



# **Manonmaniam Sundaranar University**

*DIRECTORATE OF DISTANCE AND CONTINUING EDUCATION*

*TIRUNELVELI - 627 012, TAMILNADU*

***B.A ENGLISH (FIFTH SEMESTER)***

## **Shakespeare**

*(From the Academic Year 2021 onwards)*

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**SHAKESPEARE**  
**SEMESTER V**

**UNIT I: GENERAL SHAKESPEARE AND POPULAR SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICS**

Importance of Opening Scenes, Supernatural Elements and Fools and Clowns.

A.C. Bradley: “The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy” from *Shakespearean Tragedy*

Tiffany Stern: “The Theatre of Shakespeare’s London”

**UNIT II: SONNETS**

Sonnets: 18, 65, 116 & 121

**UNIT III: COMEDY OR DARK COMEDY**

A Midsummer Night’s Dream

Much Ado About Nothing

**UNIT IV: TRAGEDY**

King Lear

**UNIT V: HISTORICAL**

Antony and Cleopatra

**PRESCRIBED TEXTS:**

A.C. Bradley. “The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy”. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. London: Penguin, 1991.

Tiffany Stern. “The Theatre of Shakespeare’s London.” *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*. Ed. Margreta de Grazia. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010.

William Shakespeare. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Fingerprint Publishing, 2019.

William Shakespeare. *Much Ado About Nothing*. New York: Penguin Books, 2017.

William Shakespeare. *King Lear*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.

William Shakespeare. *Antony and Cleopatra*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.

## **UNIT I: GENERAL SHAKESPEARE AND POPULAR SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICS**

### **About the Author:**

Born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, William Shakespeare was a well-known English poet, playwright, and actor. Shakespeare's birthday is most frequently observed on April 23. He died in 1616. Shakespeare wrote a lot during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, which are also referred to as the Early Modern Period or the English Renaissance. Shakespeare authored more than just plays; these are arguably his most famous works. Shakespeare's poetry is still widely read today.

There are still records on William Shakespeare's family that provide insight into the circumstances of both Shakespeare's early life and his family members' lives. Following his marriage to Mary Arden, John Shakespeare had eight children. William was the eldest child of John and Mary, who lost two daughters when they were still babies. John Shakespeare was a glove maker by trade, but he also held civic office and rose to prominence in Stratford. Given his higher social standing, he was even more likely to have sent William and the other members of his family to the neighbourhood grammar school.

Until the age of eighteen, William Shakespeare would have resided in his family's Henley Street home. Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, a twenty-six-year-old, when he was eighteen. Because Anne was pregnant at the time of the wedding, it was a hurried marriage. They had three kids together. Six months after the wedding, their first daughter Susanna was born, and the twins Hamnet and Judith came next. Hamnet passed away at the age of eleven.

Shakespeare travelled to London, but when did he arrive? His career took off there. Shakespeare's twins' baptism in 1585 and his rise to prominence in London by 1592 are known facts, but what happened in between is a mystery. These years are typically referred to by academics as 'The Lost Years.' Shakespeare's first printed works were released when he was living in London. 'Venus and Adonis' (1593) and 'The Rape of Lucrece' (1594) were two lengthy poems. In addition, he started the theatre group The Lord Chamberlain's Men. Shakespeare wrote two plays a year on average for the company's dramatists for nearly twenty years. He spent the remainder of his career with the company, which under King James I's patronage changed its name to The King's Men (from 1603). Shakespeare composed many of his most well-known

tragedies, like Macbeth and King Lear, as well as beloved romances, such The Tempest and The Winter's Tale, while he was employed by the company.

Shakespeare wrote 38 plays, 2 narrative poems, 154 sonnets, and a wide range of other writings in total. Shakespeare's plays have no known original manuscripts that have been discovered to date. In fact, we only have around half of the plays at all because of a group of performers from Shakespeare's company. Following Shakespeare's death, they gathered them for publication, protecting the plays. The First Folio, so named because of the size of the paper used, is a collection of these writings.

Thirty-six of his plays were included, but none of his poems. His influence is as vast and varied as his body of work; his plays have inspired innumerable translations into other genres and cultural contexts. His plays continue to be performed on stage and in movies. Shakespeare's plays, sonnets, and other pieces have all been collected into various editions of The Complete Works of William Shakespeare. One of the most significant writers in English literature is still William Shakespeare. Shakespeare became extremely wealthy as a result of his performances in London's theatres, and by 1597 he had acquired New Place, the biggest home in the Stratford-upon-Avon town.

Despite spending his working life in London, he remained quite connected to his hometown. Recent archaeological findings at Shakespeare's New Place demonstrate that Shakespeare was never more than a sporadic guest in London. This implies that he commuted for two or three days between Stratford and London. Contrary to what has been previously believed by scholars, Shakespeare may have spent more time in Stratford-upon-Avon in his later years.

William Shakespeare inherited the old family property on Henley Street, which was later rented out to tenants, at the death of his father in 1601. Afterwards, Stratford saw other real estate purchases, such as the acquisition of 107 acres in 1602. At the age of fifty-two, Shakespeare passed away in Stratford-upon-Avon on April 23, 1616. He is interred at Holy Trinity Parish Church's sanctuary.

## IMPORTANCE OF OPENING SCENES IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Any play must begin at the appropriate moment and in the appropriate manner to grab the audience's attention immediately. However, there are other reasons why this is crucial. Shakespeare sets the setting in most of his introductory speeches. They hold the germs of what will transpire in the play's later scenes. They accomplish this in a way that piques the interest and attention of the audience.

Shakespeare employs a variety of strategies to improve the impact of his play openings. The play begins in the midst of an event that has just occurred or is going to occur. A minor character would frequently speak at the beginning of the play to explain the scenario or what has happened to the audience. These characters frequently allude to a prominent character, even though the primary figure typically makes an appearance a bit later. The drama opens with the establishment of a certain tone or atmosphere.

