabeth was an illegitimate usurper and that one could be forgiven for eliminating her. The plots against Elizabeth of her cousin Mary, Queen of Scots, and Mary's Catholic followers were a serious recurrent anxiety.

By the date of Shakespeare's birth (1564) Elizabeth had been on the throne for almost six years, and the "Elizabethan Settlement" had established the Church of England as Protestant. Though "Anglo-Catholic" (to apply a later description), the English church was now entirely severed from Rome. The events that brought about great changes in English social and economic life had occurred in the reigns of Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, and of his son Edward VI. It is

traditional to say that the "English Reformation" took place from 1529 to 1559-the latter is the date of the Elizabethan Acts of Uniformity and Supremacy, and the former the date when Henry, failing to obtain the Pope's consent to his divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, made himself supreme head of the Church in the Pope's place. This neat formulation overlooks the history of dissent from Wyclif and the Lollards in the late fourteenth century, a reform movement not forgotten in the years before Henry's catastrophic break with Rome. But that break, and the proclamation of the English as the true Catholic yet vernacular church, was, despite opposition, decisive in the long run.

Henry very much wanted a male heir, but the surviving child of his first, supposedly invalid, marriage was a daughter, Mary. His second wife, Anne Boleyn, produced another daughter, Elizabeth, and it was Jane Seymour, the third of his wives, who gave birth to a son, Edward. He succeeded his father in 1547, and his brief rule was dominated by a harsh Protestant regency. His successor, his elder half-sister Mary, was, like her mother, a devout Catholic and did all she could to restore relations with the Papacy. Her too-late marriage to Philip of Spain was barren. At the end of her short reign she was succeeded by Elizabeth, who resumed her father's title as supreme head of the Church, and was able to withstand both the Catholic and the growing Puritan oppositions.

The Reformation affected not only theology and liturgy; the distribution of national wealth and political power was greatly altered by the dissolution of monasteries and other rich ecclesiastical establishments. The upheaval affected not only the clergy; ordinary people had to accommodate themselves to radical change. Historians argue about the exact nature of that change. We used to be taught about the "waning" or the "autumn" of the Middle Ages-a story of loss, or at least of a late flowering that preceded loss. An age had ended when most people derived their religious knowledge not from printed books but from the imagery and symbolism of the wall paintings and stained glass of the churches, a huge non-literary context for the Catholic sacraments (immemorially seven, but now reduced by the theologians of Reformation to two). It used to be taken for granted that those old-fashioned ways of worship and instruction had become self-evidently obsolescent. The Roman church had permitted all manner of abuses as well as

forbidding translation of the Bible, the Word of God, so that by the time Reformation arrived it was badly needed. Now there are historians who dispute this account of the matter, and lament the rapid extinction of the old faith and its attributes-its arts and rituals, its control over the pattern of life over so many generations.

This is in part the thesis of Eamon Duffy's remarkable book The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-1580 (1992). Duffy emphasizes the degree to which almost every aspect of daily life had been consonant with the liturgy, and the ways in which religious doctrine was taught-not only by pictures but by many liturgical acts not properly part of the Mass-instances of traditional piety, as when the episodes of the Passion were annually reenacted by the clergy but also, in dramas of their own devising, by the laity. For example, since St. John spoke of the parting of Christ's garments, two linen cloths were removed from the altar at the appropriate moment. A sepulchre was prepared in which the Host was reverently laid-for of course the Host was literally corpus Christi, the body of Christ. And such enactments should be borne in mind when one reflects on the extraordinary persistence of quasi-dramatic traditions throughout the entire period before the professionals began, in the new world of the later sixteenth century, to absorb and secularize play-acting and translate it from these quiet devotional origins to the inns and theaters of London.

The commercial development of drama was one more sign that the world as regulated by liturgy was being supplanted by a world more concerned with capital and labor-a world in which time itself had a different quality. "The rhythms of the liturgy," writes Duffy, "were the rhythms of life itself." The rhythms of work and of pleasure reflected the routines of liturgy and prayer. The doctrine of Purgatory, which the Reformers especially detested, had for centuries exerted a powerful influence on conduct, whether in the ordinary course of life or on the deathbed, and its hold over people's minds remained strong long after it was condemned, in ways well illustrated by Stephen Greenblatt in his Hamlet in Purgatory (2001).

Duffy's account of the stripping of the churches-the altars were now considered idolatrous and were replaced by "communion tables"-emphasizes the tragic aspect of these losses. Dissident

commentators dispute his contention that in the period just before the Reformation the Catholic religion, far from being in decay, was indeed in a perfectly healthy state. Of course a case can also be made for the beneficial effects of the new Protestantism, and indeed some say that the notion of undisturbed Catholic contentment suddenly and barbarously interrupted by Reform is mere propaganda. The intellectual and educational achievements of Protestantism, it is argued, are in the Catholic version of events much undervalued. So is the fact that throughout Elizabeth's reign Cranmer's Book of Common Prayer, containing not only his celebrated prose but also the Articles of the reformed Church of England-various in number but eventually settled as thirty-nine. These Articles defined the differences between Roman and English doctrine and could be consulted in every parish church. Also to be found in the churches were the Great Bible and Foxe's Acts and Monuments (1563), better known as Foxe's Book of Martyrs, powerful propaganda for the true (English) Protestant-Catholic faith, and for the royal and imperial claims of Elizabeth. The book remains notorious for its polemic against Rome and the Marian persecutions.

These books in part replaced the old images-wall paintings, stained glass, rood screens, decorated altars-of the old régime, and, to judge from the growing strength of Protestant feeling, their effect was, in its different way, as powerful. One estimate holds that in 1585 the population of England was five percent Catholic and fifteen percent Puritan, the rest accepting the middle way prescribed by Elizabeth. Such estimates are of course just more or less well informed guesses. There was certainly a rump of faithful Catholics, but England in the time of Elizabeth should probably be thought of as primarily a Protestant nation, at war ideologically as well as militarily with Rome.

Both sides were equipped for international conflict, not least as to the war of ideas. England had theologians like Cranmer and Jewel (defender of the antiquity of the English Church), while Rome used such propagandists as Cardinal Borromeo, whose apologetics became well known in England when distributed by Jesuit missionaries. Shakespeare's father seems to have owned a copy of Borromeo's Spiritual Testament, a guide for perplexed and oppressed Catholics. In the active as opposed to the contemplative life, the age is famous for its seamen pirates and for the secret services that employed such gifted spies as Christopher Marlowe. There were some,

among them the poet John Donne, who hoped for a theological compromise, believing some move toward reunification might be possible, but the differences, for instance those concerning the doctrine of the Real Presence and the celibacy of the clergy, were too stubborn to be reasoned away.

Orders relating to the nature of divine service and attendance at church were now issued by the State, replacing the older priestly sanctions that were backed by the authority of Rome. Above all, the vernacular Bible, long denied to the Catholic laity, was now made the foundation of faith. The reformed church believed it had gone back beyond a millennium of papistical distortions and rediscovered the true Christian message of the New Testament. It is not surprising that some lay people, especially those born under the old régime, might cling almost unconsciously to the religious practices of their youth. Moreover, there were bitter factions within the reform movement, and the extremists tended to gain ground, zealous in the detection and destruction of anything that could be labeled idolatrous.

They had no time for such festivals as Corpus Christi, instituted in 1264-a feast of central theological importance as a celebration of the Real Presence in the sacrament, but also the occasion of great civic festivities, including the cycles of plays organized and financed by the craftsmen's guilds of the towns. Of these remarkable works the "mystery plays" of Coventry, York, and Wakefield are the most famous ("mystery" was a word for "trade" or "craft") and they continued into Elizabeth's reign. Shakespeare as a child could well have seen them at Coventry; but by his time they were frowned upon. The feast itself was no longer legal, and the expense of these elaborate displays had probably grown too great, and so they expired.

These productions had a didactic purpose, offering in the vernacular a long series of plays about sacred history. Events in the Old Testament were presented as prefiguring the truths of the New (much as church glass and paintings did, or had done), together with scenes from the lives of the Virgin and Christ. Performances were on "pageants" or carts, stages that could be moved from one site to the next. As far as possible, each guild chose a subject appropriate to its particular

mystery. Costumes were elaborate, and there was some use of stage machinery. Solemnity was mixed with broad humor, and some stock characters became famous-when Hamlet tells the traveling actors not to out-Herod Herod, he is alluding to the traditional rant of that character in the Corpus Christi plays. Spectacle was provided; hell yawned and devils vomited smoke. Some of the plays are more subtle than this account suggests-the Wakefield (or Towneley) Second Shepherds' Play is renowned for the daring of its double-plotting, mixing the serious theme of the Nativity with farce-indeed, the kind of mixture to be found later in some of the plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries; for a celebrated example, see Middleton's tragedy The Changeling.

The mystery plays testify to the ingenuity of their authors and actors, and also to the strong desire of late-medieval Englishmen to perform their beliefs, to act out in their own persons the sacred truths as they had been taught them in sermons and paintings. These plays translate into their own popular style the patterns and narratives of medieval piety; and they were fun, occasions for holidays. They prove that the English had long been well attuned to dramatic display, whether as actors or audience. These tastes were inherited, in very different circumstances, by their descendants. A common purpose had brought together the variously gifted craftsmen of the town, and they made a solemn feast over into a universal holiday. But they could not survive the threat of Reform forever. That they lasted so long is a tribute to the staying power of the old style of popular religion even when powerful forces were at work to destroy it.

For a time it had seemed possible to retain much of the old way of life while acquiescing in the new. Henry VIII himself remained attached to much that was traditionally Catholic, and up to the date of his death in 1547, people could keep to their old ways. Mass was celebrated with impunity. Elizabeth, when her time came, had a fondness for some old habits and customs, and favored compromise and moderation. When she was excommunicated, threatened with assassination, and opposed by the great Catholic powers, she adopted a more severe, more warlike attitude. Nevertheless she wanted the English church to be a via media between Rome and Calvinist Geneva. The difficulties of the situation-between hostile Rome and burgeoning

Calvinism-are well illustrated by John Donne's Satire 3, an excited, disturbed reflection on his own need to choose (he was brought up a Catholic) that must have been echoed by many intellectuals of the time.

Between the reign of Henry and that of his younger daughter came those of Edward and Mary. Edward's counsellors were hard-line opponents of Rome, and through them he condemned all "papistical superstitions" such as rosaries, holy water, prayers to the saints, ceremonial candles, fasting, indulgences, relics, and the existence of Purgatory. Edward was probably predisposed to the Protestant cause by the influence of his father's sixth and last wife, Catherine Parr, a devout adherent of Reform, and as he grew toward maturity he became as fiercely Protestant as his advisers.

Elizabethan theatre and audience

William Shakespeare was born on1564 and he died on 1616. He was an English playwright and poet, recognized in much of the world as the greatest of all dramatists. Hundreds of editions of his plays have been published, including translations in all major languages. Scholars have written thousands of books and articles about his plots, characters, themes, and language. He is the most widely quoted author in history, and his plays have probably been performed more times than those of any other dramatist. English Renaissance theatre is sometimes called **"Elizabethan Theatre."** The term Elizabethan theatre, however, properly covers only the plays written and performed publicly in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558-1603).

There is no simple explanation for Shakespeare's unrivaled popularity in the Elizabethan period, but he remains the greatest entertainer and perhaps the most profound thinker. He had a remarkable knowledge of human behavior, which he was able to communicate through his portrayal of a wide variety of characters. He was able to enter fully into the point of view of each of his characters and to create vivid dramatic situations in which to explore human motivations and behaviour. His mastery of poetic language and of the techniques of drama enabled him to combine these multiple viewpoints, human motives, and actions to produce a uniquely compelling theatrical experience. It is however noted that Shakespeare had no formal University Education.

Shakespeare's plays were performed at the courts of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I more frequently than those of any other dramatist of that time. Shakespeare risked losing royal favor only once, in 1599, when his company performed "the play of the deposing and killing of King Richard II" at the request of a group of conspirators against Elizabeth. In the subsequent inquiry, Shakespeare's company was absolved of any knowing participation in the conspiracy. Although Shakespeare's plays enjoyed great popularity with the public, most people did not consider them literature. Plays were merely popular entertainments, not unlike the movies today.

Shakespeare's reputation today is, however, is based primarily on his 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems and 38 plays that he wrote, modified, or collaborated on. Records of Shakespeare's plays begin to appear in 1594, when the theaters reopened with the passing of the plague that had closed them for 21 months. In December of 1594 his play The Comedy of Errors was performed in London during the Christmas revels at Gray's Inn, one of the London law schools. In March of the following year he received payment for two plays that had been performed during the Christmas holidays at the court of Queen Elizabeth I by his theatrical company, known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men. The receipt for payment, which he signed along with two fellow actors, reveals that he had by this time achieved a prominent place in the company. He was already probably a so-called sharer, a position entitling him to a percentage of the company's profits rather than merely a salary as an actor and a playwright. In time the profits of this company and its two theaters, the Globe Theatre, which opened in 1599, and the Black friars, which the company took over in 1608, enabled Shakespeare to become a wealthy man.

It is worth noting that Shakespeare's share in the production company made him wealthy, not any commissions or royalties from writing his plays. Playwriting was generally poorly paid work, which involved providing scripts for the successful theater business. His plays would have belonged to the acting company, and when they did reach print they then belonged to the publisher. No system of royalties existed at that time. Indeed, with the exception of the two narrative poems he published in 1593 and 1594, Shakespeare never seems to have bothered about publication. The plays that reached print did so without his involvement. The only form of "publication" he sought was their performance in the theatre.

OBJECTIVE

The paradox in the development of the Elizabethan theatre and its contribution to the world' theatre is that it grew out of Puritan's attack and the reign of a monarch who loved the Arts. The puritans were against professional theatre. The Elizabethan Era came after the period when theatre witness a total blackout, known as Dark Ages, there was no theatrical activity through the territory. Elizabethan period is also known as Renaissance in England. It is a period when Men broke out of the rules and regulations of the church in order to seek for knowledge. It is a period of rebirth of learning, a period when Scholars decided to look into the classical past. There are many great writers in this period. The Elizabethan era in 16th-century England was a prolific period for English literature. Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, Sir Walter Raleigh, Chettle Henry, Wyatt Thomas, Surrey Henry, Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare were only a few of the many writers who created their great works during the reign of Elizabeth I.

Drama in the Elizabethan age was seen as part of political propaganda to sustain the common weal in terms of culture and commercialism of the arts. When Elizabeth 1 came to the throne, there was an Act against vagabonds. An actor therefore is legally a vagabond unless he is attached as a retainer to a noble man of quality. When Elizabeth 1 got to the throne, she showed her joy and interest in plays and pageantry and courtly performances. She allowed special performances in the palace. William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night was first performed in the court of Elizabeth 1.

The timelessness of Shakespeare can be seen in his themes on which he later drawn his inspiration. The timelessness of Shakespeare can be categorized in three places, they are

- Themes of his plays
- His use of Language
- The play's adaptability to all ages and generation.

The themes in Shakespeare's plays varies from Ambitious in Macbeth, Revenge in Hamlet, Jealousy in Othello. All this provide timeless issues.

Shakespeare's characters emerge in his plays as distinctive human beings. Although some of the characters display elements of conventional dramatic types such as the melancholy man, the braggart soldier, the pedant, and the young lover, they are nevertheless usually individualized rather than caricatures or exaggerated types. Falstaff, for example, bears some resemblance to the braggart soldiers of 16th-century Italian comedy and to representations of the character Vice in medieval morality plays, but his vitality and inexhaustible wit make him unique. Hamlet, one of the most complex characters in all literature, is partly a picture of the ideal Renaissance man, and he also exhibits traits of the conventional melancholic character. However, his personality as a whole transcends these types, and he is so real that commentators have continued for centuries to explore his fascinating mind.

Shakespeare's philosophy of life can only be deduced from the ideas and attitudes that appear frequently in his writings, and he remained always a dramatist, not a writer of philosophical or ethical tracts. Nonetheless, the tolerance of human weakness evident in the plays tends to indicate that Shakespeare was a broad-minded person with generous and balanced views. Although he never lectured his audience, sound morality is implicit in his themes and in the way he handled his material. He attached less importance to noble birth than to an individual's noble relations with other people. Despite the bawdiness of Shakespeare's language, which is characteristic of his period, he did not condone sexual license. He accepted people as they are, without condemning them, but he did not allow wickedness to triumph. The comments of Shakespeare's contemporaries suggest that he himself possessed both integrity and gentle manners.

Shakespeare brilliantly exploited the resources of the theaters he worked in. The Globe Theatre held an audience of 2,000 to 3,000 people. Like other outdoor theatres, it had a covered, raised stage thrusting out into the audience. The audience stood around the three sides of the stage in an unroofed area called the pit. Covered galleries, where people paid more money to sit, rose beyond the pit. Performances took place only during daylight hours, and there was little use of lighting. Few props were used, and little scenery. Costumes, however, were elaborated.

In Shakespeare's time English was a more flexible language than it is today. Grammar and spelling were not yet completely formalized, although scholars were beginning to urge rules to

regulate them. English had begun to emerge as a significant literary language, having recently replaced Latin as the language of serious intellectual and artistic activity in England. Freed of many of the conventions and rules of modern English, Shakespeare could shape vocabulary and syntax to the demands of style. For example, he could interchange the various parts of speech, using nouns as adjectives or verbs, adjectives as adverbs, and pronouns as nouns. Such freedom gave his language an extraordinary plasticity, which enabled him to create the large number of unique and memorable characters he has left us. Shakespeare made each character singular by a distinctive and characteristic set of speech habits.

The main influences on Shakespeare's style were the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer, the *homilies* (sermons) that were prescribed for reading in church, the rhetorical treatises that were studied in grammar school, and the proverbial lore of common speech.

Shakespeare wrote nearly all of his plays from 1590 to 1611, when he retired to New Place. A series of history plays and joyful comedies appeared throughout the 1590s, ending with As You Like It and Twelfth Night. At the same time as he was writing comedy, he also wrote nine history plays, treating the reigns of England's medieval kings and exploring realities of power still relevant today. The great tragedies including Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, and Macbeth were written during the first decade of the 1600s. All focus on a basically decent individual who brings about his own downfall through a tragic flaw. Scholars have theorized about the reasons behind this change in Shakespeare's vision, and the switch from a focus on social aspects of human activity to the rending experience of the individual. But no one knows whether events in his own life or changes in England's circumstances triggered the shift, or whether it was just an aesthetic decision. Shakespeare's only son, Hamnet, had died in 1596 at the age of 11, his father died in 1601, and England's popular monarch, Elizabeth I, died in 1603, so it is not unreasonable to think that the change in Shakespeare's genre and tone reflects some change in his own view of life prompted by these events. In his last years working as a playwright, however, Shakespeare wrote a number of plays that are often called romances or tragicomedies, plays in which the tragic facts of human existence are fully acknowledged but where reassuring patterns of reconciliation and harmony can be seen finally to shape the action.

The theatre served Shakespeare's financial needs well. In 1597 he bought New Place, a substantial three-story house in Stratford. With the opening of the splendid Globe Theatre in

1599, Shakespeare's fortunes increased and in 1602 he bought additional property: 43 hectares (107 acres) of arable land and 8 hectares (20 acres) of pasture north of the town of Stratford and, later that year, a cottage facing the garden at New Place. In 1605 he bought more property in a neighboring village. His financial activities can be traced, and his final investment is the purchase of a house in the Black friars district of London in 1613.

In Conclusion, Shakespeare's early plays were mainly comedies and histories, genres he raised to the peak of sophistication and artistry by the end of the sixteenth century. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including Hamlet, King Lear, and Macbeth, considered some of the finest work in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragic-comedies also known as romances and collaborated with other playwright. Many of his plays were published in editions of varying quality and accuracy during his life time. In 1623, two of his former theatrical colleagues published the first Folio, a collected edition of his dramatic works.

Some of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto editions from 1594. By 1598, his name had become a selling point and began to appear on the title pages. Shakespeare continued to act in his own and other plays after his success as a playwright.

He divided his time between London and Stratford during his career. In 1596, the year before he bought New Place as his family home in Stratford, he was living in the Parish of St. Helen's Bishopsgate, north of the river Thames. He moved across the river to Southwark by 1599, the year his company constructed a Globe theatre there.

The Quarto and Folio Formats

There were two publishing formats for Shakespeare's works: quarto and folio. The difference between them was size. A quarto page was about 9½ inches wide and 12 inches high; a folio page was much larger: 12 inches wide and 19 inches high.

In 1623, friends and admirers of Shakespeare compiled a reasonably authentic collection of thirty-six of Shakespeare's plays in a folio edition of more than nine hundred pages. This collection was entitled Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tragedies. (See illustration above.) To what extent the original manuscripts of the plays had been edited is uncertain. The printer and publisher was William Jaggard, assisted by his son Isaac. This edition became known as The First Folio. Because of the presumed authenticity of this collection, later publishers used it to print copies of the plays. Other folios were printed in 1632, 1663 and 1685. In 1664, a second printing of the 1663 folio included the first publication of Pericles, Prince of Tyre.

The Publishing Industry

The publishing industry operated under the control of the Worshipful Company of Stationers, a trade organization which the government established and supervised in order to guard against printing subversive books or books unduly critical of the government. If a play met government standards—that is, if it did not attempt to inflame the people against the Crown—a publisher could print and sell the play.

Over the centuries, publishers of Shakespeare's works used both quarto and folio texts to prepare new editions of his works edited to reflect spelling and punctuation rules current at the time. They also made other editing changes. Today, the most popular editions of Shakespeare—such as The Riverside Shakespeare, The Norton Shakespeare, and The Arden Shakespeare—generally contain nearly identical texts of his works. However, close reading of them will reveal some slight variations in wording and punctuation, as well as in the interpretation of difficult passages.

Women in Shakespeare

The majority of Shakespeare’s major female characters are young and involved in romantic plots that revolve around choosing a husband. The conflict between a father and daughter regarding who represents an ideal suitor had the potential to create serious quarrels in families, and Shakespeare repeatedly stages such quarrels in his writing. Two of Shakespeare’s tragedies begin with the struggle of a young female character to free herself from male control. In Romeo and

Juliet, Juliet sneaks out of her home to marry Romeo, and then fakes her own death to escape the husband her father has chosen for her. In Othello, Desdemona also sneaks out at night to marry the man she has chosen against her father's wishes. Although these heroines free themselves from their fathers, they do not free themselves from male control altogether. Juliet loses her chosen husband when he is drawn into the ongoing feud between the men of the Capulet and Montague families. Desdemona remains faithful to Othello, but her history of defying male authority makes him anxious. He comes to suspect her of adultery and ultimately murders her.

Whereas Shakespeare's tragedies usually feature women in secondary roles, or roles that share top billing with a man (like Juliet or Cleopatra), Shakespeare's comedies often feature women as main characters. As You Like It, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, and Twelfth Night all center on young women determined to choose their own husbands or, like Olivia in Twelfth Night and Beatrice in Much Ado About Nothing, determined not to marry at all. Like the tragedies, these plays show that the apparent ability to choose a husband or to avoid marriage does not amount to much freedom after all. In the end, both Olivia and Beatrice are persuaded to marry. Likewise, both Rosalind in As You Like It and Viola in Twelfth Night don disguises and enjoy comic adventures that come to an end once they take off their costumes, get married, and begin new lives in their roles as wives. The Merchant of Venice offers a slightly more empowering ending. In that play Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as men and test their new husbands by tricking them into giving up their wedding rings, a symbolic gesture which suggests both women intend to exercise power within their marriages.

Women dress up as men in many of Shakespeare's plays, often as a dramatic device to further the plot. By making his female characters cross-dress, Shakespeare gave himself the opportunity to put them in situations from which real-life women would have been barred. In Twelfth Night, for instance, Viola disguises herself as the young man "Cesario" and offers to help Duke Orsino woo Countess Olivia, something a noblewoman would never have been allowed to do. Elizabethans largely believed that women lacked the intelligence, rationality, courage, and other qualities necessary to perform roles reserved for men. However, whenever Shakespeare's cross-dressing women take on traditionally male roles, they usually do a better job than their male counterparts. In The Merchant of Venice, none of the male characters can think of a way to rescue Antonio from a contract that allows the moneylender Shylock to take "a pound of flesh"

from his body. But when Portia arrives in court disguised as a lawyer, she demonstrates a legal savvy that no other male character possesses. Portia brilliantly points out that Shylock may be legally entitled to a pound of Antonio's flesh, but that "no jot of blood" can be spilled in the process.

Although shrewd young women appear frequently in Shakespeare's plays, mature women are conspicuously absent. Mothers in particular are missing. In The Tempest, Prospero lives alone with his daughter Miranda as castaways on a remote island. When Prospero gives an account of their escape from Milan, he only references her mother once, and only in order to confirm that Miranda is indeed his daughter: "Thy mother was a piece of virtue / And she said thou wast my daughter" (I.ii.). Mothers are missing in plays from across Shakespeare's career, from Titus Andronicus to King Lear, and like The Tempest, many of these plays focus intensely on the relationships between fathers and daughters. Two notable exceptions to the rule of missing mothers include Gertrude in Hamlet and Volumnia in Coriolanus, both of whom have difficult relationships with their adult sons. The example of Gertrude also points to Shakespeare's tendency to present mature women as being devious, even dangerous. Hamlet believes his mother to be complicit with the king's assassination. Lady Macbeth provides another example of a devious older woman. Cleopatra may offer the only example of a powerful, mature woman whom Shakespeare portrays as being noble and dignified.

Shakespearean Clowns and Fools

The Shakespearean Fool is a recurring character type in the works of William Shakespeare. They are usually clever peasants or commoners who use their wits to amuse the people of higher social standing. In this sense, they are very similar to the real fools and jesters of the time but their characteristics are greatly heightened for theatrical effect. The Groundlings who were too poor to pay for seats at the Globe Theatre and thus stood on the ground were more likely to be drawn to these fools. However, they were also favoured by the nobility , most notably Queen Elizabeth.

Shakespeare's fools, consistent with his revolutionary ideas about theatre became a complex character that could highlight more important issues . They address the themes of love, turmoil, personal identity and many other innumerable themes that arise in Shakespeare and Modern theatre. Clown scenes in Shakespeare's tragedy mostly appear after a truly horrifying scene, which actually works as a comic relief to the ever building pressure like in Hamlet and

Cleopatra. They speak truth to the other characters and also the audience. For ex Feste in Twelfth Night.

The fool figure remains one of the most intriguing stage characters in the Shakespearean drama. The presence of fool has been witnessed during the pre Shakespearean era too. But the major line of difference between the pre Shakespearean and the Shakespearean fools is the showcase of extraordinary wit by the Shakespearean fools. The purpose of the fools was confined to amuse the audience with their various skills. But Shakespeare gave a new edge to this character.

Shakespeare catered to the taste of all the sections of the society. The 'Elite' and the 'Groundlings' both were drawn towards his work. Thus, Shakespeare had an element of fascination for all. The 'Groundlings' who frequented the Globe theatre were more likely to be drawn towards these Shakespearean fools.

Shakespeare uses the character of 'fool' in at least 17 of his plays including 'Twelfth night ', 'As you like it ,'Hamlet' and 'king Lear'. Hence, it can be rightly concluded that Shakespearean fools are the diamonds in his legacy.

The word 'fool' is rather loosely used these days but it is a technical term in Shakespeare's plays. The fool in Elizabethan drama is someone employed to entertain a king or a duke or any other rich person who needs someone to entertain him. The convention in Elizabethan drama is that the fool is the most insightful and intelligent man in the play. He is not to be confused with a clown: in Shakespeare's time 'clown' was a simple rural man – a yokel.

The fool is a very important character in a Shakespeare play as he fulfils two important functions:He has licence to speak truth to power with no holds barred – in a context where no-one else dare do that, for fear of their lives – and he acts like the chorus in Greek drama – commenting on the characters and the action for the benefit of the audience.
He is usually the wisest character in the play. The other characters refer to him as 'the fool' and we usually know him as 'the jester.' He does not normally have a dramatic role but some fools do.

Some other of Shakespeare's characters are often referred to as fools. There are many of them, the most notable of which are characters like Bottom in A Midsummer Night's Dream and

Dogberry in Much Ado About Nothing but, fools that they are in the modern sense of the word, they are not technically true Shakespearean fools.

The four fools in Shakespeare's plays are the following:

Feste, in Twelfth Night

Feste is probably the most famous of Shakespeare's fools. His job is to entertain by singing and dancing, and making jokes, but he is an important member of Olivia's household because of her respect for him. He moves freely among the other characters and also freelances by disappearing from Olivia's house and singing and dancing for other patrons. He is highly intelligent with an extraordinary command of language. Olivia constantly asks his opinion. He is interesting, also, in that apart from his jestering activities he plays a major dramatic role in the play. With that role, and his conventional fool role, where he looks in at the action, he is both inside and outside the play, which makes him an almost postmodern character.

Touchstone, in As You Like It

Touchstone is Duke Frederick's court jester. He is quick witted and an astute observer of human nature. His commentary on the other characters runs continuously throughout the play. He is quite cynical and his comments on the characters are often quite caustic. He is notable for his facility with language; he can twist any argument and he loves to nitpick about everything. He is full of wise sayings and frequently talks about the wisdom of foolishness.

The Fool in King Lear

The fool in King Lear does not have a name and is called, simply, 'Fool.' He is Lear's constant companion and accompanies him on his journey into madness and eventually death when he, just before Lear's death, is hanged by those who have imprisoned Lear. In this play the fool functions as the inner consciousness of the foolish king, who is foolish while his fool is wise. The Fool is Lear's alter ego and constantly comments on Lear's relentless folly. Every time Lear does something foolish, like giving up all his power to his daughters, the fool rubs it in. When Lear

finally achieves a measure of understanding about how lacking in wisdom he has been there is no need for the Fool, who dies.

Trinculo, in The Tempest

Trunculo is an exception to the concept of the wise fool: he is Alonso's court jester, who is shipwrecked with the royal party and separated from them. He is extremely stupid and teams up with Alonso's drunken butler Stephano and Prospero's indigenous servant, Caliban, in a plot to stage a coup against Prospero. Trinculo and Stephano are so stupid and ineffectual that their efforts and antics provide some of the best comedy in Shakespeare.

Supernatural elements in Shakespeare's plays

William Shakespeare is regarded to be the most influential and genius playwright in history. With his plays and sonnets incorporated in classroom curriculum worldwide, billions of copies of his works sold around the world, and movie after movie produced in adaptation of his work, the affect Shakespeare had on the literary world is simply unbeatable.

Additionally, his works have been instrumental in opening people's perceptions of the world to new levels. His presentation of fantastic characters could be attributed to his obsession with all things mystical and mythical, but also to his business savvy. His plays took off and became incredibly popular because he understood the way people thought and stretched to the supernatural during his lifetime.

The Elizabethan period was one filled with magic and wonder, and sometimes terror. Witch trials were held during this period, and a good bit of the superstitions that carried through the Elizabethan period were based around assumptions that surrounded the trials. Pagan influence still shuddered through the "common" folk, and many of the superstitions outlasted the century and still exist today. Shakespeare wisely capitalized on these many superstitions, but also deviated from the demands of the people in that he created a full and diverse range of characters in worlds that the play-goer could envision and identify with.

Focusing on what may be considered his greatest works featuring supernatural forces, this article will explore the themes and influences in the following plays from two very opposite themes and moods:

Hamlet

Hamlet is a play by William Shakespeare telling the story of Prince Hamlet of Denmark, where the play is set. Hamlet's father is killed, and his father's brother, Claudius, is the murderer. Claudius then marries Gertrude, Hamlet's mother. The ghost of Hamlet's father is haunting the area, and after numerous sightings, Hamlet finally learns that Claudius poured poison in his brother's ear, killing him. The ghost of his father demands revenge, to which Hamlet agrees. While the only supernatural element in the play, the ghost plays a pivotal role in the underlying story, which leads Hamlet down an emotional road between unwavering belief in the spirit of his father, to doubt, and finally to resolve.

One could argue that the ghost was a metaphor for the memory of Hamlet's father, and a sign of the effects of loss and depression on Hamlet. One could also argue that the spirits of murder victims cling angrily and spitefully to this world, awaiting their vengeance as a method of releasing them to the afterlife.

Venus and Adonis

Venus and Adonis is a narrative poem by William Shakespeare published in 1593. It is probably Shakespeare's first publication.

The poem tells the story of Venus, the goddess of Love; of her unrequited love; and of her attempted seduction of Adonis, an extremely handsome young man, who would rather go hunting. The poem is pastoral, and at times erotic, comic and tragic. It contains discourses on the nature of love, and observations of nature.

It is written in stanzas of six lines of iambic pentameter rhyming ABABCC; although this verse form was known before Shakespeare's use, it is now commonly known as the Venus and Adonis stanza, after this poem. This form was also used by Edmund Spenser and Thomas Lodge. The poem consists of 199 stanzas or 1,194 lines.

It was published originally as a quarto pamphlet and published with great care. It was probably printed using Shakespeare's fair copy. The printer was Richard Field, who, like Shakespeare, was from Stratford. Venus and Adonis appeared in print before any of Shakespeare's plays were published, but not before some of his plays had been acted on stage. It has certain qualities in common with A Midsummer Night's Dream, Romeo and Juliet, and Love's Labour's Lost. It was written when the London theatres were closed for a time due to the plague.

The poem begins with a brief dedication to Henry Wriothesley, 3rd Earl of Southampton, in which the poet describes the poem as "the first heir of my invention".

The poem is inspired by and based on stories found in the Metamorphoses, a narrative poem by the Latin poet, Ovid (43 BC – AD 17/18). Ovid's much briefer version of the tale occurs in book ten of his Metamorphoses. It differs greatly from Shakespeare's version. Ovid's Venus goes hunting with Adonis to please him, but otherwise is uninterested in the out-of-doors. She wears "tucked up" robes, worries about her complexion, and particularly hates dangerous wild animals. Shakespeare's Venus is a bit like a wild animal herself: she apparently goes naked, and is not interested in hunting, but only in making love to Adonis, offering her body to him in graphically explicit terms. In the end, she insists that the boar's killing of Adonis happened accidentally as the animal, impressed by the young hunter's beauty, gored him while trying to kiss him. Venus's behavior seems to reflect Shakespeare's own feelings of empathy about animals: his poem devotes many stanzas to descriptions of a stallion's feelings as he pursues a sexually attractive mare and to a hare's feelings as hounds run it down, which is inconsistent with Venus's request that he hunt only harmless animals like hares. Other stories in Ovid's work are, to a lesser degree, considered sources: the tales of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, Narcissus, and Pygmalion.

Adonis is a young man renowned for his incredible beauty. However, he is not interested at all in love; he only wants to go hunting. Venus is the goddess of love. When she sees Adonis, she falls in love with him, and comes down to earth, where she encounters him setting out on a hunt. She desires him to get off his horse, and speak to her. Adonis doesn't want to talk to any woman, not even a goddess. So she forces him, and then lies down beside him, gazes at him, and talks of love. She craves a kiss; he wants to leave and go hunting. He manages to get away, and he goes to get his horse.

At that moment, his horse becomes enamoured of another horse, who at first resists, but soon the two animals gallop off together, which keeps Adonis from going hunting. Venus approaches him, and continues to speak to him of love. He listens for a bit, then turns away scornfully. This pains her, and she faints. Afraid he might have killed her, Adonis kneels beside her, strokes and kisses her. Venus recovers and requests one last kiss. He reluctantly gives in.

Venus wants to see him again; Adonis tells her that he cannot tomorrow, because he is going to hunt the wild boar. Venus has a vision, and warns him that if he does so, he will be killed by a boar. She then flings herself on him, tackling him to the ground. He pries himself loose, and lectures her on the topic of lust versus love. He then leaves; she cries.

The next morning Venus roams the woods searching for Adonis. She hears dogs and hunters in the distance. Thinking of her vision that he will be killed by the boar, she is afraid, and hurries to catch up with the hunt. She comes across hunting dogs that are injured. Then she finds Adonis, killed by a wild boar. Venus is devastated. Because this loss occurred to the goddess of love, she decrees that love will henceforth be mixed with suspicion, fear, and sadness and that love will be "fickle, false and full of fraud". Adonis's body has grown cold and pale. His blood gives colour to the plants all around him. A flower grows from the soil beneath him. It is white and purple, like blood on Adonis's flesh. Venus, bereft, leaves to confine herself to Paphos, on Cyprus, where she was worshipped.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

From beginning to end, A Midsummer Night's Dream is filled with supernatural themes. The primary plotline involves Hermia and Lysander, two lovers who have decided to elope to be married, though Hermia's father has chosen a husband for her already. Meanwhile, the King and Queen of the fairies, Oberon and Titania, are out in the forest, quarreling because Titania will not give over her favorite Indian boy.