Shakespeare uses the opening scene of his plays to entice you in while making you aware of his primary issues, just as a good novel or movie does with its opening paragraph or opening shot. Very few plays have major characters that make an appearance in the opening scene. Shakespeare does this on purpose to draw the audience's attention away from their true selves and towards what they say and do. They won't be as distracted by these characters from the main points.

Shakespeare may utilise this opening scene to give some important background information in plays with obscure stories. For instance, we learn about the rivalry between the two families at the start of *Romeo and Juliet*; we learn about the Duke's upcoming marriage at the start of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; we learn about a significant agreement the men have made with one another in *Love Labour's Lost*; and so on.

Shakespeare frequently introduces themes in the play's opening scenes that he will return to later on. It takes place here in the first scene between the supporting cast; later on, we can witness a different rendition involving the main players. Consider *Romeo and Juliet*'s opening scene, in which the Montague and Capulet servants choose fights. *Romeo and Tybalt* will eventually experience the same thing. Shakespeare generally takes his time presenting the major themes and conflicts.

On the one hand, the characters might just allude to them; consider Hamlet's first scene, in which the audience is introduced to a ghost who remains silent despite the watchmen's clear distress at something 'rotten in Denmark.' Alternatively, the characters could directly address the issue, as in *Julius Caesar* or *Antony and Cleopatra*, where the opening characters discuss the general perception of Caesar or Antony and the obstacles these great men must overcome.

Long opening scenes with two or more parts require special consideration. They 'shift' or experience an 'interruption' to something other. Shakespeare, for instance, frequently has the audience 'overhear' two characters converse extensively about the play's titular character in order to prepare them for some of the difficulties they encounter. A few minutes later, the persona takes the stage, giving the audience a better opportunity to assess them.

Shakespeare, however, occasionally combines two acts that don't appear to go together into one, like in Romeo and Juliet's protracted opening scene. Romeo's bitter dispute with Benvolio turns into a conversation about his melancholic side, and we get to see and hear him explain his frustrated love for Rosaline. The audience is able to detect both the developing love story between Romeo and Juliet and the contradictory elements of familial violence in this scene. Romeo's quiet romantic life first appears to be very different from the exploding violence of the rivalry; but, by the play's conclusion, Romeo will have murdered two men. Maybe, after all, hate and love are not that dissimilar after all.

## **SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS**

These days, it's hard for people to believe in ghosts, witches, or other paranormal entities. They found it incomprehensible that individuals in the Elizabethan era could take these matters so seriously. People's extreme fear of supernatural entities is most likely a result of their limited physical understanding of the world they were living in. Shakespeare's plays contain a lot of supernatural themes. We couldn't discern the plays' underlying meanings and ramifications if we didn't examine the causes and motives behind them.

Shakespeare's plays are universally regarded as the best in all of literary history, not only for their exquisite language, intricate plots, and contemporary relevance of their universal themes, but also for the astounding literary techniques and enigmatic aspects they employ.

Shakespeare's plays frequently feature supernatural elements, whether they are in his romantic comedies like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1596), tragedies like *Hamlet* (1601), *Othello* (1606), *Macbeth* (1606), *Romeo and Juliet* (1607), or his later romances like *The Tempest* (1611). These plays all have elements of the paranormal. Shakespeare's plays have a wide variety of supernatural creatures within their cast of characters. These entities are typically classified into three main categories: spirits, ghosts, and gods.

Shakespeare's plays cannot be understood without taking into account the historical context of his day. Throughout the latter part of the fourteenth century, England's textile industry expanded to the point where it rivalled and then eclipsed all other areas of trade and industry. The majority of the county's export trade underwent a radical change in nature throughout the 15th century due to the explosive expansion of English textile industry. There were more traders going overseas. However, the overland route was cut off when the Turks took Constantinople in the eastern Mediterranean. Discovering a maritime path to the East emerged as a crucial objective. As a result, the English had a great chance to learn about other European and Asian nations' cultures and beliefs because to their commercial ties. Even if the economy was growing quickly, there were still certain enigmatic phenomena that science was unable to explain at the time. As a result, people used their vivid imaginations to give explanations for these strange occurrences.

In the seventeenth century, religion played a major role in the daily lives of the people in England. There are other religious groups in addition to Catholics and Anglicans. Even though the economy was growing daily during the Elizabethan age, the majority of peasants continued to live in abject poverty. They had to labour hard for the landlords; they were without a place to dwell due to the Enclosure Movement; food was in short supply, and many of them perished from starvation. They sought solace from an enigmatic force under such dire conditions. They held the view that after passing away, people would have another life.

The supernatural themes of Shakespeare's plays can also be explained by certain literary traditions of the times. First of all, Greek and Roman mythology as well as ancient Greek dramas had a significant influence on Shakespeare's plays at the time. Superpowers are possessed by the majority of these stories' gods, goddesses, and heroes. It is not difficult to identify some of the influences that Shakespeare drew upon for his plays. Another inspirational text is the Bible,

which forms the basis of most of western society. Shakespeare's plays can also be better understood by looking at early English dramas. A new genre of play called 'supernatural plays' first emerged in the 12th century, presenting several supernatural phenomena as evidence of God's omnipotence.

Finally, the use of various supernatural themes in the plays is influenced by Shakespeare's viewpoint and religious beliefs. Shakespeare was taught about religion when he was a young child. When Sunday arrived, Stratford-upon-Avon's stores, markets, and bars were all closed. People attended the church service. The consequences for breaking the rules would be dire for anyone. Shakespeare's father may have been a puritan, but the Shakespeare family was Anglican. It is likely that his mother was a Catholic because his maternal grandfather's family practiced Catholicism. Whether or if his parents are devout religious adherents is not supported by enough data. Shakespeare's personal religious convictions are the subject of several proverbs. Shakespeare was Anglican at the time of his baptism (maybe this indicates that he was baptised using an Anglican liturgy). However, some academics argue that Shakespeare followed the Anglican service. This is most likely due to the fact that the municipal government, which has traditionally viewed theatrics with some antagonism, would have become aware of him if he hadn't. According to some academics, he was a Catholic. He was undoubtedly very religious, regardless of the specific religions he practiced.