As the play goes on, the fairies become involved in the love story, as well as creating their own mischief, going so far as to bespell a number of the characters in the play in humorous and endearing ways.

The play ends with all the enchantments being removed from the characters, with one exception - Demetrius, previously in love with Hermia, is still enchanted to be in love with Helena. The two couples are married in a group wedding, and the fairies come to bless the house with prosperity and good luck.

Conclusion

As seen in the two plays above, Shakespeare included a range of supernatural influences in his plays. Some of them are light-hearted, like the love spells from fairies, and others are not so joyful, like the ghost of Hamlet's father.A skillful wordsmith, Shakespeare played off of the superstitions of his time, weaving epic tales remembered and revered throughout his lifetime and continuing into modern day. Even in modern times these plays are identified with, beloved and watched time and time again by millions of people.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Theseus, duke of Athens, is preparing for his marriage to Hippolyta, queen of the Amazons, with a four-day festival of pomp and entertainment. He commissions his Master of the Revels, Philostrate, to find suitable amusements for the occasion. Egeus, an Athenian nobleman, marches into Theseus's court with his daughter, Hermia, and two young men, Demetrius and Lysander. Egeus wishes Hermia to marry Demetrius (who loves Hermia), but Hermia is in love with Lysander and refuses to comply. Egeus asks for the full penalty of law to fall on Hermia's head if she flouts her father's will. Theseus gives Hermia until his wedding to consider her options, warning her that disobeying her father's wishes could result in her being sent to a convent or even executed. Nonetheless, Hermia and Lysander plan to escape Athens the following night and marry in the house of Lysander's aunt, some seven leagues distant from the city. They make their intentions known to Hermia's friend Helena, who was once engaged to Demetrius and still loves him even though he jilted her after meeting Hermia. Hoping to regain his love, Helena tells Demetrius of the elopement that Hermia and Lysander have planned. At the appointed time,

Demetrius stalks into the woods after his intended bride and her lover; Helena follows behind him.

In these same woods are two very different groups of characters. The first is a band of fairies, including Oberon, the fairy king, and Titania, his queen, who has recently returned from India to bless the marriage of Theseus and Hippolyta. The second is a band of Athenian craftsmen rehearsing a play that they hope to perform for the duke and his bride. Oberon and Titania are at odds over a young Indian prince given to Titania by the prince's mother; the boy is so beautiful that Oberon wishes to make him a knight, but Titania refuses. Seeking revenge, Oberon sends his merry servant, Puck, to acquire a magical flower, the juice of which can be spread over a sleeping person's eyelids to make that person fall in love with the first thing he or she sees upon waking. Puck obtains the flower, and Oberon tells him of his plan to spread its juice on the sleeping Titania's eyelids. Having seen Demetrius act cruelly toward Helena, he orders Puck to spread some of the juice on the eyelids of the young Athenian man. Puck encounters Lysander and Hermia; thinking that Lysander is the Athenian of whom Oberon spoke, Puck afflicts him with the love potion. Lysander happens to see Helena upon awaking and falls deeply in love with her, abandoning Hermia. As the night progresses and Puck attempts to undo his mistake, both Lysander and Demetrius end up in love with Helena, who believes that they are mocking her. Hermia becomes so jealous that she tries to challenge Helena to a fight. Demetrius and Lysander nearly do fight over Helena's love, but Puck confuses them by mimicking their voices, leading them apart until they are lost separately in the forest.

When Titania wakes, the first creature she sees is Bottom, the most ridiculous of the Athenian craftsmen, whose head Puck has mockingly transformed into that of an ass. Titania passes a ludicrous interlude doting on the ass-headed weaver. Eventually, Oberon obtains the Indian boy, Puck spreads the love potion on Lysander's eyelids, and by morning all is well. Theseus and Hippolyta discover the sleeping lovers in the forest and take them back to Athens to be married—Demetrius now loves Helena, and Lysander now loves Hermia. After the group wedding, the lovers watch Bottom and his fellow craftsmen perform their play, a fumbling, hilarious version of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe. When the play is completed, the lovers go

to bed; the fairies briefly emerge to bless the sleeping couples with a protective charm and then disappear. Only Puck remains, to ask the audience for its forgiveness and approval and to urge it to remember the play as though it had all been a dream.

Analysis

The desire for well-matched love and the struggle to achieve it drives the plot of A Midsummer Night's Dream. The play opens on a note of desire, as Theseus, Duke of Athens, waxes poetic about his anticipated wedding to Hippolyta. The main conflict is introduced when other lovers' troubles take center stage. The question of who the characters should love versus who they do love drives the plot from this point on. The audience may immediately understand that Hermia and Lysander belong together, as do Helena and Demetrius, but the characters' inability to pair with the appropriate partner, and the fairies' interference, complicate the conflict. Mirroring the drama among the Athenian nobility, the monarchs of the fairy kingdom also find themselves in a lovers' tiff. Hoping to teach Titania a lesson, Oberon instructs the fairy Puck to apply a charm that will make Titania and Demetrius each fall in love with the next person they see. Lysander, under the spell of the fairies, abandons Hermia for Helena. Demetrius also falls in love with Helena, and Titania falls in love with Bottom, who now has the head of a donkey. Oberon's jealousy mirrors the pettiness of the human characters, suggesting emotions like love, jealousy, and the desire for revenge are universal.

Instead of solving the human lovers' problems, fairy mischief make the lovers' problems worse, transforming friendships into rivalries. Helena and Hermia, childhood friends, become enemies, and Demetrius battles with Lysander for Helena's affections. The play quickly (and temporarily) devolves from a love story to a story of hatred and ill-will, with all the characters fighting the people they once loved. The quickness with which characters fall in love with each other, and the ease with which they dissolve friendships, raises questions about the fickleness of emotional attachment. The action reaches a crisis point once all the characters have been separated from their appropriate partners, and the complications are at their limit. At this point in the play, no one is happy, except Bottom, who enjoys Titania's affections. But the rest of the characters have been made miserable by love. Even Helena, who now is being pursued by both Lysander and Demetrius, thinks they are playing a cruel trick on her. In this way, the play explores the many ways love can bring about unhappiness as well as joy.

With the tension rising among the Athenian lovers and the night pushing toward dawn, Oberon orders Puck to reverse Lysander's enchantment and set things right among the lovers. By the dawning of a new day, the night and its discord has resolved. Lysander, free of Puck's enchantments, falls back in love with Hermia, while Demetrius remains enchanted, and in love with Helena. Helena's father agrees to accept Lysander as a match for his daughter. Both the internal and external obstacles between the lovers have been removed, and the stage is set for weddings for all couples. The ease with which the events of the night dissolve in the light of day suggest that nothing that has come before should actually be taken seriously. However, the events of the play do make us question the depth and sincerity of the lovers' devotion, especially since Demetrius only loves Helena as a result of Puck's enchantment.

Meanwhile, the Mechanicals have been preparing to perform their adaptation of the tragedy of "Pyramus and Thisbe" for the duke and his bride to be. Shakespeare weaves this plot thread throughout the entire play, so that the bumbling attempt of these unrefined commoners to rehearse a high tragedy unfolds against the backdrop of the play's tangle of erotic confusion. This melding of tragedy and comedy reinforces the sense that none of the action should be taken seriously, and that matters of the heart are ultimately of little consequence. By having the comical Mechanicals stand in for tragic lovers, Shakespeare pokes fun at the tragic genre, including his own Romeo and Juliet .

Characters List

Puck

Also known as Robin Goodfellow, Puck is Oberon's jester, a mischievous fairy who delights in playing pranks on mortals. Though A Midsummer Night's Dream divides its action between several groups of characters, Puck is the closest thing the play has to a protagonist. His enchanting, mischievous spirit pervades the atmosphere, and his antics are responsible for many of the complications that propel the other main plots: he mistakes the young Athenians, applying the love potion to Lysander instead of Demetrius, thereby causing chaos within the group of young lovers; he also transforms Bottom's head into that of an ass.

Oberon

The king of the fairies, Oberon is initially at odds with his wife, Titania, because she refuses to relinquish control of a young Indian prince whom he wants for a knight. Oberon's desire for revenge on Titania leads him to send Puck to obtain the love-potion flower that creates so much of the play's confusion and farce.

Titania

The beautiful queen of the fairies, Titania resists the attempts of her husband, Oberon, to make a knight of the young Indian prince that she has been given. Titania's brief, potion-induced love for Nick Bottom, whose head Puck has transformed into that of an ass, yields the play's foremost example of the contrast motif.

Lysander

A young man of Athens, in love with Hermia. Lysander's relationship with Hermia invokes the theme of love's difficulty: he cannot marry her openly because Egeus, her father, wishes her to wed Demetrius; when Lysander and Hermia run away into the forest, Lysander becomes the victim of misapplied magic and wakes up in love with Helena.

Demetrius

A young man of Athens, initially in love with Hermia and ultimately in love with Helena. Demetrius's obstinate pursuit of Hermia throws love out of balance among the quartet of Athenian youths and precludes a symmetrical two-couple arrangement.

Hermia

Egeus's daughter, a young woman of Athens. Hermia is in love with Lysander and is a childhood friend of Helena. As a result of the fairies' mischief with Oberon's love potion, both Lysander and Demetrius suddenly fall in love with Helena. Self-conscious about her short stature, Hermia

suspects that Helena has wooed the men with her height. By morning, however, Puck has sorted matters out with the love potion, and Lysander's love for Hermia is restored.

Helena

A young woman of Athens, in love with Demetrius. Demetrius and Helena were once betrothed, but when Demetrius met Helena's friend Hermia, he fell in love with her and abandoned Helena. Lacking confidence in her looks, Helena thinks that Demetrius and Lysander are mocking her when the fairies' mischief causes them to fall in love with her.

Egeus

Hermia's father, who brings a complaint against his daughter to Theseus: Egeus has given Demetrius permission to marry Hermia, but Hermia, in love with Lysander, refuses to marry Demetrius. Egeus's severe insistence that Hermia either respect his wishes or be held accountable to Athenian law places him squarely outside the whimsical dream realm of the forest.

Theseus

The heroic duke of Athens, engaged to Hippolyta. Theseus represents power and order throughout the play. He appears only at the beginning and end of the story, removed from the dreamlike events of the forest.

Hippolyta

The legendary queen of the Amazons, engaged to Theseus. Like Theseus, she symbolizes order.

Nick Bottom

The overconfident weaver chosen to play Pyramus in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Bottom is full of advice and self-confidence but frequently makes silly mistakes and misuses language. His simultaneous nonchalance about the beautiful Titania's

sudden love for him and unawareness of the fact that Puck has transformed his head into that of an ass mark the pinnacle of his foolish arrogance.

Peter Quince

A carpenter and the nominal leader of the craftsmen's attempt to put on a play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Quince is often shoved aside by the abundantly confident Bottom. During the craftsmen's play, Quince plays the Prologue.

Francis Flute

The bellows-mender chosen to play Thisbe in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Forced to play a young girl in love, the bearded craftsman determines to speak his lines in a high, squeaky voice.

Robin Starveling

The tailor chosen to play Thisbe's mother in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. He ends up playing the part of Moonshine.

Tom Snout

The tinker chosen to play Pyramus's father in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. He ends up playing the part of Wall, dividing the two lovers.

Snug

The joiner chosen to play the lion in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Snug worries that his roaring will frighten the ladies in the audience.

Philostrate

Theseus's Master of the Revels, responsible for organizing the entertainment for the duke's marriage celebration.

Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed

The fairies ordered by Titania to attend to Bottom after she falls in love with him.

Themes

Love's Difficulty

"The course of true love never did run smooth," comments Lysander, articulating one of A Midsummer Night's Dream's most important themes—that of the difficulty of love (I.i.134). Though most of the conflict in the play stems from the troubles of romance, and though the play involves a number of romantic elements, it is not truly a love story; it distances the audience from the emotions of the characters in order to poke fun at the torments and afflictions that those in love suffer. The tone of the play is so lighthearted that the audience never doubts that things will end happily, and it is therefore free to enjoy the comedy without being caught up in the tension of an uncertain outcome.

The theme of love's difficulty is often explored through the motif of love out of balance—that is, romantic situations in which a disparity or inequality interferes with the harmony of a relationship. The prime instance of this imbalance is the asymmetrical love among the four young Athenians: Hermia loves Lysander, Lysander loves Hermia, Helena loves Demetrius, and Demetrius loves Hermia instead of Helena—a simple numeric imbalance in which two men love the same woman, leaving one woman with too many suitors and one with too few. The play has strong potential for a traditional outcome, and the plot is in many ways based on a quest for internal balance; that is, when the lovers' tangle resolves itself into symmetrical pairings, the traditional happy ending will have been achieved. Somewhat similarly, in the relationship between Titania and Oberon, an imbalance arises out of the fact that Oberon's coveting of Titania's Indian boy outweighs his love for her. Later, Titania's passion for the ass-headed Bottom represents an imbalance of appearance and nature: Titania is beautiful and graceful, while Bottom is clumsy and grotesque.

Magic

The fairies' magic, which brings about many of the most bizarre and hilarious situations in the play, is another element central to the fantastic atmosphere of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Shakespeare uses magic both to embody the almost supernatural power of love (symbolized by the love potion) and to create a surreal world. Although the misuse of magic causes chaos, as when Puck mistakenly applies the love potion to Lysander's eyelids, magic ultimately resolves the play's tensions by restoring love to balance among the quartet of Athenian youths. Additionally, the ease with which Puck uses magic to his own ends, as when he reshapes Bottom's head into that of an ass and recreates the voices of Lysander and Demetrius, stands in contrast to the laboriousness and gracelessness of the craftsmen's attempt to stage their play.

Dreams

As the title suggests, dreams are an important theme in A Midsummer Night's Dream; they are linked to the bizarre, magical mishaps in the forest. Hippolyta's first words in the play evidence the prevalence of dreams ("Four days will quickly steep themselves in night, / Four nights will quickly dream away the time"), and various characters mention dreams throughout (I.i.7–8). The theme of dreaming recurs predominantly when characters attempt to explain bizarre events in which these characters are involved: "I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what / dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about t'expound this dream," Bottom says, unable to fathom the magical happenings that have affected him as anything but the result of slumber.

Shakespeare is also interested in the actual workings of dreams, in how events occur without explanation, time loses its normal sense of flow, and the impossible occurs as a matter of course; he seeks to recreate this environment in the play through the intervention of the fairies in the magical forest. At the end of the play, Puck extends the idea of dreams to the audience members themselves, saying that, if they have been offended by the play, they should remember it as nothing more than a dream. This sense of illusion and gauzy fragility is crucial to the atmosphere of A Midsummer Night's Dream, as it helps render the play a fantastical experience rather than a heavy drama.

Jealousy

The theme of jealousy operates in both the human and fairy realms in Midsummer Night's Dream. Jealousy plays out most obviously among the quartet of Athenian lovers, who find themselves in an increasingly tangled knot of misaligned desire. Helena begins the play feeling jealous of Hermia, who has managed to snag not one but two suitors. Helena loves Demetrius, who in turn feels jealous of his rival for Hermia's affections, Lysander. When misplaced fairy mischief leads Lysander into an amorous pursuit of Helena, the event drives Hermia into her own jealous rage. Jealousy also extends into the fairy realm, where it has caused a rift between the fairy king and queen. As we learn in Act II, King Oberon and Queen Titania both have eyes for their counterparts in the human realm, Theseus and Hippolyta. Titania accuses Oberon of stealing away with "the bouncing Amazon" (II.i.). Oberon accuses Titania of hypocrisy, since she also loves another: "How canst thou thus for shame, Titania, / Glance at my credit with Hippolyta, / Knowing I know thy love to Theseus?" (II.i.). This jealous rift incites Oberon to command Puck to fetch the magic flower that eventually causes so much chaos and confusion for the Athenian lovers.

Mischief

In Midsummer, mischief is primarily associated with the forest and the fairies who reside there. Accordingly, the fairies of traditional British folklore are master mischief makers. The trickster fairy Puck (also known as Robin Goodfellow) is the play's chief creator of mischief. Puck's reputation as a troublemaker precedes him, as suggested in the first scene of Act II, where an unnamed fairy recognizes Puck and rhapsodizes about all the tricks Puck has played on unsuspecting humans. Although in the play Puck only retrieves and uses the magical flower at Oberon's request, his mistakes in implementing Oberon's plan have the most chaotic effects. Puck also makes mischief of his own accord, as when he transforms Bottom's head into that of ass. Puck is also the only character who explicitly talks about his love of mischief. When in Act III he declares that "those things do best please me / That befall prepost'rously" (III.ii.), he effectively announces a personal philosophy of mischief and an appreciation for turning things on their head.

Transformation

Many examples of emotional and physical transformation occur in Midsummer. These transformations contribute to the play's humorous chaos, and also make its happy ending possible. Most of the transformations that take place in the play derive from fairy magic, specifically the magic of Puck. Perhaps the most obvious example is when Puck assists Oberon in placing a charm on Titania and two of the Athenian lovers in order to transform their affections. Instead of helping the lovers, Puck's meddling amplifies the tensions that already existed among them. Puck wreaks further havoc when he physically transforms Bottom, "translating" his head into the head of a donkey. Bottom's transformation inspires terror among Bottom's companions, who fear that his change bears the marks of a devil. Although these transformations initially stimulate conflict and fear, they ultimately help to restore order. By the end of the night, the Athenian lovers all end up in their proper pairings and are able to return safely to Athens. Likewise, after Titania awakens from her bizarre coupling with Bottom, she and Oberon are able to settle their quarrel. The many transformations therefore enable the play's happy ending.

Unreason

The many transformations that take place in Midsummer give rise to a temporary suspension of reason. As night progresses in the forest, things cease to make sense. For example, Hermia falls asleep near Lysander but then wakes to find him gone. When she eventually finds him again, Lysander does the verbal equivalent of spitting in Hermia's face: "Could not this make thee know / The hate I bear thee made me leave thee so?" (III.ii.). Completely floored by the sudden reversal of Lysander's former love, Hermia senses a failure of reason: "You speak not as you think" (III.ii.). A more humorous version of unreason occurs when Bottom, recently crowned with the head of a donkey, finds himself nestling with Titania in her bower. Even though Bottom doesn't know about his physical transformation, he's self-aware enough to see the absurdity of the situation. When Titania professes her love for Bottom, he responds coolly: "Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that" (III.i.). By turns disturbing and amusing, these

and other examples of unreason in the play function to amplify the chaos and confusion traditionally associated with fairies and the forest.