The author of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, an early romantic comedy, transports readers to a magical and enchanted country filled with lovely scenery, joyful fairies, and spirits on a summer night. The narrative of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* centres on two Athen couples: Helena and Demetrius and Hermia and Lysander. Lysander and Demetrius first developed feelings for the same girl, Hermia. Demetrius turned down Helena's advances for courtship despite her deep love for him. In a show of compassion, Oberon, the king of the fairies, gave Puck, one of his fairies, instructions to put love potion on Demetrius's eyelids so he would fall in love with the next person he saw. But it was Puck's improper use of enchantment that caused Lysander and Demetrius to fall in love with Helena. Following a sequence of odd and comical events, the spell was undone and everything was restored. The playwright's faith in human morality and love is reflected in its supernatural aspects. Puck, the tiny spirit, is a central character in this play. He uses his magical abilities to alter the relationships of three couples in

love. The play occasionally causes a considerable deal of surprise, perplexity, and amusement among the audience. The storyline is full of situational comedy and frequently takes unexpected twists due to the mischievous spirit and their magical abilities. Shakespeare creates a strange universe in this play by using magic to represent the mystical power of love. The otherworldly figures, in contrast to his later tragedies, are good characters who made an effort to aid humans. Rather of wanting to hurt someone, they are interfering with their romantic relationship with kindness. The supernatural characters are also more sympathetic. The emotions of the fairies are very similar to those of humans. The arguments between fairy queen Titania and fairy king Oberon resemble those between human spouses in certain ways.

**Oberon:** Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.

**Titania:** What! Jealous Oberon. Fairies, skip hence: I have forsworn his bed and company.

**Oberon:** Tarry, rash wanton! Am not I thy lord?

**Titania:** Then, I must be thy lady; but I know....

**Oberon:** How canst thou thus for shame, Titania,  
Glance at my credit with Hippolyta? (Act 2, Scene 1)

Shakespeare's optimism about the universe and human nature is likely demonstrated by the play's resolution of tension despite a number of trials and tribulations. The play's protagonist, Puck, is portrayed as incredibly beautiful but also a little wicked. He is regarded as one of the most beloved characters in Shakespeare's plays and makes the audience laugh a lot. There is no longer any joy and laughter in his second writing phase, which is the period of great tragedies, in contrast to his first playwriting period. The prince's retaliation follows the ghost's entrance in Hamlet. In *Macbeth*, the king is killed as a result of the three witches' prophecy. Hamlet is used as an example here.

Among Shakespeare's characters, The Ghost from *Hamlet* is arguably the most intriguing and mysterious. The Ghost made three appearances in *Hamlet*. It originally appeared in front of Hamlet's close friend Horatio, who informed Hamlet of its presence, as well as two soldiers, Bernardo and Marcellus. Hamlet learned the truth about his father's passing and that the Ghost was, in fact, his father through their conversations. It came out that Claudius, Hamlet's uncle, had poisoned his father, wed his mother, and assumed the throne. In Gertrude's closet, the Ghost

made its third visit. He chastised Hamlet for not exacting his vengeance. Scholars in this play interpret the Ghost in a variety of ways. While the first two appearances of the Ghost were independently verified, some scholars believe that Hamlet's third appearance was just a hallucination. When Hamlet confronted his mother in Act 3, Scene 4, he encountered his father's ghost in the queen's closet, urging him to talk to his mother. As alleged by Hamlet, Gertrude, the queen, was unable to see or hear the Ghost.

**Queen:** To whom did you speak this?

**Hamlet:** Do you see nothing there?

**Queen:** Nothing at all, yet all that is I see.

**Hamlet:** Nor did you nothing I hear?

**Queen:** No, nothing but ourselves.

**Hamlet:** Why, you look there! Look how it steals away!

My father in his habit as he lived...

**Queen:** This is the very coinage of your brain!

This bodiless creation ecstasy is very cunning in. (Act 3, Scene 4)

It is impossible to categorise the Ghost in the drama as either good or evil. When Hamlet first learned of the Ghost's presence, he had serious concerns about his sincerity and his motivations.

My father's spiritual arms! All is not well;

I doubt some foul play; Would the night were come!

Till then sit still, my soul: foul deeds with rise,

Though all the earth o'erwhelm them, to men's eyes (Act 1, Scene 2)

The appearance of the Ghost and what he pushed Hamlet to do partly drove Hamlet mad or as some scholars explained, the Ghost is nothing but a hallucination of Hamlet. The Ghost also foreshadowed Claudio's death and Hamlet's madness. He told Hamlet that Claudius killed him by putting poison into his ears and urged him to take revenge and kill Claudius who was indeed killed by his own nephew. What's more, in his conversation with Hamlet, he warned Hamlet of the possible madness "But howsoever thou pursue this act, Taint not thy mind or let thy soul against thy mother aught" (Act 1, Scene 5). The existence of the Ghost has added a tune of sadness and sorrow in the play.

In *The Tempest*, the supernatural aspects have taken centre stage, whereas in the previous two periods they functioned as a unifying theme to weave the drama together. Unlike all of his past plays, the play is unique. With its magical ambiance and abundance of supernatural beings (including Ariel, who looks like Puck), it is similar to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. However, its theme is far more sombre than that of the previous play, where all that is there is 'cross purpose in love.' The drama revolves around the idealised character of Prospero, who was a duke who turned philosopher and magician. It also has Gonzalo's utopian dreams, and throughout it all is the use of magic by Prospero up until the point where he breaks the wand and dismisses Ariel. Not only is there a mishmash of gods and goddesses, all made possible by magic, but there is also a mixture of the sad and the funny, the ridiculous and the very serious (the murder plot), especially in the sequences involving Stephano and Trinculo.