Reversal

Situations transform quickly into their opposites throughout the play. Most obviously, the charm Puck uses to transform the Athenian lovers' affections creates sudden reversals of love and hate, and these reversals result in a breakdown of reason. The sudden reversal of Lysander's affection for Hermia not only leaves his former lover stunned, but also shocks Helena, who suddenly finds herself being pursued by Lysander. All of the madcap foolery that plays out in the forest arises from Oberon's original idea to affect just one strategic reversal. In Act II, when Oberon spies on Helena chasing after Demetrius, Helena comments that her pursuit reverses the natural order of things: "Apollo flies, and Daphne holds the chase. / The dove pursues the griffin; the mild hind / Makes speed to catch the tiger." (II.i.) According to Helena, this state of affairs creates "a scandal for my sex." Hearing Helena, Oberon promises to reverse the reversal, thereby restoring order: "Ere he do leave this grove / Thou shalt fly him, and he shall seek thy love" (II.i.).

Symbols

Theseus and Hippolyta

Theseus and Hippolyta bookend A Midsummer Night's Dream, appearing in the daylight at both the beginning and the end of the play's main action. They disappear, however, for the duration of the action, leaving in the middle of Act I, scene i and not reappearing until Act IV, as the sun is coming up to end the magical night in the forest. Shakespeare uses Theseus and Hippolyta, the ruler of Athens and his warrior bride, to represent order and stability, to contrast with the uncertainty, instability, and darkness of most of the play. Whereas an important element of the dream realm is that one is not in control of one's environment, Theseus and Hippolyta are always entirely in control of theirs. Their reappearance in the daylight of Act IV to hear Theseus's hounds signifies the end of the dream state of the previous night and a return to rationality.

The love potion is made from the juice of a flower that was struck with one of Cupid's misfired arrows; it is used by the fairies to wreak romantic havoc throughout Acts II, III, and IV. Because the meddling fairies are careless with the love potion, the situation of the young Athenian lovers becomes increasingly chaotic and confusing (Demetrius and Lysander are magically compelled to transfer their love from Hermia to Helena), and Titania is hilariously humiliated (she is magically compelled to fall deeply in love with the ass-headed Bottom). The love potion thus becomes a symbol of the unreasoning, fickle, erratic, and undeniably powerful nature of love, which can lead to inexplicable and bizarre behavior and cannot be resisted.

The Craftsmen's Play

The play-within-a-play that takes up most of Act V, scene i is used to represent, in condensed form, many of the important ideas and themes of the main plot. Because the craftsmen are such bumbling actors, their performance satirizes the melodramatic Athenian lovers and gives the play a purely joyful, comedic ending. Pyramus and Thisbe face parental disapproval in the play-within-a-play, just as Hermia and Lysander do; the theme of romantic confusion enhanced by the darkness of night is rehashed, as Pyramus mistakenly believes that Thisbe has been killed by the lion, just as the Athenian lovers experience intense misery because of the mix-ups caused by the fairies' meddling. The craftsmen's play is, therefore, a kind of symbol for A Midsummer Night's Dream itself: a story involving powerful emotions that is made hilarious by its comical presentation.

Measure for Measure

Shakespeare's Measure for Measure centers around the fate of Claudio, who is arrested by Lord Angelo, the temporary leader of Vienna. Angelo is left in charge by the Duke, who pretends to leave town but instead dresses as a friar to observe the goings-on in his absence. Angelo is strict, moralistic, and unwavering in his decision-making; he decides that there is too much freedom in Vienna and takes it upon himself to rid the city of brothels and unlawful sexual activity. Laws against these behaviors and institutions already exist, and Angelo simply decides to enforce them more strictly. Claudio is arrested for impregnating Juliet, his lover, before they were married.

Although they were engaged and their sexual intercourse was consensual, Claudio is sentenced to death in order to serve as an example to the other Viennese citizens.

Isabella, Claudio's sister, is about to enter a nunnery when her brother is arrested. She is unfailingly virtuous, religious, and chaste. When she hears of her brother's arrest, she goes to Angelo to beg him for mercy. He refuses, but suggests that there might be some way to change his mind. When he propositions her, saying that he will let Claudio live if she agrees to have sexual intercourse with him, she is shocked and immediately refuses. Her brother agrees at first but then changes his mind. Isabella is left to contemplate a very important decision.

Isabella is, in a way, let off the hook when the Duke, dressed as a friar, intervenes. He tells her that Angelo's former lover, Mariana, was engaged to be married to him, but he abandoned her when she lost her dowry in a shipwreck. The Duke forms a plan by which Isabella will agree to have sex with the Angelo, but then Mariana will go in her place. The next morning, Angelo will pardon Claudio and be forced to marry Mariana according to the law.

Everything goes according to plan, except that Angelo does not pardon Claudio, fearing revenge. The provost and the Duke send him the head of a dead pirate, claiming that it belonged to Claudio, and Angelo believes that his orders were carried out. Isabella is told that her brother is dead, and that she should submit a complaint to the Duke, who is due to arrive shortly, accusing Angelo of immoral acts.

The Duke returns in his usual clothes, saying that he will hear all grievances immediately. Isabella tells her story, and the Duke pretends not to believe her. Eventually, the Duke reveals his dual identity, and everyone is forced to be honest. Angelo confesses to his misdeeds, Claudio is pardoned, and the Duke asks Isabella to marry him.

Characters

Isabella

The main character, Isabella, is a very virtuous and chaste young woman who faces a difficult decision when her brother is sentenced to death for fornication (unlawful sex). Isabella does not approve of her brother's actions at all, but she pleads for his life out of loyalty and sisterly devotion. Isabella is a spiritual person who starts off wanting to become a nun.

The Duke

The other central figure is the Duke, who spends most of his time dressed as a friar in order to observe what is happening in his absence. The Duke is unfailingly virtuous, good, and kind-hearted. He tends to rule a little softly, which is why he enlists Angelo's help.

Claudio

Isabella's brother Claudio is a young man sentenced to death for impregnating an unmarried woman. He was engaged to her by a common-law agreement, but they had sexual intercourse before the legal marriage took place. Claudio depends less on the guidance of laws and religious practices than on his sister.

Lord Angelo

Angelo is the villain of the play, a man who rules strictly and without mercy. He has his own weaknesses, however, and he is loathsome more for his hypocrisy than for anything else. He presents Isabella with a difficult proposition and then does not even hold up his end of the bargain.

Escalus

Escalus is a wise lord who advises Angelo to be more merciful. He is loyal to the Duke and seeks to carry out his orders justly, but cannot go against Angelo's will.

Lucio

Lucio, described by Shakespeare as a "fantastic," is a flamboyant bachelor who provides much of the play's comedic content. He is a friend of Claudio's and tries to help him.

Mariana

Mariana was supposed to marry Angelo, but he called the wedding off when she lost her dowry in a shipwreck that killed her brother.

Mistress Overdone

Mistress Overdone runs a brothel in Vienna.

Pompey

Pompey is a clown who also works for Mistress Overdone.

Provost

The provost runs the prison and is responsible for carrying out all of Angelo's orders.

Elbow

Elbow is a dim-witted constable who arrests people for misconduct, particularly of the sexual variety. He speaks in malapropisms and provides comic-relief throughout the play.

Barnadine

A long-term prisoner in the jail, Barnadine is sentenced to be executed together with Claudio. The Duke originally considers him hopeless and therefore dispensable but later changes his mind.

Juliet

Claudio's lover, she is pregnant with his baby.

Questions

Is Isabella's decision not to save her brother justified?

This is a very complicated question, with many different answers. On one hand, Isabella is standing up for her own principles when she refuses to have sexual intercourse with Angelo. On the other hand, she is essentially condemning her own brother to death. While Isabella claims that she is acting purely out of religious and moral concerns, she must have some thought for herself as well. She does not want to have sexual relations with Angelo, and she knows that she should not have to do that. However, her brother's life is at stake. Perhaps she is right to protect herself and her principles, especially considering that she believes in an afterlife. But perhaps she is too cold and selfish.

Isabella says that she would gladly give her life to save Claudio. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

Isabella believes that sacrificing her virginity would be a sin, but she claims that she would gladly give her life instead. Of course, this is not really an option, since Angelo has proposed

only one solution. Remember that Isabella does not really approve of what Claudio did. She thinks the punishment is just, but hopes that Angelo might show mercy on Claudio. She sees herself as a virtuous follower of God; otherwise she would not seek to join a nunnery. It is possible that she would view her life as more valuable than her brother's in the eyes of God because she has not sinned as he has.

Why does Mariana agree to the Duke's plan?

Angelo has certainly wronged Mariana, and yet she agrees to have sexual intercourse with him and marry him, not merely trick him. When the Duke condemns him to death, she asks him to reconsider, though the Duke tells her that she should be thankful her honor has been preserved and enjoy life as a widow instead. Mariana argues that men have faults and perhaps are even better for them. This issue is brought up a lot during the play, as the male characters sin and the female characters forgive them for it.

Why does the Duke lie to Isabella about her brother's death?

Isabella is understandably saddened by the false news of Claudio's death, and it seems unnecessary for the Duke to lie to her in this way, since he has hidden Claudio. This speaks to the play's general treatment of its female characters. They are not "in on" the Duke's plan, probably because he does not trust them to act properly without some manipulation. The Duke convinces Isabella that her brother is dead in order to make her angry at Angelo, probably thinking that otherwise she would simply let him be.

Although Measure for Measure's plot is complicated, it could be argued that its characters are simple. How would you support or refute this statement?

The characters in the play could, in most cases, be described according to single words or phrases. Isabella is virtuous and chaste; her brother is cowardly; the Duke is wise; Angelo is evil. Angelo is the only character that seems to have more complexity to his character, since he appears strict at first and then is shown to be hypocritical and somewhat emotional, allowing himself to be controlled by desire rather than rationality. The simplicity of the characters is a justifiable criticism of the play.

Does Isabella function as a symbol of femininity? Why or why not?

At the start of the play, Isabella is pictured as a completely non-sexual being, about to enter a nunnery and never speak to men again. This adds a twist to her decision, as she is clearly not desirous of sexual intercourse when Angelo propositions her. Angelo is so taken with her that he cannot resist asking her to have intercourse with him, despite the laws he is enforcing in Vienna. Later, the Duke falls in love with Isabella as well. Something about her is clearly very attractive to men. Lucio describes her as submissive and therefore very convincing. Perhaps it is her naive nature that attracts both men, who are obviously interested in power, given their government posts.

Is the play's conclusion satisfying? Why or why not?

The play ends in marriage for Angelo and Mariana, Claudio and Juliet, and the Duke and Isabella. Even Lucio will probably be forced to marry a prostitute whom he has impregnated. This is a traditional ending to comedies, and it provides somewhat of a conclusion, at least suggesting that all the characters are about to embark on another phase in their lives. However, it is not really a happy solution for Angelo or Lucio, who would rather remain bachelors. Isabella's willingness to marry is unlikely, since she wanted to be a nun. Perhaps the implication is that Isabella joined the nunnery only because she could not find a worthy husband, just as Mariana did not marry because her only candidate left her. This says something about the treatment of women in the play, and their independence or lack of independence.

Why is marriage a punishment for many of the characters?

Marriage would seem to be a reward rather than a punishment, but in Measure for Measure it functions as a dreaded state for most of the male characters. In some way, the Duke's proposal to Isabella is a statement of his approval of the institution of marriage, his desire to give up his own possibly freewheeling life to settle down. Lucio certainly does not wish to marry. Claudio was engaged but could not resist engaging in sexual intercourse before the wedding; it is unclear how certain he was about his decision to take a wife. Angelo certainly does not wish to marry Mariana, since she has no dowry, but Mariana does want to marry him. Shakespeare was perhaps satirizing the institution of marriage and the bachelor's desire to avoid it if possible.

How is death treated? What does this say about the relative value placed on people's lives?

Claudio is told to resign himself to death, and both the Duke and Isabella offer him words of solace and encouragement. He is still frightened by the prospect and asks his sister to save him at the cost of her perceived virtue. Death is viewed as both a religious passage and the end to the joys of life, and Claudio is most concerned about his ignorance of what it holds. He is not ready to die, though he says he is. Even Barnadine, who the provost describes as being unaware of life or death, refuses to be executed. For Isabella, death is a better alternative than sinful sexual intercourse. The implication is possibly that no one is really prepared to die, however they try to convince themselves otherwise.

Does the Duke help Isabella only because he is in love with her?

The Duke offers wisdom and assistance to Isabella, but much of it centers around demonstrating his own power and intellect. He could easily have disclosed his identity early on, freeing Claudio and punishing Angelo, yet he chooses to manipulate the situation through a different persona. He certainly enjoys carrying on his charade, needlessly complicating the decisions to be made and the solutions to the other characters' problems. Isabella is certainly devoted to the friar, following his every command. It is only natural that she should transfer her affection to the Duke. The occurrences of the play could be described as one long courtship ritual, in which the Duke emerges as a heroic figure by preserving a woman's chastity, tricking a villain, and saving a man from death.

William Shakespeare and Measure for Measure Background

Likely the most influential writer in all of English literature and certainly the most important playwright of the English Renaissance, William Shakespeare was born in 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire, England. The son of a successful middle-class glove-maker, Shakespeare attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further. In 1582, he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her. Around 1590 he left his family behind and traveled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Public and critical success quickly followed, and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part owner of the Globe Theater. His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558-1603) and James I (ruled 1603-1625); he was a favorite of both monarchs. Indeed, James granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by endowing them with the status of king's players. Wealthy and renowned, Shakespeare retired to

Stratford, and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two. At the time of Shakespeare's death, such luminaries as Ben Jonson hailed him as the apogee of Renaissance theatre.

Shakespeare's works were collected and printed in various editions in the century following his death, and by the early eighteenth century his reputation as the greatest poet ever to write in English was well established. The unprecedented admiration garnered by his works led to a fierce curiosity about Shakespeare's life; but the paucity of surviving biographical information has left many details of Shakespeare's personal history shrouded in mystery. Some people have concluded from this fact that Shakespeare's plays in reality were written by someone else--Francis Bacon and the Earl of Oxford are the two most popular candidates--but the evidence for this claim is overwhelmingly circumstantial, and the theory is not taken seriously by many scholars.

In the absence of definitive proof to the contrary, Shakespeare must be viewed as the author of the 37 plays and 154 sonnets that bear his name. The legacy of this body of work is immense. A number of Shakespeare's plays seem to have transcended even the category of brilliance, becoming so influential as to affect profoundly the course of Western literature and culture ever after.Measure for Measure is considered a comedy, which is sometimes misleading. Some critics consider it a particularly "dark" comedy for its bitterness and cynicism. The play certainly raises important moral issues in its detailed descriptions of Christianity. The structure is based around secret identities and a lot of manipulation. First, the Duke disguises himself as a friar, and many problems are resolved when he discloses his identity. Second, the Duke advises other characters to carry out two other secret plans involving mistaken identity: Mariana takes Isabella's place, and the head of a dead pirate is sent in place of Claudio's. The plot is therefore complexly woven, and the resolution of the play comes with the unraveling of the layers of intrigue created by the Duke.

The Duke, then, functions as a kind of master of ceremonies in the play. Although he has placed another man in his position during his absence, he is still manipulating all the occurrences in town. He is unfailingly wise in a way that most Shakespearean characters are not. He is a good, kind, devoted leader, but his one fault lies in his inability to maintain order. For this he calls in Angelo, and through this he pardons him.

Measure for Measure can also be called a problem play, because it brings up a difficulty and then seeks to solve it. However, the difficulty lies in misunderstandings and hidden identities, not in the real moral questions of the play. No character comes to reconsider his or her beliefs about freedom, justice, sexual relationships, or morality. A very intriguing question--whether or not Isabella should commit a sin in order to save her brother--is never discussed in any great detail. Isabella thinks she should not and never really considers the option. Claudio thinks she should, and so he begs her to save him. The Duke tells her that she is virtuous and that the option is not really open to her anyway, and closes off the discussion by giving her a new plan. The Duke is correct in thinking that Angelo's proposal is not entirely honest, and Isabella emerges faultless; the audience, even if it considers Isabella too cold in not saving her brother, must come to the conclusion that she would have sacrificed her virginity for nothing.

Macbeth

The play begins with the brief appearance of a trio of witches and then moves to a military camp, where the Scottish King Duncan hears the news that his generals, Macbeth and Banquo, have defeated two separate invading armies—one from Ireland, led by the rebel Macdonwald, and one from Norway. Following their pitched battle with these enemy forces, Macbeth and Banquo encounter the witches as they cross a moor. The witches prophesy that Macbeth will be made thane (a rank of Scottish nobility) of Cawdor and eventually King of Scotland. They also prophesy that Macbeth’s companion, Banquo, will beget a line of Scottish kings, although Banquo will never be king himself.

The witches vanish, and Macbeth and Banquo treat their prophecies skeptically until some of King Duncan’s men come to thank the two generals for their victories in battle and to tell Macbeth that he has indeed been named thane of Cawdor. The previous thane betrayed Scotland by fighting for the Norwegians and Duncan has condemned him to death. Macbeth is intrigued by the possibility that the remainder of the witches’ prophecy—that he will be crowned king—might be true, but he is uncertain what to expect. He visits with King Duncan, and they plan to dine together at Inverness, Macbeth’s castle, that night. Macbeth writes ahead to his wife, Lady Macbeth, telling her all that has happened.

Lady Macbeth suffers none of her husband's uncertainty. She desires the kingship for him and wants him to murder Duncan in order to obtain it. When Macbeth arrives at Inverness, she overrides all of her husband's objections and persuades him to kill the king that very night. He and Lady Macbeth plan to get Duncan's two chamberlains drunk so they will black out; the next morning they will blame the murder on the chamberlains, who will be defenseless, as they will remember nothing. While Duncan is asleep, Macbeth stabs him, despite his doubts and a number of supernatural portents, including a vision of a bloody dagger. When Duncan's death is discovered the next morning, Macbeth kills the chamberlains—ostensibly out of rage at their crime—and easily assumes the kingship. Duncan's sons Malcolm and Donalbain flee to England and Ireland, respectively, fearing that whoever killed Duncan desires their demise as well.