The supernatural ability in *The Tempest* was held by a human. Prospero, the Duke of Milan, the main character, was preoccupied with magic and disregarded everyday tasks. Twelve years later, after his brother tried to kill him, he fled to an island and sought retribution. On the island where he was living, he summoned a powerful storm that led to the ship carrying his brother capsizing. He then divided his fellowman, Antonio, and his brother into various groups, cutting them apart from their families. His deception caused the issue to spiral out of control. His opponents endured the same sufferings and afflictions as he did.

Prospero requests that his spirit servant Ariel lead his groups to him. His forgiveness was the final straw that broke the tension. The human character in *The Tempest* took charge of everything, in contrast to the human characters in *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who must leave their fate in the hands of ghosts and fairies. Prospero used magic to control both human and non-human characters throughout the play. Act 1, Scene 2 shows that despite being a spirit with numerous supernatural skills, Ariel was nothing more than a slave who had to do what Prospero required him to do.

**Prospero:** Dull thing, I say so!

When I arrived and hear thee, that made gape

The pine and let thee out.

**Ariel:** I thank thee, master.

**Prospero:** If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak

And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till  
Thou hast howled away twelve winers.

**Ariel:** Pardon, master,  
I will be correspondent to command,  
And do my spriting gently. (Act 1, Scene 2)

At the close of his career, Shakespeare wrote this play. It's possible that his thoughts about paranormal forces and supernatural beings have evolved along with his worldview. The supernatural is something untouchable, scary, and beyond human comprehension throughout the time Shakespeare penned his tragedies, as demonstrated by Hamlet's well-known soliloquy in which he muses over what happens to a dead person. Shakespeare demonstrated in *The Tempest* that humans are capable of gaining superpowers and applying them to their own purposes. Shakespeare's faith in human potential is amply demonstrated in this play.

Shakespeare's plays are always well-received, whether they are performed today or in the past due to their widespread appeal. The Elizabethan theatre uses an intriguing and straightforward staging technique. The audience swarmed the stage from the front and two sides when the performers were performing; the stages were in the middle of the crowd. As a result, the actors and the audience were quite near. Five or six feet was the height of the stage. The performers portraying the ghost or spirits would appear and vanish through a door that could be opened in the stage floor. The door might also double as a grave when it was open. The play was performed in that manner at the time, even though it may appear too basic for an audience in the present day to accept. There are many terrifying things in *The Tempest*, including a number of terrifying spirits that swoop down from the sailors, rise up, and cross the air.

Additionally, the entire house is enveloped in darkness as fireballs rain down on them as the ship sinks. Along with lightning and multiple thunderclaps, the storm is coming to an end. The storm would also prove to be an alluring test of the scenic artist's prowess for later producers of *The Tempest*. It must have been a fantastic presentation given the allure of the music, song, and location, but it lacks the ambiguity and intrigue of the original play. As the twenty-first century progresses, technology advances have led to the application of increasingly sophisticated costumes and equipment on stage, making it feasible to do feats that would have seemed

unattainable during the Elizabethan era. Concerns regarding the phenomenon of 'flying witches' are no longer warranted. More visual enjoyment is available to the audience than before.

It is quite difficult for us, as modern humans, to believe in ghosts or witches in Shakespeare's plays. That does not negate people's propensity to believe it, though. When human beings are in danger, they tend to resort to some kind of supernatural power for help. Even if a person is not a religious believer, he or she when encountering difficulty, would say, 'God, please help me!' or similar appealing to the divine power. So being superstitious is reckoned to be a natural tendency for human beings. When people are traumatized, they tend to comfort themselves by saying 'It is fate!' If people don't believe in the supernatural power, there wouldn't be so many expressions related to 'bad luck' in almost all languages. If people don't believe in the supernatural power, astrology wouldn't be in nowadays the most popular branch of science. Many people believe certain future events must occur regardless of our present actions or choices...for fate indifferently assigns each person to the predetermined course of events.

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* seem to imply fatalism. A sequence of unintentional circumstances still serves as the direct cause of this love tragedy, even though the conflict between the families is its primary cause. Fate, as a type of supernatural force, is a major character in the drama. Things would be completely different if Romeo arrived half an hour late, Juliet woke up thirty minutes earlier, or the man carrying the letter didn't get delayed. People were overcome with pity for the tragic fate of these two young lovers after reading or viewing the play.

In the play, prescience also has a significant role. It is the sensation of knowing what is ahead. Romeo's dream foreshadows what he would actually witness later on - that of Juliet, dead in her grave. The prologue sonnet, which narrates the story of the 'star-crossed lovers,' is the play's start. A lot of the play foreshadows or looks ahead to future events.

The prologue

From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventur'd piteous overshadows  
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.

There is one thing about Mercutio's curse: Mercutio says "A plague on both your houses". This 'plague' is foreshadowed in the scene where Friar John was prevented from delivering the letter to Romeo because he ended up quarantined in a plague house. He did foreshadow events. And those events fall into the category of fate, hinted at the initial line, "a pair of star-crossed lovers..." indeed; Romeo and Juliet are destined for a certain fate, because they are 'star-crossed'. But no one can predict anything, except Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is hardly the only well-known author who believes in supernatural forces. Emerson is a transcendentalist who sees nature as a symbol of God's spirit; Hardy is a fatalist. They still have a sizable fan base, and their writings are still worth studying. It's highly mysterious whether or not people believe in the supernatural. In addition, it's important to address the topic of why people should believe in God if they reject ghosts.