Fearful of the witches' prophecy that Banquo's heirs will seize the throne, Macbeth hires a group of murderers to kill Banquo and his son Fleance. They ambush Banquo on his way to a royal feast, but they fail to kill Fleance, who escapes into the night. Macbeth becomes furious: as long as Fleance is alive, he fears that his power remains insecure. At the feast that night, Banquo's ghost visits Macbeth. When he sees the ghost, Macbeth raves fearfully, startling his guests, who include most of the great Scottish nobility. Lady Macbeth tries to neutralize the damage, but Macbeth's kingship incites increasing resistance from his nobles and subjects.

Frightened, Macbeth goes to visit the witches in their cavern. There, they show him a sequence of demons and spirits who present him with further prophecies: he must beware of Macduff, a Scottish nobleman who opposed Macbeth's accession to the throne; he is incapable of being harmed by any man born of woman; and he will be safe until Birnam Wood comes to Dunsinane Castle. Macbeth is relieved and feels secure, because he knows that all men are born of women and that forests cannot move. When he learns that Macduff has fled to England to join Malcolm, Macbeth orders that Macduff's castle be seized and, most cruelly, that Lady Macduff and her children be murdered.

When news of his family's execution reaches Macduff in England, he is stricken with grief and vows revenge. Prince Malcolm, Duncan's son, has succeeded in raising an army in England, and Macduff joins him as he rides to Scotland to challenge Macbeth's forces. The invasion has the support of the Scottish nobles, who are appalled and frightened by Macbeth's tyrannical and murderous behavior. Lady Macbeth, meanwhile, becomes plagued with fits of sleepwalking in which she bemoans what she believes to be bloodstains on her hands. Before Macbeth's opponents arrive, Macbeth receives news that she has killed herself, causing him to sink into a deep and pessimistic despair. Nevertheless, he awaits the English and fortifies Dunsinane, to which he seems to have withdrawn in order to defend himself, certain that the witches' prophecies guarantee his invincibility. He is struck numb with fear, however, when he learns that the English army is advancing on Dunsinane shielded with boughs cut from Birnam Wood. Birnam Wood is indeed coming to Dunsinane, fulfilling half of the witches' prophecy.

In the battle, Macbeth hews violently, but the English forces gradually overwhelm his army and castle. On the battlefield, Macbeth encounters the vengeful Macduff, who declares that he was not "of woman born" but was instead "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb (what we now call birth by cesarean section). Though he realizes that he is doomed, Macbeth continues to fight until Macduff kills and beheads him. Malcolm, now the King of Scotland, declares his benevolent intentions for the country and invites all to see him crowned at Scone.

Analysis

Macbeth is a tragedy that tells the story of a soldier whose overriding ambition and thirst for power cause him to abandon his morals and bring about the near destruction of the kingdom he seeks to rule. At first, the conflict is between Macbeth and himself, as he debates whether or not he will violently seize power, and between Macbeth and his wife, as Lady Macbeth urges her husband toward a course of action he is hesitant to take.

Once Macbeth stops struggling against his ambition, the conflict shifts. It then primarily exists between Macbeth and the other characters, in particular Banquo and Macduff, who challenge his

authority. Macbeth is the protagonist in the sense that he is the main focus of the narrative and that audiences frequently have access to his point of view. However, as he often acts against his own best interests, as well as the best interests of the other characters and his country, he is also the antagonist. The characters who oppose Macbeth and eventually defeat him do so in order to restore order and justice.

The play actually opens with the consequences of someone else's ambition. In the first scene, audiences hear about the bloody conflict that resulted from the rebellion led by the Thane of Cawdor. The rebellion foreshadows the consequences of overreaching one's role. The conflict is initiated when Macbeth encounters the witches who prophesize that he will become first the Thane of Cawdor, and then the King of Scotland. As soon as he learns that their first prophecy has come true, he is awakened to the possibility of the second also being realized. As Macbeth marvels to himself, "Two truths are told/As happy prologues to the swelling act/ Of the imperial theme" (1.3.128-130).

In a crucial turning point in the play, Macbeth is faced with a choice: to take decisive action to claim the crown as his own, or to simply wait and see what happens. Every choice he makes, and every thing that happens for the rest of the play stem from his decision here. Macbeth feels ambivalence, as he wants to be king but also knows that he owes Duncan loyalty both "as his kinsman and as his subject" (1.7.13).

The tension between duty and ambition sharpens when Lady Macbeth learns of the prophecy that her husband will become king, and immediately begins strategizing ways to bring about the fulfillment of the prophecy. Now Macbeth is torn between loyalty to Duncan and loyalty to his wife, who does not appear to feel any shame, doubt, or remorse about the dark act she is plotting. She is eager to "pour my spirits in [Macbeth's] ear/And chastise with the valor of my tongue/All that impedes [him] from the golden round" (1.5.25-27). The audience has the sense that Lady Macbeth may have been longing for just such an opportunity where she can put her intelligence and strategic ability to good use.

Lady Macbeth successfully manipulates her husband into taking action, telling him, "when you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.49). This initial conflict over whether or not he can kill his king, which exists both between Macbeth and himself and between Macbeth and his wife, is

resolved when Macbeth acts, murdering Duncan and then seizing power after the more obvious heirs flee in fear of being accused of the crime.

After the murder, the conflict resides primarily in the opposition between Macbeth and the individuals who mistrust his power and how he got it. Having damned himself by killing Duncan, Macbeth will stop at nothing to hold on to his power. At the start of Act 3, the audience learns that Banquo is suspicious of whether Macbeth may have achieved power through nefarious means. Perhaps because he knows that Banquo has reason to mistrust him, and certainly because he fears that Banquo's heirs are a challenge to his lineage, Macbeth arranges to have Banquo and his son murdered.

Both Macbeth and his wife have changed: Macbeth, formerly hesitant, is now completely firm and decisive, and Lady Macbeth, formerly impatient and bloodthirsty, now thinks it would be fine to leave matters well enough alone. For example, she explicitly tells him that he "must leave this" (3.2.35), while he explains that "things bad begun make strong themselves by ill" (3.2.55). The murder of Banquo furthers heightens the conflict. Macbeth is clearly a tyrannical figure, and the plot will revolve around him being removed from power and punished for his crimes.

The expository speech between Lennox and the lord in Act 3, Scene 6 clarifies that political loyalties have shifted and that Macbeth is now viewed as a usurper who needs to be deposed. We see that Macbeth's rule is disastrous for Scotland as a whole, as Lennox laments the fate of "this our suffering country/Under a hand accursed" (3.6.49-50). Macbeth's horrific order of the murder of Macduff's wife and children creates a more specific personal conflict within the broader one; Macduff now has a case for personal vengeance against Macbeth. Spurred by his rage and grief, Macduff vows to "Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself/Within my sword's length set him" (4.3.234-235). Macduff's declaration of personal enmity against Macbeth sets the stage for the final conflict between the two, and for Macbeth's defeat. A positive outcome becomes impossible for Macbeth as he gradually loses his authority, power, and eventually his wife.

Ultimately, Macbeth's overreliance on his belief he is fated to be king leads to his downfall, since he arrogantly misinterprets the witches' prophecies, believing that they promise him glory

while in fact, the prophecies predict how he will be defeated. While the audience has long understood that the witches are untrustworthy and up to no good, Macbeth only realizes this fact when facing his own death. He laments that the witches "palter with us in a double sense/That keep the word of promise to our ear/And break it to our hope" (5.8.20-22). Although he blames the witches, his own ambition is equally to blame. He heard what he wanted to hear and believed what he wanted to believe from the first moment he met the witches.

Yet Macbeth is not entirely unsympathetic, as he had several powerful forces inciting him to action, and for a long time truly believed he was following his fate. His death resolves the political and social conflict, since the legitimate king can now return to power and restore order to Scotland. The play's brief falling action allows for the promise of a brighter future under Malcolm's new reign.

Themes

The Corrupting Power Of Unchecked Ambition

The main theme of Macbeth—the destruction wrought when ambition goes unchecked by moral constraints—finds its most powerful expression in the play's two main characters. Macbeth is a courageous Scottish general who is not naturally inclined to commit evil deeds, yet he deeply desires power and advancement. He kills Duncan against his better judgment and afterward stews in guilt and paranoia. Toward the end of the play, he descends into a kind of frantic, boastful madness. Lady Macbeth, on the other hand, pursues her goals with greater determination, yet she is less capable of withstanding the repercussions of her immoral acts. One of Shakespeare's most forcefully drawn female characters, she spurs her husband mercilessly to kill Duncan and urges him to be strong in the murder's aftermath, but she is eventually driven to distraction by the effect of Macbeth's repeated bloodshed on her conscience. In each case, ambition—helped, of course, by the malign prophecies of the witches—is what drives the couple to ever more terrible atrocities. The problem, the play suggests, is that once one decides to use violence to further one's quest for power, it is difficult to stop. There are always potential threats to the throne—Banquo, Fleance, Macduff—and it is always tempting to use violent means to dispose of them.

The Relationship Between Cruelty And Masculinity

Characters in Macbeth frequently dwell on issues of gender. Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband by questioning his manhood, wishes that she herself could be "unsexed," and does not contradict Macbeth when he says that a woman like her should give birth only to boys. In the same manner that Lady Macbeth goads her husband on to murder, Macbeth provokes the murderers he hires to kill Banquo by questioning their manhood. Such acts show that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth equate masculinity with naked aggression, and whenever they converse about manhood, violence soon follows. Their understanding of manhood allows the political order depicted in the play to descend into chaos. At the same time, however, the audience cannot help noticing that women are also sources of violence and evil. The witches' prophecies spark Macbeth's ambitions and then encourage his violent behavior; Lady Macbeth provides the brains and the will behind her husband's plotting; and the only divine being to appear is Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. Arguably, Macbeth traces the root of chaos and evil to women, which has led some critics to argue that this is Shakespeare's most misogynistic play.

While the male characters are just as violent and prone to evil as the women, the aggression of the female characters is more striking because it goes against prevailing expectations of how women ought to behave. Lady Macbeth's behavior certainly shows that women can be as ambitious and cruel as men. Whether because of the constraints of her society or because she is not fearless enough to kill, Lady Macbeth relies on deception and manipulation rather than violence to achieve her ends.

Ultimately, the play does put forth a revised and less destructive definition of manhood. In the scene where Macduff learns of the murders of his wife and child, Malcolm consoles him by encouraging him to take the news in "manly" fashion, by seeking revenge upon Macbeth. Macduff shows the young heir apparent that he has a mistaken understanding of masculinity. To Malcolm's suggestion, "Dispute it like a man," Macduff replies, "I shall do so. But I must also feel it as a man" (4.3.221–223). At the end of the play, Siward receives news of his son's death rather complacently. Malcolm responds: "He's worth more sorrow [than you have expressed] / And that I'll spend for him" (5.8.16–17). Malcolm's comment shows that he has learned the lesson Macduff gave him on the sentient nature of true masculinity. It also suggests that, with Malcolm's coronation, order will be restored to the Kingdom of Scotland.

The Difference Between Kingship And Tyranny

In the play, Duncan is always referred to as a "king," while Macbeth soon becomes known as the "tyrant." The difference between the two types of rulers seems to be expressed in a conversation that occurs in Act 4, scene 3, when Macduff meets Malcolm in England. In order to test Macduff's loyalty to Scotland, Malcolm pretends that he would make an even worse king than Macbeth. He tells Macduff of his reproachable qualities—among them a thirst for personal power and a violent temperament, both of which seem to characterize Macbeth perfectly. On the other hand, Malcolm says, "The king-becoming graces / [are] justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness, / Bounty, perseverance, mercy, [and] lowliness" (4.3.92–93).

The model king, then, offers the kingdom an embodiment of order and justice, but also comfort and affection. Under him, subjects are rewarded according to their merits, as when Duncan makes Macbeth thane of Cawdor after Macbeth's victory over the invaders. Most important, the king must be loyal to Scotland above his own interests. Macbeth, by contrast, brings only chaos to Scotland—symbolized in the bad weather and bizarre supernatural events—and offers no real justice, only a habit of capriciously murdering those he sees as a threat. As the embodiment of tyranny, he must be overcome by Malcolm so that Scotland can have a true king once more.

Ambition

Although he is encouraged by the Witches, Macbeth's true downfall is his own ambition. Lady Macbeth is as ambitious as her husband, encouraging him to commit murder to achieve their goals. Both Macbeths fail to see how their ambition makes them cross moral lines and will lead to their downfall. Once Macbeth kills Duncan, his ambition to hold on to his title as king becomes intertwined with his paranoia. Rather than being able to enjoy the fruits of his ambition, he becomes obsessed with maintaining the power he's won. Macbeth's blind pursuit of power can be contrasted with other ambitious characters in the play like Banquo. Banquo also hears the Witches' prophecies, and similarly has ambition for his sons. But unlike Macbeth, Banquo's morality prevents him from pursuing his goal at any cost. At the end of the play, Macbeth has achieved all he wanted but has nothing. With his wife gone and no hope of producing a prince, Macbeth sees what his unchecked ambition has cost him: the loss of all he holds dear.

Guilt

Macbeth's guilt about murdering his king, Duncan, and ordering the murder of his friend, Banquo, causes him to have guilty hallucinations. Lady Macbeth also hallucinates and eventually goes insane from guilt over her role in Duncan's death. The fact that both characters suffer torment as a result of their actions suggests neither Macbeth nor his wife is entirely cold-blooded. Although they commit terrible crimes, they know, on some level, that what they've done is wrong. Their guilt prevents them from fully enjoying the power they craved. Lady Macbeth says "What's done/ cannot be undone" in Act Five scene one, but her guilt continues to torment her. While Macbeth's guilt causes him to commit further murders in an attempt to cover up his initial crimes, Lady Macbeth's guilt drives her to insanity, and, finally, suicide.

Children

The loss of children is a complex and intriguing theme in the play. For both Macbeth and Banquo, children represent the idea of the continuation of a family line. Macbeth has Banquo murdered in hopes of thwarting the Witches' prophecy that Banquo will sire a long line of kings. However, Fleance is able to escape being killed, leaving open the possibility he will one day take over the throne. Macbeth and his wife have no heirs, although Lady Macbeth references having been a mother once, saying, "I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me. " This line suggests the Macbeths may have lost a child. Similarly, Macduff mourns the children Macbeth ordered killed and uses their memory to spur him on to victory against their killer; and Siward laments the loss of his son in the play's closing battle, but is proud to have fathered such a brave soldier who fought in a noble cause.

Questions

Are the witches in Macbeth real?

Yes. Macbeth really does see the three Witches in the play. Banquo also sees them and speaks with them. Initially, Banquo questions the Witches about whether they are real or possibly a hallucination he and Macbeth both share, but throughout the rest of the play both men seem to accept the Witches as physical beings. Later in the play, the Witches appear with their Queen, Hecate, in a scene without any human characters. If Macbeth had been hallucinating the Witches, he would need to be onstage for them to be seen. He is not, which is more proof that in the world of this play, they are real.

We can also contrast the treatment of the Witches to Banquo's ghost. When Macbeth claims he sees the ghost, Lady Macbeth insists she doesn't see anything, telling Macbeth "When all's done/ You look but on a stool." (3.4.) In the play, both Macbeth and his wife have hallucinations which they alone see, but the Witches are clearly visible to more than just Macbeth.

Did Macbeth always want to be king?

The audience sees Macbeth for the first time just moments before he and Banquo encounter the Witches. Thus, there's not much time for the audience to learn anything about Macbeth before the Witches' prophesy. However, immediately upon hearing that he will be king, Macbeth seems to have a strong reaction, causing Banquo to say "Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear/ Things that do sound so fair?" (1.3.) Macbeth's reaction suggests he has powerful feelings about the prospect of being king. Similarly, when Lady Macbeth reads a letter from Macbeth telling of the prophecies for his future, she immediately begins to plot to kill Duncan and take the throne, suggesting that Lady Macbeth has also always dreamed of being queen.

Why does Macbeth think the Witches want to help him?

When Malcom reveals that he was taken from his mother's womb – or, in other words, delivered via Cesarean section – Macbeth finally understands that the Witches' prophecies meant his downfall, not his elevation. Up to the end of the play, Macbeth has confused the fact that the Witches' predictions always came true with the idea that their predictions were helpful to him. Everything the Witches predict does come true, but everything that happens ends up hurting Macbeth as well. He does become Thane of Cawdor, but that feeds his ambition so he kills Duncan. He becomes the king, but as a result kills many people, including his best friend.

When Macbeth hears the Witches' final prediction, he is tormented by the vision of Banquo's children ruling instead of him, but he still doesn't understand that the Witches are not on his side. He sees their predictions that he can't be defeated until Birnam Wood moves and that he can't be killed except by a man not born of a woman as proof that he is protected. He is very wrong.

Does Lady Macbeth commit suicide?

Shakespeare leaves the exact nature of Lady Macbeth's death ambiguous. When Macbeth is told that his wife has died, no details are given and he does not ask for them. Instead, he talks about how futile and pointless life is. At the end of the play, Malcolm tells the noblemen that "'tis thought, by self and violent hands" the Queen killed herself, but the inclusion of the word "thought" implies her suicide is a rumor. Suicide is considered a mortal sin by the Roman Catholic Church, and thus frowned upon throughout England. According to church law, if Lady Macbeth killed herself, she would be eternally damned. Yet the question is never fully answered.

How did Birnam Wood move and why was Macduff able to kill Macbeth?

When Malcolm, Macduff, Siward and the other nobles are planning to attack Macbeth's castle and overthrow him, in Act V, scene 4, they are in Birnam Wood, across the fields. Malcolm orders the soldiers to break off boughs from a tree in the Wood and hold the boughs in front of them as they march toward Macbeth. He says that doing so will conceal their true numbers from those watching for Macbeth, who will not be able to report an accurate count to the king. From Macbeth's perspective, many yards away, it does look like the Wood itself is moving when the men do this.

Although the Witches tell Macbeth he cannot be killed by a man "of woman born," Macduff reveals to Macbeth that he was delivered by what we call a Cesarean section, cut out of his mother's body instead of being born in the more usual manner. Thus, Macduff fulfills the Witches' prediction that a man not born of a woman is the only person who can kill Macbeth.

What convinces Macbeth that the Witches' prophecy is true?