In summary, humans will always be drawn to philosophical ideas that science hasn't yet been able to explain. This is one of the reasons Shakespeare's plays with supernatural aspects continue to captivate audiences and have relevance for contemporary audiences.

When considering the literary heritage of Britain, William Shakespeare stands alone among English writers for his ability to deftly blend the paranormal with the historical. His plays are a product of the historical legacy of Greek and Roman tragedies as well as the cultural and intellectual mingling of various European nations. His plays' allusions to ghosts, fairies, and fatalism drive the plot to a climax gradually, with each new development surprising both readers and viewers.

His plays' supernatural themes have generated a tremendous deal of controversy and centuries of debate among literary scholars. Whether or not modern man accepts these supernatural components, Shakespeare's plays continue to draw sizable crowds to theatres. They could have been boring and tedious without the witches, ghosts, apparitions, and visions. Even today's readers require some incentive to read, and these antiquated ghost superstitions significantly improve the play.

## FOOLS AND CLOWNS IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Although the term 'fool' is used relatively loosely these days, Shakespeare's plays utilise it as a technical term. In Elizabethan drama, the fool is a person hired to provide entertainment for a king, duke, or other wealthy individual who requires company. In Elizabethan drama, it is customary for the fool to be the play's most perceptive and knowledgeable character. He should not be mistaken with a clown; in Shakespeare's day, a 'clown' was a down-to-earth country man, or yokel.

A Shakespeare play's fool is a crucial character because he serves two crucial purposes: He is free to speak truth to power without holding back in an environment when others would be afraid to do so for fear of their lives. He also functions as the audience's go-to chorus in Greek drama, offering commentary on the characters and the action.

Typically, he is the play's wisest character. He is referred to by the other characters as 'the fool,' but we commonly know him as 'the jester.' He rarely plays a dramatic role, but some fools do.

It's common to call some of Shakespeare's other characters idiots. Though they are undoubtedly foolish in the contemporary sense, the most famous examples of them are Bottom from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Dogberry from *Much Ado About Nothing*. However, they are not strictly speaking. Shakespeare's plays feature four idiots, who are as follows:

### **Feste in *Twelfth Night***

Perhaps the most well-known of Shakespeare's idiots is Feste. Although his role as an entertainer consists of singing, dancing, and telling jokes, Olivia values him greatly and treats him as a valued member of the family. He interacts with the other characters without restriction and works as a freelancer by vanishing from Olivia's home and entertaining other guests with singing and dance. He is extremely brilliant and has a remarkable grasp of language. Olivia is always asking him what he thinks. In addition to his jesting actions, he plays a significant dramatic role in the play, which makes him interesting. He is virtually postmodern in that he is both inside and outside the play with that part and his traditional fool role, where he peers in at the action.

### **Touchstone in *As You Like It***

Duke Frederick's court jester is Touchstone. He is witty and a perceptive observer of people. He makes constant observations about the other characters throughout the play. He is extremely cynical, and his criticism of the characters is frequently sharp. He is renowned for his skill with words; he can turn any disagreement around and enjoys picking flaws in things. He is replete with sage advice and often discusses the wisdom of folly.

### **The Fool in *King Lear***

The nameless character in *King Lear* is referred to as just 'Fool.' He is Lear's constant friend and travels with him till he goes insane and eventually dies when he is hanged by those who have imprisoned him. In this drama, the fool represents the foolish king's inner consciousness - the king is foolish, but his fool is intelligent. Lear's alter ego, the Fool, is always criticising Lear for his unrelenting foolishness. Lear becomes irritated every time he makes a dumb decision, such as ceding all of his authority to his daughters. The Fool is rendered unnecessary when Lear eventually comes to realise how foolish he has been. As a result, the Fool passes away.

### **Trinculo in *The Tempest***

Trinculo, Alonso's court jester, is an exception to the wise fool theory. He shipwrecks with the royal party and is separated from them. He is incredibly foolish and joins up with Prospero's native servant Caliban and Alonso's inebriated butler Stephano to launch a revolt against Prospero. Shakespeare's greatest comedies are derived from Trinculo and Stephano's foolish and useless efforts and antics. Act Three of *Hamlet*'s speech to the players contains a number of directives regarding the fool (or clown) part. Most notably, the actor is only to say what is in the script, lest they jeopardise the play's central ideas. Shakespeare might still be thinking about the Kemp / Armin incident, and this could be our chance to learn the true reason Kemp quit the company. It is rumoured that Armin was destined for the grave-digger profession, which he famously inherited. Strangely, *Hamlet* employs the phrases 'fool' and 'clown' interchangeably in his speech, suggesting that they refer to nearly the same kind of person. However, the evidence clearly points to the contrary, and the plays that were written around the turn of the century - among which *Hamlet* is one - are the main source of this proof.

## THE SUBSTANCE OF SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY – A C BRADLEY

### Author:

Professor Andrew Cecil Bradley of Oxford University, who has given Shakespeare lectures in Oxford, Glasgow, and Liverpool, is among the most insightful interpreters of Shakespeare's plays. *Shakespearean Tragedy*, his excellent work, was based on these lectures. The four tragedies in this book - "The Tragical Historie of *Hamlet*, Prince of Denmarke," "The Tragedy of *Othello*, The Moor of Venice," "The Tragedy of *King Lear*," and *Macbeth* - are psychologically analysed and then turned into philosophical generalisations.

### Summary

In the first lecture, "The substance of Shakespearean Tragedy," Bradley claims that people of 'high rank,' such as kings, princes, or chieftains, are invariably linked to Shakespearean tragedies. Take *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, which features representatives of powerful families whose feud has social ramifications. The author invites the reader to focus on the main character of the dramatic action, putting aside the individual traits that set one hero apart from another, and consider whether they share any traits that could influence the sad conclusion.