Macbeth becomes convinced that the Witches' prophecy is true when Duncan names him Thane of Cawdor, which the Witches prophesied would happen. When the three Witches first approach Macbeth, they acknowledge Macbeth as Thane of Glamis (his current title) as well as Thane of Cawdor. This puzzles Macbeth since he can't figure out how he is both. Shortly after, Ross delivers the news that the king has given Macbeth the new title of Thane of Cawdor, since the

previous Thane of Cawdor has been executed for treason. This unexpected event causes Macbeth to become convinced that the Witches were telling the truth.

Why does Banquo not trust the Witches?

Banquo is skeptical of the Witches' intentions and remains unconvinced of the Witches' prophecy. Banquo warns Macbeth that "instruments of darkness" often tell half-truths "to win us to our harm" (1.3.125–126). While the Witches have prophesied great futures for both Macbeth and Banquo, Banquo is less inspired and intrigued than Macbeth and would rather leave the matter safely alone.

Why does Macbeth believe he needs to kill King Duncan?

Macbeth believes he needs to kill King Duncan because he sees the king's son, Malcolm, as a threat to the throne. Macbeth has already felt confused about whether he needs to leave the Witches' prophecy in the hands of fate or do some "dark" deeds to help their prophecies along. However, when Macbeth hears Duncan declare his intention to make Malcolm his heir, Macbeth becomes convinced he needs to take matters into his own hands and kill King Duncan himself.

How does Lady Macbeth persuade Macbeth to kill King Duncan?

Lady Macbeth persuades Macbeth to kill King Duncan by preying on his sense of manhood and courage. When Macbeth reveals that he has had a change of heart and is no longer willing to kill King Duncan, Lady Macbeth becomes enraged. She openly questions whether he is a man who is willing to act on his desires, asking, "Art thou afeard / To be in the same in thine own act and valor / As thou art in desire?" (1.7.39–41), and further calls his manhood into question by stating, "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.49). Lady Macbeth's tactics work: Even though Macbeth is disgusted by his wife's ruthlessness, he resolves to kill Duncan.

Why does Macbeth kill King Duncan's two chamberlains?

While Macbeth's motive is unclear, it is suggested that Macbeth kills King Duncan's two chamberlains in an act of fear and horror. Lady Macbeth's original plan is to get King Duncan's chamberlains so drunk that they pass out and then frame them for King Duncan's murder by having Macbeth leave two bloody daggers in their hands. The plan goes well until Macbeth fails to leave the bloody daggers by the drunken men. In a confused manner, Macbeth tells Lady Macbeth that he thought he heard the chamberlains say, "God bless us!" in their drunken sleep as if they saw him, but it's not clear whether this is true. Macbeth is notably rattled and has ostensibly murdered the chamberlains out of fear of being caught and in horror for what he has chosen to be a part of.

Why do King Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain, flee to England after their father is murdered?

Malcolm and Donalbain flee from Scotland to England after their father's murder because they are afraid that whoever killed their father will kill them next. While such a move would seem logical given the circumstances, some view it differently. Some characters view their escape as a symptom of guilt and wonder if Malcolm and Donalbain are actually the murderers.

Why does Macbeth kill Banquo?

Macbeth kills Banquo because he sees Banquo as another threat to the throne. In the Witches' original prophecy, they proclaim that Macbeth will be king but that Banquo's son and descendants will be the future kings, while Banquo will never be king himself. Macbeth, never fully understanding how the prophecy would manifest, once again takes matters into his own hands. Even though Banquo is his close comrade, Macbeth is now on a single-minded mission to protect himself and his position, and he kills Banquo to maintain the throne.

How does Lady Macbeth's death affect Macbeth?

When Macbeth hears of Lady Macbeth's death, he responds that she was eventually going to die anyway—"She should have died hereafter" (5.5.17)—just like everyone else. Macbeth then goes

on to comment on the brevity of life: “Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player / That struts and frets his hour upon the stage” (5.5.24–25). Macbeth might be emotionally numb at this point in the play, beyond the point of sadness or even regret, especially for a wife who has helped bring him to ruin.

What convinces Macbeth that he is invincible over Macduff’s army?

Macbeth believes that he is invincible over Macduff’s army because the Witches and the apparitions prophesied “none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth” (4.1.82–83) and “Macbeth shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him” (4.1.96–98). Macbeth interprets such prophecies literally. He reasons that since all men are born from women and woods can’t move, he is invincible.

How does the Witches' prophecy about Banquo come true?

It can be assumed that Banquo’s son, Fleance, eventually becomes king. This assumption is based partly on the Witches’ prophecy that while Banquo would never be king, his son and descendants would be. When Macbeth sends a group of murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance, Fleance escapes, and the murderers only complete half their task, leaving an open path for Banquo’s line to inherit the throne. The only king actually crowned after Macbeth in the play, however, is Malcolm, Duncan’s son

The Winter's Tale

King Leontes of Sicilia begs his childhood friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia, to extend his visit to Sicilia. Polixenes protests that he has been away from his kingdom for nine months, but after Leontes's pregnant wife, Hermione, pleads with him he relents and agrees to stay a little longer. Leontes, meanwhile, has become possessed with jealousy—convinced that Polixenes and Hermione are lovers, he orders his loyal retainer, Camillo, to poison the Bohemian king. Instead, Camillo warns Polixenes of what is afoot, and the two men flee Sicilia immediately.

Furious at their escape, Leontes now publicly accuses his wife of infidelity, and declares that the child she is bearing must be illegitimate. He throws her in prison, over the protests of his nobles, and sends to the Oracle of Delphi for what he is sure will be confirmation of his suspicions. Meanwhile, the queen gives birth to a girl, and her loyal friend Paulina brings the baby to the king, in the hopes that the sight of the child will soften his heart. He only grows angrier, however, and orders Paulina's husband, Lord Antigonus, to take the child and abandon it in some desolate place. While Antigonus is gone, the answer comes from Delphi—Hermione and Polixenes are innocent, and Leontes will have no heir until his lost daughter is found. As this news is revealed, word comes that Leontes's son, Mamillius, has died of a wasting sickness brought on by the accusations against his mother. Hermione, meanwhile, falls in a swoon, and is carried away by Paulina, who subsequently reports the queen's death to her heartbroken and repentant husband.

Antigonus, meanwhile abandons the baby on the Bohemian coast, reporting that Hermione appeared to him in a dream and bade him name the girl Perdita and leave gold and other tokens on her person. Shortly thereafter, Antigonus is killed by a bear, and Perdita is raised by a kindly Shepherd. Sixteen years pass, and the son of Polixenes, Prince Florizel, falls in love with Perdita. His father and Camillo attend a sheepshearing in disguise and watch as Florizel and Perdita are betrothed—then, tearing off the disguise, Polixenes intervenes and orders his son never to see the Shepherd's daughter again. With the aid of Camillo, however, who longs to see his native land again, Florizel and Perdita take ship for Sicilia, after using the clothes of a local rogue, Autolycus, as a disguise. They are joined in their voyage by the Shepherd and his son, a Clown, who are directed there by Autolycus.

In Sicilia, Leontes—still in mourning after all this time—greets the son of his old friend effusively. Florizel pretends to be on a diplomatic mission from his father, but his cover is blown when Polixenes and Camillo, too, arrive in Sicilia. What happens next is told to us by gentlemen of the Sicilian court: the Shepherd tells everyone his story of how Perdita was found, and Leontes realizes that she is his daughter, leading to general rejoicing. The entire company then goes to Paulina's house in the country, where a statue of Hermione has been recently finished. The sight of his wife's form makes Leontes distraught, but then, to everyone's amazement, the

statue comes to life—it is Hermione, restored to life. As the play ends, Paulina and Camillo are engaged, and the whole company celebrates the miracle.

Analysis

The Winter's Tale is a perfect tragicomedy. Set in an imaginary world where Bohemia has a seacoast, and where ancient Greek oracles coexist with Renaissance sculptors, it offers three acts of unremitting tragedy, followed by two acts of restorative comedy. In between, sixteen years pass hastily, a lapse which many critics have taken as a structural flaw, but which actually only serves to highlight the disparity of theme, setting, and action between the two halves of the play. The one is set amid gloomy winter, and illuminates the destructive power that mistaken jealousy exercises over the family of Leontes, King of Sicilia; in the second half, flower-strewn spring intervenes, and all the damage that the King's folly accomplished is undone—through coincidence, goodwill, and finally through miracle, as a statue of his dead wife comes to life and embraces him.

As the force behind the tragedy stems from Leontes's belief that his wife, Hermione, and best friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia, are lovers, so Leontes has attracted more critical interest than any other character in the play. An Othello who is his own Iago, he is a perfect paranoiac, convinced that he has all the facts and ready to twist any counter-argument to fit his (mistaken) perception of the world. Perhaps because of its uncertain origin, Leontes's madness is a terrifying thing: he becomes a poet of nihilism, demanding, when told that there is "nothing" between Hermione and Polixenes, "Is this nothing? / Why, then the world and all that's in't is nothing, / The covering sky's nothing, Bohemia nothing, / My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings, / If this be nothing"(I.ii.292-296). The roots of his jealousy seem to run too deep for the play to plumb—there are hints of misogyny, of dynastic insecurity, and of an inability to truly separate himself psychologically from Polixenes, but no definitive answers. Indeed, the only answer is his own—in one of Shakespeare's finer images, Leontes says "I have drunk, and seen the spider"(II.i.45).

To balance his morbid, brooding nihilism and sexual jealousy, Shakespeare makes Leontes's daughter Perdita a poet of spring, rebirth, and revitalization, whose own lover (Polixenes's son Florizel) is as constant and generous as Leontes is suspicious and cruel. She appears decked in

flowers, and when she dispenses them to everyone around her, the play links her with Proserpina, Roman goddess of the spring and growing things. If Leontes is a tragic hero, then she is a fairy-tale heroine, a princess reared among commoners who falls in love with a prince and—eventually—lives happily ever after. Leontes casts her out as an infant in Act III, when he is in the grip of darkness; in Act V she returns to him, and restores him to happiness. The miracle of Hermione's resurrection at the play's close is only a fitting close to the spirit of rebirth that Perdita brings into the story.

The play is also notable for its rich group of supporting characters. Hermione is an exemplary and eloquent figure, despite the fact that she spends the play defending herself against unjust accusations, and her friend Paulina is the voice of sanity while Leontes is mad and then the voice of reminder and penance once he regrets his crimes. The rustic Shepherd who takes in Perdita and the ever-faithful lord, Camillo are both sympathetic characters, too, but none can match Autolycus, the peddler, thief and minstrel who is a harmless villain (he robs, lies, and cheats)—so harmless, in fact, that the audience forgives and even applauds him as he sings, dances, and robs his way through the play, contriving even to find time to provide a helping hand to the other characters as they struggle toward their happy ending.

Questions

Discuss and analyze Leontes's jealousy.

The innocence of Hermione is never in doubt—every character in the play testifies to it, and the Oracle confirms it—so Leontes's suspicions of his wife and best friend are clearly irrational. As the victim of misplaced jealousy, he resembles one of the most famous Shakespearean heroes, Othello, who murders his wife Desdemona because he believes her to be unfaithful. But Othello is led into error by his villainous aide, Iago, whereas Leontes is his own Iago—the entire dream of adultery is concocted within his own mind. The play offers us hints, in the childhood friendship of the two kings, and the suggestion that Leontes may have been too close to Polixenes; in the king's insecurity over the legitimacy of Mamillius, and the threat that bastards posed to any kingdom; in Leontes's misogyny and fear of women, which comes out when

Paulina tries to reason with him. But none of these is sufficient to solve the problem, and Shakespeare seems to intend it thus. "Your actions are my dreams," (III.ii.81) Leontes tells Hermione, and while he means it sarcastically, the play does not—he has allowed his nightmares to infect his view of the waking world.

Discuss the changes in mood, plot and imagery that occur between Act I-III and Act IV-V.

In Mamillius's words, "a sad tale's best for winter," (II.i.25) and the first three acts are set in a Sicilian winter, and are determinedly sad. Indeed, these acts offer a kind of miniature tragedy, as Leontes's errors, like Lear's or Othello's, bring death and destruction down upon his family and kingdom. What makes The Winter's Tale a romance, rather than a tragedy, is the abrupt shift in mood after Time announces the passage of sixteen years, and the action shifts to Bohemia. Winter comes to an end, and spring enters, bringing with it the promise of rebirth—and as the seasons change, so the story shifts away from tragedy and into the realm of fairy tale and romantic comedy. The imagery of Act IV is dominated by the flowers that Perdita wears and dispenses as hostess of the sheepshearing, and the mood of the act is found in the cheerful songs of Autolycus. This spirit is eventually brought back to Sicilia, where Act V undoes much of what seemed so tragic in Act III—Perdita is restored to her rightful home, Hermione is restored to life, and even Paulina is given a new husband. The Winter's Tale, then, ends the way all winters end—by giving its characters the promise of forgiveness and a fresh start.

Discuss the resurrection scene. Is the apparent miracle real?

There is evidence on both sides of this question. Paulina, who orchestrates the entire scene—and who ostensibly commissioned the statue—seems remarkably unsurprised by the "miracle," and she is, after all, our only witness to the fact that Hermione actually died. Her behavior in the years since suggests a foreknowledge of her queen's return, as she steadfastly kept the king

fixated on his own guilt, and on the impossibility of ever marrying again. On the other hand, if the entire business is only a trick, it seems rather an over-the-top stunt for two level-headed women like Hermione and Paulina to orchestrate. And no one who witnesses the miracle raises even a scrap of doubt as to whether the statue was ever an actual statue. Clearly, Shakespeare wants to have it both ways—a genuine miracle to cap off his "Tale," and a hint of a naturalistic explanation for the careful reader. And in either case, the miracle is an appropriate conclusion to the play, since it provides for a truly happy ending that Hermione's death seemed to place out of reach.

Henry V

The play is set in England in the early fifteenth century. The political situation in England is tense: King Henry IV has died, and his son, the young King Henry V, has just assumed the throne. Several bitter civil wars have left the people of England restless and dissatisfied. Furthermore, in order to gain the respect of the English people and the court, Henry must live down his wild adolescent past, when he used to consort with thieves and drunkards at the Boar's Head Tavern on the seedy side of London.

Henry lays claim to certain parts of France, based on his distant roots in the French royal family and on a very technical interpretation of ancient land laws. When the young prince, or Dauphin, of France sends Henry an insulting message in response to these claims, Henry decides to invade France. Supported by the English noblemen and clergy, Henry gathers his troops for war.

Henry's decision to invade France trickles down to affect the common people he rules. In the Boar's Head Tavern in Eastcheap, some of the king's former friends—whom he rejected when he rose to the throne—prepare to leave their homes and families. Bardolph, Pistol, and Nim are common lowlifes and part-time criminals, on the opposite end of the social spectrum from their royal former companion. As they prepare for the war, they remark on the death of Falstaff, an elderly knight who was once King Henry's closest friend.

Just before his fleet sets sail, King Henry learns of a conspiracy against his life. The three traitors working for the French beg for mercy, but Henry denies their request. He orders that the trio, which includes a former friend named Scrope, be executed. The English sail for France, where they fight their way across the country. Against incredible odds, they continue to win after

conquering the town of Harfleur, where Henry gives an impassioned speech to motivate his soldiers to victory. Among the officers in King Henry's army are men from all parts of Britain, such as Fluellen, a Welsh captain. As the English advance, Nim and Bardolph are caught looting and are hanged at King Henry's command.

The climax of the war comes at the famous Battle of Agincourt, at which the English are outnumbered by the French five to one. The night before the battle, King Henry disguises himself as a common soldier and talks to many of the soldiers in his camp, learning who they are and what they think of the great battle in which they have been swept up. When he is by himself, he laments his ever-present responsibilities as king. In the morning, he prays to God and gives a powerful, inspiring speech to his soldiers. Miraculously, the English win the battle, and the proud French must surrender at last. Some time later, peace negotiations are finally worked out: Henry will marry Catherine, the daughter of the French king. Henry's son will be the king of France, and the marriage will unite the two kingdoms.

Character List

King Henry V

The young, recently crowned king of England. Henry is brilliant, focused, fearless, and committed to the responsibilities of kingship. These responsibilities often force him to place his personal feelings second to the needs of the crown. Henry is a brilliant orator who uses his skill to justify his claims and to motivate his troops. Once Henry has resolved to conquer France, he pursues his goal relentlessly to the end.

Chorus

A single character who introduces each of the play's five acts. Like the group of singers who comprised the chorus in Greek drama, the Chorus in Henry V functions as a narrator offering commentary on the play's plot and themes.

The Dukes of Exeter, Westmorland, Salisbury, and Warwick
Trusted advisors to King Henry and the leaders of his military. The Duke of Exeter, who is also Henry's uncle, is entrusted with carrying important messages to the French king.

The Dukes of Clarence, Bedford, and Gloucester Henry's three younger brothers.
Clarence, Bedford, and Gloucester are noblemen and fighters.

The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely
Wealthy and powerful English clergymen. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely do not go to fight in the war, but their urging and fund-raising are important factors in Henry's initial decision to invade France.

Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey Three conspirators against King Henry.
Cambridge, Scrope, and Grey are bribed by French agents to kill Henry before he sets sail for France. Scrope's betrayal of his king is particularly surprising, as Scrope and Henry are good friends.

York and Suffolk
Two noble cousins who die together at the Battle of Agincourt.

The King of France Charles VI.
A capable leader, Charles does not underestimate King Henry, as his son, the Dauphin, does.

Isabel
The queen of France, married to Charles VI. Isabel does not appear until the final scene (V.ii), in which her daughter, Catherine, is betrothed to King Henry.

The Dauphin
The son of the king of France and heir to the throne (until Henry takes this privilege from him). The Dauphin is a headstrong and overconfident young man, more inclined to mock the English than to make preparations to fight them. He also mocks Henry, making frequent mention of the king's irresponsible youth.

Catherine

The daughter of the king of France. Catherine is eventually married off to King Henry in order to cement the peace between England and France. She speaks little English.

French noblemen and military leaders

The Constable of France, the Duke of Orléans, the Duke of Britain, the Duke of Bourbon, the Earl of Grandpré, Lord Rambures, the Duke of Burgundy, and the Governor of Harfleur are French noblemen and military leaders. Most of them are killed or captured by the English at the Battle of Agincourt, though the Duke of Burgundy survives to help with the peace negotiations between France and England. Like the Dauphin, most of these leaders are more interested in making jokes about the English than in taking them seriously as a fighting force, a tendency that leads to the eventual French defeat at Agincourt.

Sir Thomas Erpingham

A wise, aged veteran of many wars who serves with Henry's campaign.