Bradley says there is just one of these qualities. These heroes all have distinct characteristics. Shakespeare's hero is a person of great social standing or importance, and his suffering or deeds have peculiar qualities. Still, that's not all. According to what the author writes, the hero also possesses an exceptional nature that allows him to climb above the typical human level in several ways. It does not imply that the hero is a kook or a shining example of all the good things in life. Shakespeare never established morality norms; in his plays, eccentrics are relegated to supporting roles and some heroes are completely bad characters. The same material that makes up the readers also makes up his sad characters. However, they put so much pressure on themselves to live an apparently normal existence that they rise above the rest.

The author demonstrates that, in contrast to pseudo-tragedies, Shakespeare's tragedy does not lead to hopelessness. After reading Shakespeare's plays, the reader will not believe that man is a helpless, sad creature. The hero can be repulsive and awful, but he is never pitiful. The

reader may experience a mystical sense or have their heart broken by the hero's fate, but never belittled by it.

After reading his tragedies, even the most hopeless cynic becomes less of one. Shakespeare's tragedy, in the opinion of Andrew Cecil Bradley, is fundamentally a narrative of agony and misfortune culminating in death. At the conclusion, the hero typically has to face death. Bradley examined Shakespeare's four classic tragedies and concluded that the heroes and unusual circumstances were present.

Bradley looks at the four great tragedies from a single point of view in these lectures. Shakespeare's place in English literature or the history of play is not discussed by him. The author gives a scant account of his life, character, and journey towards artistic mastery and genius.

The following summarizes the essence of a Shakespearean tragedy and tragic hero according to leading Shakespearean scholar A. C Bradley (1905).

**Tragedy:**

1. Primarily concerned with one person
2. A tale of suffering and calamity leading to the death of a man in high estate.
3. The suffering and calamity are exceptional. They befall a significant person.
4. They are also, as a rule unexpected, and contrasted with previous happiness and glory
5. Attended by tragic pity
6. When he falls suddenly from the height of early greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast, of the powerlessness of man and the omnipotence –perhaps the caprice –of Fortune or Fate.
7. The centre of the tragedy may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from a major character flaw(Tragic Flaw or Hamartia), or a character flaw issue from action (from the common ingredients such as (a) abnormal conditions of mind (b) the supernatural (c) a chance or accident.
8. The action can be defined as conflict (a) between two persons, (b) between two passions, tendencies, ideas, principles, forces, (c) there is a conflict in the hero's soul.

**Tragic Hero** - A unique individual, such as a King, Prince, military commander, or leader, of 'high degree.' They have to be 'good' or admirable, or at the very least, someone the audience will recognise as being of 'high degree' or magnificence (in rank and character). His deeds and eventual demise therefore have an impact on the welfare of others, possibly even an entire nation. He is a figure who the audience can relate to or who they see to be representative of human nature in general. But he also has an extraordinary character, which means that commonplace traits are enhanced in him.

**One-sidedness:** One-sidedness is defined as having a proclivity in one direction, being completely unable to resist the force pulling one in that direction under specific conditions, and having a fatal inclination to connect one's entire identity with one passion, interest, object, or mental habit.

**Tragic Flaw:** The hero's tragic flaw, hamartia, which is also his grandeur, is fatal to him in the circumstances in which we see him put. Tragic errors typically involve no deliberate violation of right; in other situations, they are accompanied by a strong conviction in right.

**The Fall:** The hero's terrible weakness and the events surrounding him are what lead to his downfall and, eventually, his death. It is essential that he be so magnificent that we are acutely aware of the fallibility of human nature through his mistake and downfall. Furthermore, the tragic impression's core—that of tragic waste—is linked to the tragic hero's magnificence.

## **Analysis**

A.C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* is a critique of Shakespeare's writings. Bradley presents a thorough analysis of Shakespeare's works through a series of lectures. Bradley appears to be perplexed by the concept of greatness because, in his first lecture, he examines what he refers to as 'Shakespeare's tragic characters' and explains how Shakespeare elevated them. Shakespeare's characters are being presented by Bradley as actual people, and he explores the idea that Shakespeare valued brilliance above all else. The tragic characters in a flawed plot are highlighted by *The Shakespearean Tragedy*. Shakespeare, according to Bradley, always features a tragic figure, who is viewed as a hero but ultimately has to confront death.

In Shakespeare's works, the struggle between good and evil is clearly present. Shakespeare shows evil as something that all people must face in the majority of his plays.

Bradley claims that Shakespeare wrote about extraordinary individuals who are more valuable than the society in which they inhabit. But these people's shortcomings cause them to fall from high places. For example, Hamlet is in danger of dying because he intends to murder Claudius in retaliation for his father's passing. According to Bradley, the remarkable individuals that Shakespeare presents in his plays have underlying flaws that ultimately bring them to an end.

Shakespeare presents wealthy and influential characters who ultimately meet their demise. Julius Caesar is assassinated by reliable allies. Brutus and Cassius eventually begin to fight, which ultimately results in their premature deaths. Bradley is attempting to criticise Shakespeare's use of these tragic heroes in his writing. There's a problem with the way these characters fall from grace.

What one sees in most of Shakespeare's plays is that the tragedy results from the hero giving in to his own frailties. For instance, Othello's own jealousy caused him to act rashly and violently. Furthermore, he was sensitive to the opinions of others, which led him to internalise all of his emotions until, at some point, he erupted and carried out his horrible deeds.

Bradley draws attention to the use of characters with high social status, which runs across all of Shakespeare's plays. He emphasises that the main characters are typically nobles or have a higher social status, and this plays a significant role in their behaviour and deeds throughout.

Shakespeare's main characters are so magnificent because they are flawed people. The characters' deeds make *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *Lear* tragic plays. For instance, Lear's own imprudence and stubbornness ultimately lead to his own demise. The tragic conclusion stems from his failure to recognise the value of his youngest daughter's affection for him.