Captain Gower

An army captain and a capable fighter who serves with Henry's campaign.

Captain Fluellen, Captain MacMorris, and Captain Jamy

The captains of King Henry's troops from Wales, Ireland, and Scotland, respectively, all of whom have heavy accents reflecting their countries of origin. Fluellen, a close friend of Captain Gower, is the most prominent of the three. His wordiness provides comic relief, but he is also very likable and is an intelligent leader and strategist.

Ancient Pistol

A commoner from London who serves in the war with Henry, and a friend of Nim and Bardolph. Pistol speaks with a blustery and melodramatic poetic diction; he is married to the hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern in London.

Bardolph

A commoner from London who serves in the war with Henry, and a friend of Pistol and Nim. Bardolph is a former friend of King Henry from his wild youth. A thief and a coward, Bardolph is hanged in France for looting from the conquered towns in violation of the king's order.

Nim

A commoner from London who serves in the war with Henry, and a friend of Pistol and Bardolph. Like Bardolph, Nim is hanged in France for looting from the conquered towns.

Boy

Formerly in the service of Falstaff, the nameless boy leaves London after his master's death and goes with Pistol, Nim, and Bardolph to the war in France. The boy is somewhat touchy and embarrassed that his companions are cowardly thieves.

Michael Williams, John Bates, and Alexander Court

Common soldiers with whom King Henry, disguised, argues the night before the Battle of Agincourt. Though he argues heatedly with Williams, Henry is generally impressed with these men's intelligence and courage.

Hostess

The keeper of the Boar's Head Tavern in London. Mistress Quickly, as she is also known, is married to Pistol. We hear news of her death from venereal disease in Act V, scene i.

Sir John Falstaff

The closest friend and mentor of the young Henry, back in his wild days. Falstaff doesn't actually appear in Henry V, but he is a major figure in the Henry IV plays. He is a jovial and frequently drunken old knight, but his heart is broken when Henry breaks his ties with him after becoming king. We hear news of Falstaff's offstage death in Act II, scenes i and iii.

Alice

The maid of the French princess Catherine. Alice has spent time in England and teaches Catherine some English, though not very well.

Montjoy

The French herald, or messenger.

Monsieur le Fer

A French soldier and gentleman who is captured by Pistol at the Battle of Agincourt.

Themes

Literary Devices Themes

The Ruthlessness of the Good King

In presenting the figure of its heroic yet ruthless protagonist, *Henry V*'s predominant concern is the nature of leadership and its relationship to morality. The play proposes that the qualities that define a good ruler are not necessarily the same qualities that define a good person. Henry is an extraordinarily good leader: he is intelligent, focused, and inspiring to his men. He uses any and all resources at his disposal to ensure that he achieves his goals. Shakespeare presents Henry's charismatic ability to connect with his subjects and motivate them to embrace and achieve his goals as the fundamental criterion of good leadership, making Henry seem the epitome of a good leader. By inspiring his men to win the Battle of Agincourt despite overwhelming odds, Henry achieves heroic status.

But in becoming a great king, Henry is forced to act in a way that, were he a common man, might seem immoral and even unforgivable. In order to strengthen the stability of his throne, Henry betrays friends such as Falstaff, and he puts other friends to death in order to uphold the law. While it is difficult to fault Henry for having Scrope killed, since Scrope was plotting to assassinate him, Henry's cruel punishment of Bardolph is less understandable, as is his willingness to threaten the gruesome murder of the children of Harfleur in order to persuade the governor to surrender. Henry talks of favoring peace, but once his mind is settled on a course of action, he is willing to condone and even create massive and unprovoked violence in order to achieve his goal.

Shakespeare's portrayal of the king shows that power complicates the traditional distinctions between heroism and villainy, so that to call Henry one or the other constitutes an oversimplification of the issue. As Henry himself comments, the massive responsibilities laid on

the shoulders of a king render him distinct from all other people, and the standards that can be brought to bear in judging a king must take that distinction into account. A king, in Shakespeare's portrayal, is responsible for the well-being and stability of his entire nation; he must subordinate his personal feelings, desires, dislikes, and even conscience wholly to this responsibility. Perhaps, then, the very nature of power is morally ambiguous, which would account for the implicit critique of Henry's actions that many contemporary readers find in the play. But within the framework of judgment suggested by the play, there is no doubt that Henry is both a great king and a hero.

The Diversity of the English

The play opens with the Chorus reminding the audience that the few actors who will appear onstage represent thousands of their countrymen, and, indeed, the characters who appear in *Henry V* encompass the range of social classes and nationalities united under the English crown during Henry's reign. The play explores this breadth of humanity and the fluid, functional way in which the characters react to cultural differences, which melt or rupture depending on the situation.

The catalog of characters from different countries both emphasizes the diversity of medieval England and intensifies the audience's sense of Henry's tremendous responsibility to his nation. For a play that explores the nature of absolute political power, there is something remarkably democratic in this enlivening portrayal of rich and poor, English and Welsh, Scottish and Irish, as their roles intertwine in the war effort and as the king attempts to give them direction and momentum.

Interestingly, this disparate group of character types is not unanimous in supporting Henry. Many of them do admire the king, but other intelligent and courageous men, such as Michael Williams, distrust his motives. It is often seen as a measure of Henry's integrity that he is able to tolerate Williams's type of dissent with magnanimity, but the range of characters in the play would seem to imply that his tolerance is also expedient. With so many groups of individuals to take into account, it would be unrealistic of Henry to expect universal support—another measure of pressure added to his shoulders. In this way, the play's exploration of the people of Britain

becomes an important facet of the play's larger exploration of power. As the play explores the ruler, it also examines the ruled.

Symbols

The Tun of Tennis Balls

The Dauphin knows that Henry was an idler before becoming king, and he sends Henry a tun, or chest, of tennis balls to remind Henry of his reputation for being a careless pleasure-seeker. This gift symbolizes the Dauphin's scorn for Henry. The tennis balls enrage Henry, however, and he uses the Dauphin's scorn to motivate himself. The tennis balls thus come to symbolize Henry's burning desire to conquer France. As he tells the French ambassador, the Dauphin's jests have initiated a deadly match, and these tennis balls are now cannonballs.

Characters as Cultural Types

As the Chorus tells the audience, it is impossible for a stage to hold the vast numbers of soldiers that actually participated in Henry V's war with France. As a result, many of the characters represent large groups or cultures: Fluellen represents the Welsh, Pistol represents the underclass, Jamy represents the Scottish, and MacMorris represents the Irish. These characters are often given the stereotypical traits thought to characterize each group in Shakespeare's day—MacMorris, for instance, has a fiery temper, a trait thought to be common to the Irish.

Motifs

Male Interaction

There are almost no women in *Henry V*. Catherine is the only female character to be given many lines or presented in the domestic sphere, and most of her lines are in French. With this absence of women and the play's focus on the all-male activity of medieval warfare, the play presents many types of male relationships. The relationships between various groups of men—Fluellen and Gower; Bardolph, Pistol, and Nim; and the French lords—mirror and echo one another in various ways. The cowardice of the Eastcheap group is echoed in the cowardice of the French lords, for instance. Perhaps more important, these male friendships all draw attention to another aspect of Henry's character: his isolation from other people. Unlike most of the play's other male characters, Henry seems to have no close friends, another characteristic that makes the life of a king fundamentally different from the life of a common citizen.

Parallels Between Rulers and Commoners

Henry V presents a wide range of common citizens. Some scenes portray the king's interactions with his subjects—Act IV, scene i, when Henry moves among his soldiers in disguise, is the most notable of these. The play also presents a number of mirror scenes, in which the actions of commoners either parallel or parody the actions of Henry and the nobles. Examples of mirror scenes include the commoners' participation at Harfleur in Act III, scene ii, which echoes Henry's battle speech in Act III, scene i, as well as Act II, scene i, where the commoners plan their futures, mirroring the graver councils of the French and English nobles.

War Imagery

The play uses a number of recurring metaphors for the violence of war, including images of eating and devouring, images of fire and combustion, and, oddly, the image of a tennis match. All of this imagery is rooted in aggression: in his rousing speech before the Battle of Harfleur, for example, Henry urges his men to become savage and predatory like tigers. Even the tennis balls, the silly gift from the Dauphin to Henry, play into Henry's aggressive war rhetoric. He states that the Dauphin's mocking renders the tennis balls "gunstones," or cannonballs, thus transforming them from frivolous objects of play into deadly weapons of war (I.ii.282).

Questions

What kind of a king is King Henry V? Is he a good king or merely a successful one?

The qualities that make Henry universally admired include his bravery, his eloquence, his ability to appear regal or humble depending on the demands of the situation, and his willingness to step down from his position and talk with the common soldiers, as he does the night before the Battle of Agincourt. His less admirable qualities include his insistence on disowning his responsibility for other people's deaths and his heartlessness toward his former friends.

Whichever qualities we find most striking in Henry, it is important to note that in order to be effective, it is essential that Henry appear to be good. Henry's claim to the English throne is weak, since his father was a usurper, and for Henry to appear to be a legitimate king he has to seem like he has God on his side. Thus, for instance, he makes sure that the Archbishop of

Canterbury publicly presents the arguments supporting Henry's legal claim to the French throne, even though the arguments are logically tortured, and even though the audience already knows that it cannot trust the archbishop.

Shakespeare provides us with plenty of clues that Henry is self-consciously performing the part of the good king, but he doesn't necessarily give us the sense that Henry is in fact bad. Henry V explores the idea that the qualities that make one a great king are not necessarily morally admirable ones—what makes a good king is not what makes a good person. Henry is willing to kill his former friends coldly and slaughter thousands of French people in the heat of battle to satisfy the demands of his throne; he must put his personal feelings second to the requirements of rulership and achieve the result he desires at any cost. Henry's act of placing responsibility for the war on others helps him to achieve his goals, as it burdens others with the moral pressure of stopping the war. This behavior may make Henry seem unlikable, but it also makes him a great leader and leads directly to the triumph at Agincourt in Act IV. Ultimately, the answer to the question may be that there are no good kings—just effective ones.

Henry V spends a lot of time simply giving speeches to others (to the French ambassador, before the town of Harfleur, and before Agincourt, for example). What effect do Henry's speeches have, and how are they important in the play?

King Henry speaks a great deal in this play, as he understands the power of his words to elicit action. Sometimes his speeches are meant to stir soldiers' morale, as with the speech at the Battle of Harfleur in Act III, scene i, and before the Battle of Agincourt in Act IV, scene iii. Other times they are meant to intimidate, as when he speaks to the French ambassadors in Act I, scene ii or the governor of Harfleur in Act III, scene iii. Even when he is talking to his soldiers in disguise, as in Act IV, scene i, or courting Catherine in Act V, scene ii, Henry seldom gets interrupted and is usually able to sway the mind of the person to whom he is talking. Henry's side always wins in battle or argument, partly because Henry uses his charisma as an effective tool: for Henry, the act of speech, or rhetoric, is a vital weapon of both persuasion and war.

Women are almost absent from the play, allowing male-to-male relationships to dominate. What do you think of the male bonding, or the structures of friendship and enmity between men, in the play? Which characters have these relationships and which do not? How does King Henry participate in these relationships?

Oddly enough, King Henry, the character around whom everyone else in the play revolves, spends much of his time alone—even when he is surrounded by a crowd. He is often surrounded by other people, but seldom talks to anyone alone or outside of formal war business. One exception is his interlude in disguise, in Act IV, scene i, in which he talks face-to-face with various soldiers, only to come away with a still stronger sense of the special position of a king.

In comparison to the sense of fellowship among Pistol, Nim, Bardolph, and the boy, or the friendship between Fluellen and Gower, Henry doesn't seem to have any close friends. Falstaff, once a close friend, dies rejected in Act II, scene iii, and Henry has Scrope killed in Act II, scene ii, just before Scrope can attempt to assassinate him. It even seems dubious that Henry will find companionship with his future wife: Catherine, who barely speaks English, is marrying him for political reasons. King Henry exists in the strange isolation of power, a condition he touches on in his monologue the night before the Battle of Agincourt

Coriolanus

Summary

In ancient Rome, in the aftermath of a famine, the common people, or plebeians, demand the right to set their own price for the city's grain supply. In response to their protests, the ruling aristocracy, or patricians, grant the plebeians five representatives, or tribunes--a decision that provokes the ire of the proud patrician soldier Caius Martius, who has nothing but contempt for the lower classes. At this time, war breaks out with a neighboring Italian tribe, the Volscians, who are led by Martius' great rival, Tullus Aufidius. In the campaign that follows, the Volscians are defeated, and the Rome takes the Italian city of Corioles, thanks to the heroism of Martius. In recognition of his great deeds, he is granted the name Coriolanus.

Upon his return to Rome, Coriolanus is given a hero's welcome, and the Senate offers to make him consul. In order to gain this office, however, he must go out and plead for the votes of the plebeians, a task that he undertakes reluctantly. At first, the common people agree to give him their votes, but they later reverse their decision at the prodding of two clever tribunes, Brutus and Sicinius, who consider Coriolanus an enemy of the people. This drives the proud Coriolanus into a fury, and he speaks out intemperately against the very idea of popular rule; Brutus and Sicinius, seizing on his words, declare him a traitor to the Roman state and drive him into exile.

Desiring revenge against Rome, Coriolanus goes to his Volscian enemy, Aufidius, in the city of Antium, and makes peace with him. Aufidius is planning a new campaign against the Romans, and he welcomes Coriolanus's assistance, although he soon feels himself to be falling into his new ally's shadow. Their army proceeds to march on Rome, throwing the city into a panic--Rome's armies are helpless to stop the advance, and soon Aufidius and Coriolanus are encamped outside the city walls. Two of his oldest friends come pleading for mercy, but Coriolanus refuses to hear him. However, when his mother, Volumnia, to whom he is devoted, begs him to make peace, he relents, and the Romans hail Volumnia the savior of the city. Meanwhile, Coriolanus and the Volscians return to Antium, where the residents hail Coriolanus as a hero. Aufidius, feeling slighted, declares that Coriolanus's failure to take Rome amounts to treachery; in the ensuing argument, some of Aufidius' men assassinate Coriolanus.

Analysis

One of Shakespeare's final tragedies, *Coriolanus* cannot be considered one of his greatest plays, and it has never been one of his more popular. It lacks depth, both metaphysical and psychological; though structurally sound, its characters are not multi-dimensional, and it lacks both the great poetic strength and the capacity to surprise that the best of the tragedies possess. It is, nevertheless, a solid play, united in structure and theme--the playwright is very much in command of his characters, one feels, although this sense of control may actually weaken the play: The *dramatis personae* never seem able to escape the iron structure that the plot imposes.
Perhaps Shakespeare's most overtly political play, more so even than the histories, *Coriolanus* takes as its hero a man completely lacking in political gifts--a stubborn

soldier, brought down by an overweening pride and an inability to compromise with the forces that seek his downfall. A representative of the patrician class of Rome, Coriolanus' prowess in battle would seem to make him an ideal hero for the masses; however, he utterly lacks the common touch, and his fear of popular rule allows him to be construed as an enemy of the people. Set in the immediate aftermath of Rome's transition from monarchy to republic (indeed, we are told that Coriolanus played a part in the expulsion of the last king, Tarquin), the play portrays its hero as trapped between two worlds--he is a kingly figure, born to command; yet, at the same time he finds himself inhabiting a republican political reality that--though he himself has helped to create it--he cannot endure. Thus, his fate of exile is appropriate; he truly has no place in the new political life of his city.

Analyze the character of Coriolanus.

The play's eponymous hero is a difficult man with whom to sympathize. His virtues include his military prowess (amply displayed in the play's battle scenes) and his sense of honor--but his honor easily lapses into unpleasant pigheadedness. Among his primary enemies lurk two clever schemers, Brutus and Sicinius, but, as Coriolanus is incapable of scheming himself, he is at a disadvantage from the beginning. Yet the two tribunes are hardly Edmunds or Iagos; Coriolanus' difficulties are less their fault than the fault of his own stubbornness and lack of self-control. Convinced that humility and compromise clash with his own nature, he simply cannot make the gestures necessary to win the plebeians' respect, and his inability to control his unruly tongue only facilitates his adversaries' plans to bring him down. Ultimately, his chief fault is childishness, a failing reflected in his submissiveness to his mother, Volumnia. It is her ambition and bloodlust, more than anything else, that have shaped his character.

Discuss the play's political stance.

The plot centers around a class conflict, between the political and economic elite, or patricians, and the poorer but more numerous plebeians. The recent expulsion of Rome's kings has created a power vacuum, and the two classes now fight over whether elite opinion or the popular will

should hold sway in the Roman polity. As a number of critics have pointed out, these same issues of class conflict and the question of oligarchic vs. popular rule similarly plagued Shakespeare's own time, as tensions rose between King James and the English Parliament. However, the playwright veils his own point of view on such issues with deliberate ambiguity. On the one hand, Coriolanus's expulsion seems to be a clear warning about the dangerous volatility of the popular will; the plebeians quickly bend under the tribunes' manipulation instead of considering Coriolanus' service to his country. However, while his exile seems unjust, Coriolanus remains manifestly unsuited for the consulship, in both character and temperament; his angry contempt for the plebeians seems to stem less from political principle than from self-interest and pride. Thus, the play vividly presents political issues while refraining from taking sides.

Discuss the role of women in Coriolanus.

The world of the play is a man's world; the two chief arenas in which one can gain power--politics and war--exclude women. The female characters seem confined to the domestic sphere: We see them sewing, gossiping, welcoming their heroic husbands home from war, and engaging in other appropriately female activities. However, the character of Volumnia, Coriolanus' mother, shows how a strong-willed woman can have an impact in a male-dominated society: Volumnia lives through her son, raising him to be a warrior, delighting in his victories, and, ultimately, hoping to see him reach the peak of political power, the consulship. Through it all, he remains dependant upon her, so much so that she is able, at the end of the play, to succeed where all his male friends have failed--in convincing him to forgive the Romans and spare Rome from

destruction. For this feat, she is hailed as her city's savior, while he, the great warrior, slinks off to die in Antium--an ironic reversal and a triumph for maternal and female strength.

THE SUBSTANCE OF SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

The question we are to consider in this lecture may be stated in a variety of ways. We may put it thus: What is the substance of a Shakespearean tragedy, taken in abstraction both from its form and from the differences in point of substance between one tragedy and another? Or thus: What is the nature of the tragic aspect of life as represented by Shakespeare? What is the general fact shown now in this tragedy and now in that? And we are putting the same question when we ask: What is Shakespeare's tragic conception, or conception of tragedy?

These expressions, it should be observed, do not imply that Shakespeare himself ever asked or answered such a question; that he set himself to reflect on the tragic aspects of life, that he framed a tragic conception, and still less that, like Aristotle or Corneille, he had a theory of the kind of poetry called tragedy. These things are all possible; how far any one of them is probable we need not discuss; but none of them is presupposed by the question we are going to consider. This question implies only that, as a matter of fact, Shakespeare in writing tragedy did represent a certain aspect of life in a certain way, and that through examination of his writings we ought tobe able, to some extent, to describe this aspect and way in terms addressed to the understanding. Such a description, so far as it is true and adequate, may, after these explanations, be called indifferently an account of the substance of Shakespearean tragedy, or an account of Shakespeare's conception of tragedy or view of the tragic fact.

Two further warnings may be required. In the first place, we must remember that the tragic aspect of life is only one aspect. We cannot arrive at Shakespeare's whole dramatic way of looking at the world from his tragedies alone, as we can arrive at Milton's way of regarding things, or at Wordsworth's or at Shelley's, by examining almost any one of their important works. Speaking very broadly, one may say that these poets at their best always look at things in one light; but *Hamlet* and *Henry IV* and *Cymbeline* reflect things from quite distinct positions, and Shakespeare's whole dramatic view is not to be identified with any one of these reflections. And, in the second place, I may repeat that in these lectures, at any rate for the most part, we are to be

content with his dramatic view, and are not to ask whether it corresponded exactly with his opinions or creed outside his poetry -- the opinions or creed of the being whom we sometimes oddly call 'Shakespeare the man.' It does not seem likely that outside his poetry he was a very simple-minded Catholic or Protestant or atheist, as some have maintained; but we cannot be sure, as with those other poets we can, that in his works he expressed his deepest and most cherished convictions on ultimate questions, or even that he had any. And in his dramatic conceptions there is enough to occupy us. In approaching our subject it will be best, without attempting to shorten the path by referring to famous theories of the drama, to start directly from the facts, and to collect from them gradually an idea of Shakespearean Tragedy. And first, to begin from the outside, such a tragedy brings before us a considerable number of persons (many more than the persons in a Greek play, unless the members of the Chorus are reckoned among them); but it is pre-eminently the story of one person, the 'hero,' [1] or at most of two, the 'hero' and 'heroine.' Moreover, it is only in the love tragedies, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra,* that the heroine is as much the center of the action as the hero. The rest, including *Macbeth,* are single stars. So that, having noticed the peculiarity of these two dramas, we may henceforth, for the sake of brevity, ignore it, and may speak of the tragic story as being concerned primarily with one person.

The story, next, leads up to, and includes, the death of the hero. On the one hand (whatever may be true of tragedy elsewhere), no play at the end of which the hero remains alive is, in the full Shakespearean sense, a tragedy; and we no longer class *Troilus and Cressida* or *Cymbeline* as such, as did the editors of the Folio. On the other hand, the story depicts also the troubled part of the hero's life which precedes and leads up to his death; and an instantaneous death occurring by 'accident' in the midst of prosperity would not suffice for it. It is, in fact, essentially a tale of suffering and calamity conducting to death.

The suffering and calamity are, moreover, exceptional. They befall a conspicuous person. They are themselves of some striking kind. They are also, as a rule, unexpected, and contrasted with previous happiness or glory. A tale, for example, of a man slowly worn to death by disease, poverty, little cares, sordid vices, petty persecutions, however piteous or dreadful it might be, would not be tragic in the Shakespearean sense.

Such exceptional suffering and calamity, then, affecting the hero, and -- we must now add -- generally extending far and wide beyond him, so as to make the whole scene a scene of woe, are an essential ingredient in tragedy, and a chief source of the tragic emotions, and especially of pity. But the proportions of this ingredient, and the direction taken by tragic pity, will naturally vary greatly. Pity, for example, has a much larger part in *King Lear* than in *Macbeth,* and is directed in the one case chiefly to the hero, in the other chiefly to minor characters.

Representing Ophelia: Women, Madness, and the Responsibilities of Feminist Criticism Elaine Showalter Though she is neglected in criticism, Ophelia is probably the most frequently illustrated and cited of Shakespeare's heroines. Her visibility as a subject in literature, popular culture, and painting, from Redon who paints her drowning, to Bob Dylan, who places her on Desolation Row, to Cannon Mills, which has named a flowery sheet pattern after her, is in inverse relation to her invisibility in Shakespearean critical texts. Why has she been such a potent and obsessive figure in our cultural mythology? Insofar as Hamlet names Ophelia as "woman" and "frailty," substituting an ideological view of femininity for a personal one, is she indeed representative of Woman, and does her madness stand for the oppression of women in society as well as in tragedy? Furthermore, since Laertes calls Ophelia a "document in madness," does she represent the textual archetype of woman as madness or madness as woman? And finally, how should feminist criticism represent Ophelia in its own discourse? What is our responsibility towards her as character and as woman? Feminist critics have offered a variety of responses to these questions. Some have maintained that we should represent Ophelia as a lawyer represents a client, that we should become her Horatio, in this harsh world reporting her and her cause aright to the unsatisfied. Carol Neely, for example, describes advocacy--speaking for Ophelia--as our proper role: "As a feminist critic," she writes, "I must 'tell' Ophelia's story."But what can we mean by Ophelia's story? The story of her life? The story of her betrayal at the hands of her father, brother, lover, court, society? The story of her rejection and marginalisation by male critics of Shakespeare? Shakespeare gives us very little information from which to imagine a past for Ophelia. She appears in only five of the play's twenty scenes; the pre-play course of her love story with Hamlet is known only by a few ambiguous flashbacks. Her tragedy is subordinated in the play; unlike Hamlet, she does not struggle with moral choices or alternatives. Thus another feminist critic, Lee Dewards, concludes that it is impossible to reconstruct Ophelia's biography

from the text: “We can imagine Hamlet’s story without Ophelia, but Ophelia literally has no story without Hamlet.” If we turn from American to French feminist theory, Ophelia might confirm the impossibility of representing the feminine in patriarchal discourse as other than madness, incoherence, fluidity, or silence. In French theoretical patriarchal language and symbolism, it remains on the side of negativity, absence, and lack. In comparison to Hamlet, Ophelia is certainly a creature of lack. “I think nothing, my lord,” she tells him in the Mousetrap scene, and he cruelly twists her words: Hamlet: That’s a fair thought to lie between maids’ legs. Ophelia: What is, my lord? Hamlet: Nothing. (III. ii. 117-19) In Elizabethan slang, “nothing” was a term for the female genitalia, as in Much Ado About Nothing. To Hamlet, then, “nothing” is what lies between maids’ legs, for, in the male visual system of representation and desire, women’s sexual organs, in the words of the French psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray, “represent the horror of having nothing to see.” When Ophelia is mad, Gertrude says that “Her speech is nothing,” mere “unshaped use.” Ophelia’s speech thus represents the horror of having nothing to say in the public terms defined by the court. Deprived of thought, sexuality, language, Ophelia’s story becomes the Story of O--the zero, the empty circle or mystery of feminine difference, the cipher of female sexuality tobe deciphered by feminist interpretation. A third approach would be to read Ophelia’s story as the female subtext of the tragedy, the repressed story of Hamlet. In this reading, Ophelia represents the strong emotions that the Elizabethans as well as the Freudians thought womanish and unmanly. When Laertes weeps for his dead sister he says of his tears that “ When these are gone,/ The woman will be out”--that is to say, that the feminine and shameful part of his nature will be purged. According to David Leverenz, in an important essay called “The Woman in Hamlet.” Hamlet’s disgust at the feminine passivity in himself is translated into violent revulsion against women, and into his brutal behaviour towards Ophelia. Ophelia’s suicide, Leverenz argues, then becomes “a microcosm of the male world’s banishment of the female, because ‘woman’ represents everything denied by reasonable men.” To liberate Ophelia from the text, or to make her its tragic center, is to re-appropriate her for our own ends; to dissolve her into a female symbolism of absence is to endorse our own marginality; to make her Hamlet’s anima is to reduce her to a metaphor of male experience. I would like to propose instead that Ophelia does have a story of her own that feminist criticism can tell; it is neither her life story, nor her love story, nor Lacan’s story, but rather the history of her representation. This essay tries to bring together some of the categories of French feminist thought about the

"feminine" with the empirical energies of American historical and critical research; to yoke French theory and Yankee knowhow. Tracing the iconography of Ophelia in English and French painting, photography, psychiatry, and literature, as well as in theatrical production, I will be showing first of all the representational bonds between female insanity and female sexuality. Secondly, I want to demonstrate the two-way transaction between psychiatric theory and cultural representation. As one medical historian has observed, we could provide a manual of female insanity by chronicling the illustrations of Ophelia; this is so because the illustrations of Ophelia have played a major role in the theoretical construction of female insanity. Finally, I want to suggest that the feminist revision of Ophelia comes as much from the actress's freedom as from the critic's interpretation. When Shakespeare's heroines began to be played by women instead of boys, the presence of the female body and female voice, quite apart from details of interpretation, created new meanings and subversive tensions in these roles, and perhaps most importantly with Ophelia. Looking at Ophelia's history on and off the stage, I will point out the contest between male and female representations of Ophelia, cycles of critical repression and feminist reclamation of which contemporary feminist criticism is only the most recent phase. By beginning with these data from cultural history, instead of moving from the grid of literary theory, I hope to conclude with a fuller sense of the responsibilities of feminist criticism, as well as a new perspective on Ophelia. "Of all the characters in Hamlet," Bridget Lyons has pointed out, "Ophelia is most persistently presented in terms of symbolic meanings." Her behaviour, her appearance, her gestures, her costume, her props, are freighted with emblematic significance, and for many generations of Shakespearean critics her part in the play has seemed to be primarily iconographic. Ophelia's symbolic meanings, moreover, are specifically feminine. Whereas for Hamlet madness is metaphysical, linked with culture, for Ophelia it is a product of the female body and female nature, perhaps that nature's purest form. On the Elizabethan stage, the conventions of female insanity were sharply defined. Ophelia dresses in white, decks herself with "fantastical garlands" of wild flowers and enters, according to the stage directions of the "Bad" Quarto, "distracted" playing on a lute with her "hair down singing." Her speeches are marked by extravagant metaphors, lyrical free associations, and "explosive sexual imagery." She sings wistful and bawdy ballads, and ends her life by drowning.

All of these conventions carry specific messages about femininity and sexuality. Ophelia's virginal and vacant white is contrasted with Hamlet's scholar's garb, his "suits of solemn black." Her flowers suggest the discordant double images of female sexuality as both innocent blossoming and whorish contamination; she is the "green girl" of pastoral, the virginal "Rose of May" and the sexually explicit madwoman who, in giving away her wild flowers and herbs, is symbolically deflowering herself. The "weedy trophies" and phallic "long purples" which she wears to her death intimate an improper and discordant sexuality that Gertrude's lovely elegy cannot quite obscure. In Elizabethan and Jacobean drama, the stage direction that a woman enters with disheveled hair indicates that she might either be mad or the victim of a rape; the disordered hair, her offence against decorum, suggests sensuality in each case. The mad Ophelia's bawdy songs and verbal licence, while they give her access to "an entirely different range of experience" from what she is allowed as the dutiful daughter seem to be her one sanctioned form of self-assertion as a woman, quickly followed, as if in retribution, by her death. Drowning too was associated with the feminine, with female fluidity as opposed to masculine aridity. In his discussion of the " Ophelia complex," the phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard traces the symbolic connections between women, water, and death. Drowning, he suggests, becomes the truly feminine death in the dramas of literature and life, one which is a beautiful immersion and submersion in the female element. Water is the profound and organic symbol of the liquid woman whose eyes are so easily drowned in tears, as her body is the repository of blood, amniotic fluid, and milk. A man contemplating this feminine suicide understands it by reaching for what is feminine in himself, like Laertes, by a temporary surrender to his own fluidity--that is, his tears; and he becomes a man again in becoming once more dry--when his tears are stopped. Clinically speaking, Ophelia's behaviour and appearance are characteristic of the malady the Elizabethans would have diagnosed as female love-melancholy, or erotomania. From about 1580, melancholy had become a fashionable disease among young men, especially in London, and Hamlet himself is a prototype of the melancholy hero. Yet the epidemic of

melancholy associated with intellectual and imaginative genius "curiously bypassed women." Women's melancholy was seen instead as biological and emotional in origins. On the stage, Ophelia's madness was presented as the predictable outcome of erotomania. From 1660, when women first appeared on the public stage, to the beginnings of the eighteenth century, the most celebrated of the actresses who played Ophelia were those whom rumour credited with disappointments in love. The greatest triumph was reserved for Susan Mountfort, a former actress at Lincoln's Inn Fields who had gone mad after her lover's betrayal. One night in 1720 she escaped from her keeper, rushed to the theatre, and just as the Ophelia of the evening was to enter for her mad scene, "sprang forward in her place…with wild eyes and wavering motion." As a contemporary reported, "she was in truth Ophelia herself, to the amazement of the performers as well as of the audience--nature having made this last effort, her vital powers failed her and she died soon after." These theatrical legends reinforced the belief of the age that female madness was a part of female nature, less to be intimidated by an actress than demonstrated by a deranged woman in a performance of her emotions. The subversive or violent possibilities of the mad scene were nearly eliminated, however, on the eighteenth-century stage. Late Augustan stereotypes of female love-melancholy were sentimentalized versions which minimized the force of female sexuality, and made female insanity a pretty stimulant to male sensibility. Actresses such as Mrs. Lessingham in 1772, and Mary Bolton in 1811, played Ophelia in this decorous style, relying on the familiar images of the white dress, loose hair, and wild flowers to convey a polite feminine distraction, highly suitable for pictorial reproduction, and appropriate for Samuel

Johnson's description of Ophelia as young, beautiful, harmless, and pious. Even Mrs Sidons in 1785 played the mad scene with stately and classical dignity. For much of the period, in fact, Augustan objections to the levity and indecency of Ophelia's language and behaviour led to censorship of the part. Her lines were frequently cut, and the role was often assigned to a singer instead of an actress, making the mode of representation musical rather than visual or verbal. But whereas the Augustan response to madness was a denial, the romantic response was an embrace. The figure of the madwoman permeates romantic literature, from the gothic novelists to Wordsworth and Scott in such texts as "The Thorn" and The Heart of Midlothian, where she stands for sexual victimization, bereavement, and thrilling emotional extremity. Romantic artists such as Thomas Barker and George Shepheard painted pathetically abandoned Crazy Kates and

Crazy Anns, while Henry Fuseli's "Mad Kate" is almost demonically possessed, an orphan of the romantic storm. In the Shakespearean theatre, Ophelia's romantic revival began in France rather than England. When Charles Kemble made his Paris debut as Hamlet with an English troupe in 1827, his Ophelia was a young Irish ingénue named Harriet Smithson. Smithson used "her extensive command of mime to depict in precise gesture the state of Ophelia's confused mind." In the mad scene, she entered in a long black veil, suggesting the standard imagery of female sexual mystery in the gothic novel, with scattered bedlamish wisps of straw in her hair. Spreading the veil on the ground as she sang, she spread flowers upon it in the shape of a cross, as if to make her father's grave, and mimed a burial, a piece of stage business which remained in vogue for the rest of the century. The French audiences were stunned. Dumas recalled that "it was the first time I saw in the theatre real passions, giving life to men and women of flesh and blood". The twenty-three-year-old Hector Berlioz, who was in the audience on the first night, fell madly in love, and eventually married Harriet Smithson despite his family's frantic opposition. Her image as the mad Ophelia was represented in popular lithographs and exhibited in bookshop and printshop windows. Her costume was imitated by the fashionable, and a coiffure "à la folle," consisting of a "black veil with wisps of straw tastefully interwoven" in the hair, was widely copied by the Parisian beau monde, always on the lookout for something new. Although Smithson never acted Ophelia on the English stage, her intensely visual performance quickly influenced English productions as well; and indeed the romantic Ophelia--a young girl passionately and visibly driven to picturesque madness--became the dominant international acting style for the next 150 years, from Helena Modjeska in Poland in 1871, to the eighteen-year-old Jean Simmons in the Laurence Olivier film of 1948. Whereas the romantic Hamlet, in Coleridge's famous dictum, thinks too much, has an "overbalance of the contemplative faculty" and an overactive intellect, the romantic Ophelia is a girl who feels too much, who drowns in feeling. The romantic critics seem to have felt that the less said about Ophelia the better; the point was to look at her. Hazlitt, for one, is speechless before her, calling her "a character almost too exquisitely touching to be dwelt upon." While the Augustans represent Ophelia as music, the romantics transform her into an objet d'art, as if to take literally Claudius's lament, "poor Ophelia/ Divided from herself and her fair judgment,/ Without the which we are pictures." Smithson's performance is best recaptured in a series of pictures done by Delacroix from 1830 to 1850, which show a strong romantic interest in the relation of female sexuality and insanity. The

most innovative and influential of Delacroix's lithographs is La Mort d'Ophèlie of 1843; the first of three studies. Its sensual languor, with Ophelia half-suspended in the stream as her dress slips from her body, anticipated the fascination with the erotic trance of the hysteric as it would be studied by Jean-Martin

Charcot and his students, including Janet and Freud. Delacroix's interest in the drowning Ophelia is also reproduced to the point of obsession in later nineteenth-century painting. The English Pre-Raphaelites painted her again and again, choosing the drowning which is only described in the play, and where no actress's image had preceded them or interfered with their imaginative supremacy. In the Royal Academy show of 1852, Arthur Hughes's entry shows a tiny waif-like creature--a sort of Tinker Bell Ophelia--in a filmy white gown, perched on a tree trunk by the stream. The overall effect is softened, sexless, and hazy, although the straw in her hair resembles a crown of thorns. Hughes's juxtaposition of childlike femininity and Christian martyrdom was overpowered, however, by John Everett Millais's great painting of Ophelia in the same show. While Millais's Ophelia is sensuous siren as well as victim, the artist rather than the subject dominates the scene. The division of space between Ophelia and the natural details Millais had so painstakingly pursued reduces her to one more visual object; and the painting had such a hard surface, strangely flattened perspective, and brilliant light that it seems cruelly indifferent to the woman's death.