## UNIT II: SONNETS

### SONNET 18 – SHAKESPEARE

#### **About the Sonnet**

"Sonnet 18" is perhaps the best known of all of Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, primarily due to the opening line, "Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day," which every true romantic knows by heart. But there is much more to this line than the eye meets. William Shakespeare's sonnets are world-renowned and are said to have been written for a "fair youth" (1–126) and a "dark lady" (127–54), but no one is totally certain for whom they were penned, as they include no definite names and no written evidence. Shakespeare may have been well-known in his lifetime, but he was also very good at keeping secrets. The sonnets were first published in 1609, seven years before the Bard's death, and their remarkable quality has kept them in the public eye ever since. Their depth and range set Shakespeare apart from all other sonneteers.

#### **Summary**

The speaker opens the poem with a question addressed to the beloved: "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?" The next eleven lines are devoted to such a comparison. In line 2, the speaker stipulates what mainly differentiates the young man from the summer's day: he is "more lovely and more temperate." Summer's days tend toward extremes: they are shaken by "rough winds"; in them, the sun ("the eye of heaven") often shines "too hot," or too dim. And summer is fleeting: its date is too short, and it leads to the withering of autumn, as "every fair from fair sometime declines." The final quatrain of the sonnet tells how the beloved differs from the summer in that respect: his beauty will last forever ("Thy eternal summer shall not fade...") and never die. In the couplet, the speaker explains how the beloved's beauty will accomplish this feat, and not perish because it is preserved in the poem, which will last forever; it will live "as long as men can breathe or eyes can see."

#### **Analysis**

This sonnet is certainly the most famous in the sequence of Shakespeare's sonnets; it may be the most famous lyric poem in English. Among Shakespeare's works, only lines such as "To be or not to be" and "Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?" are better-known. This is not to say that it is at all the best or most interesting or most beautiful of the sonnets; but the simplicity and loveliness of its praise of the beloved has guaranteed its place.

On the surface, the poem is simply a statement of praise about the beauty of the beloved; summer tends to unpleasant extremes of windiness and heat, but the beloved is always mild and temperate. Summer is incidentally personified as the 'eye of heaven' with its 'gold complexion'; the imagery throughout is simple and unaffected, with the 'darling buds of May' giving way to the 'eternal summer', which the speaker promises the beloved. The language, too, is comparatively unadorned for the sonnets; it is not heavy with alliteration or assonance, and nearly every line is its own self-contained clause - almost every line ends with some punctuation, which effects a pause.

Sonnet 18 is the first poem in the sonnets not to explicitly encourage the young man to have children. The 'procreation' sequence of the first 17 sonnets ended with the speaker's realization that the young man might *not* need children to preserve his beauty; he could also live, the speaker writes at the end of Sonnet 17, 'in my rhyme.' Sonnet 18, then, is the first 'rhyme' - the speaker's first attempt to preserve the young man's beauty for all time. An important theme of the sonnet (as it is an important theme throughout much of the sequence) is the power of the speaker's poem to defy time and last forever, carrying the beauty of the beloved down to future generations. The beloved's 'eternal summer' shall not fade precisely because it is embodied in the sonnet: So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, the speaker writes in the couplet, So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

## SONNET 65

### About the Sonnet

William Shakespeare, an English Renaissance poet and dramatist, wrote "Sonnet 65," which was first released in 1609. Even the most resilient things on earth eventually break down and decay, so how can something as delicate as beauty endure? The poem's speaker bemoans the passage of time. The speaker does, however, come to the conclusion that poetry itself - and, more importantly, the love it expresses - is the one thing that can withstand time's relentless assault. "Sonnet 65" is one of Shakespeare's "Fair Youth" sonnets, a collection of sonnets he penned that are all devoted to a handsome young man.

### Summary

Shakespeare's "Sonnet 65" begins with a quatrain that begs the question of how beauty, which is weaker and less powerful than any of those elements, can withstand the force of nature

that destroys brass, stone, earth, and the sea. Death is the overwhelming state that pervades everything of nature, and neither the land nor the sea can bear it. The third sentence describes mortality as 'this rage' - a strong rage, bordering on lunacy that stands in opposition to beauty, the most delicate of subjects. With its strength equal to that of a flower, beauty appears to have little chance of enduring if the earth itself is no match for this energy.

The poet sees 'summer's honey breath,' another of nature's transient and insubstantial forms, as the victim of a 'wreckful siege' in the form of 'battering days.' The 'earth' mentioned in the first line is here represented as rocks impregnable,' and brass has been replaced by 'gates of steel.' Neither of these substantial forms can withstand the corrosive force of time. The second quatrain reiterates the opening question. The speaker poses a question, but she also suggests that whatever that stands up to time will eventually fail and that nothing in the natural world is immune to this force - least of all something as fleeting as the breath of summer.

The poet's sentiments as he faces the impending onslaught of time are expressed in the opening line of the third quatrain, O fearful meditation! Time is then described as the quick runner whose foot cannot be held back. "Even flight is futile, for beauty, now symbolised as a jewel, cannot escape being imprisoned finally and forever in 'Time's breast.' No 'hand' or external power can or will reach out to save beauty from the relentless march of time. At the end of the third quatrain, beauty is reduced to a defenceless victim of time's theft as well as a hopeless supplicant. It seems that the poet has come to terms with the fact that beauty will eventually be destroyed by the unrelenting march of time. But there is promise in the last couplet—the written word. Since the poet's words have the amazing potential to capture beauty's splendour in an eternal condition, mere ink infused with the poet's love is the only thing standing between you and Time's destructive force.

### **Analysis**

The poet draws the conclusion that nothing is impervious to the effects of time, reiterating many of the images from Sonnet 64. Time has power over even the toughest metals and stones, the vast earth, and the sea: "Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea, / But sad mortality o'er-sways their power." "O fearful meditation!" the young man exclaims, where can he hide from the same "siege of batt'ring days" that time will inflict upon him?

Unlike in the previous sonnet, the poet is persuaded once more that his sonnets would grant the youth immortality because nothing can endure the deterioration of time but his verse. Going back to the idea that poetry has the ability to grant immortality, the poet states, "That in black ink my love may still shine bright." He feels that his love poem will be able to keep the beauty of the young person forever. Ironically, the poet employs this back-and-forth reasoning to reflect the waves' passage towards the shore, an image that appears in several of the sonnets in this series that deal with time.

Physically and emotionally removed from the young man, the poet's inconsistent belief in the value of his verse parallels his inconsistent faith in the young man. For instance, in Sonnet 60, the poet writes, "Each changing place with that which goes before, / In sequent toil all forwards do contend"; and in Sonnet 64, he notes, "Increasing store with loss and loss with store."

## SONNET 116

### About the Sonnet

"Sonnet 116" is one of William Shakespeare's most well-known poems and features the opening line that is all-too quotable: *Let me not to the marriage of true minds/Admit impediments*. It goes on to declare that true love is no fool of time; it never alters.

### Summary

The opening line of "Sonnet 116," also known as "Let me not to the marriage of true minds," declares that true love is blind to all impediments. "Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments," is the opening line of the poem and introduces the first metaphor. The "marriage of true minds" is a metaphor for the joining of two people's souls in a profound, sincere, and enduring love rather than a real wedding. In this statement, the speaker declares that genuine love is impervious to 'impediments.' A strong statement is made by the third and fourth lines, as well as the opening of their sentence in the second portion of line 2. The speaker asserts that genuine love endures change in its surroundings. When someone tries to take it off, it does not give way or bend. Stated differently, true love is unwavering and unchanging.

The metaphor of love as an "ever-fixed mark," which remains constant and steadfast even in the face of life's biggest storms, is introduced in the fifth and sixth lines. It helps ships

navigate through hazardous waters safely, much like a nautical beacon. The idea of the "star to every wand'ring bark" highlights the dependability and direction of love.

The poet concedes in the eighth line that although the existence and importance of this love are obvious, its actual worth might not be understood. Love has an unfathomable value, much as a star's worth cannot be determined, even though its height above the earth can. The poet starts to look at love throughout time as the sonnet goes on. By saying, "Love's not Time's fool," the speaker is stating categorically that true love is not subject to the whims or fluctuations of time.

The words that follow, "though rosy lips and cheeks / Within his bending sickle's compass come," highlight how love never changes, even though circumstances change, youth fades, and physical beauty fades with time. The speaker highlights the persistence and steadfastness of genuine love, emphasising that it is not only a passing sensation related to the temporal world but rather a force that continues independent of anything. In this context, youth is symbolised by "rosy lips and cheeks."

True love, as portrayed in this sonnet, endures beyond the fleeting experiences of hours and weeks and lasts until the end of human existence, "the edge of doom." The thirteenth and fourteenth lines reinforce that point: "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, / But bears it out even to the edge of doom." The poem's main idea is forcefully stated in the final couplet. The speaker asserts boldly that no one has ever truly loved and that he has never written a word if his theories on the nature and power of love are shown to be false. The speaker's unwavering belief in the ageless and unchanging nature of genuine love is emphasised in this statement.

### **Analysis**

This sonnet has a confessional tone, yet it makes no explicit mention of the youth. Sonnet 116, then, seems a meditative attempt to define love, independent of reciprocity, fidelity, and eternal beauty: "Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks / Within his bending sickle's compass come." After all his uncertainties and apologies, Sonnet 116 leaves little doubt that the poet is in love with love. However, the general context makes it clear that the poet's temporary alienation refers to the youth's inconsistency and betrayal, not the poet's. Coming as it does after

the previous sonnet, the poet may be trying to convince himself again that 'Now' he loves the youth 'best.'

The poet seems to believe that mutuality, or reciprocity, is the core of friendship and love. "Sonnet 116", for instance, describes the ideal marriage as "the marriage of true minds," a union that can be accomplished by the committed and pious: "Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments." The opening lines of the sonnet are modelled after the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer's marriage service - "If any of you know cause or just impediment" They reveal the poet's perspective on love, which he goes on to characterise initially in a negative light. He describes love positively after explaining what it is not. The North Star, a traditional sea mark and navigator's aid, is known as the "ever-fixed mark." Its significance is immeasurable despite knowing its altitude, or "height." Both the star and true love, which is not "Time's fool," are impervious to the effects of ageing, in contrast to outward beauty.

Note that the verb "alters" is taken directly from line 3, which explains what love is not. The poet then incorporates the ideas of space and time, applying them to his ideal of genuine love: "Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks, / But bears it out even to the edge of doom." "Edge of doom," Judgement Day; "bears it out" implies to survive. This final couplet shows how secure the poet is in his standards of friendship and love, which he hopes that he and the youth can achieve; he stakes his own poetry as his wager that love is all he has described it to be. Finally, the poet challenges others to find him wrong in his definition, saying, "If this be error and upon me proved, / I never writ, nor no man ever loved."

## SONNET 121

### About the Sonnet

Sonnet 121' by William Shakespeare is a poem about being true to one's self, admiring mistakes, and corruption.

### Summary

The speaker declares that they are 'vile' in the opening lines of Sonnet 121. He makes the argument that acting truly nasty is preferable to being thought of as nasty when one isn't. With the latter, there is no chance to carry out the 'vile' deed. Without the fulfilment that comes from carrying out an action that others find objectionable, one is stigmatised in that sense. The speaker

seems to be implying in these comments that he will be focusing on being himself and that he detests hypocrisy. The speaker is compelled to question if what he is doing is actually that horrible.

The speaker poses two queries in the second quatrain. He questions why he is subject to criticism from people who are dishonest and now acting hypocritically. They should be worried about their own transgressions. It's his own fault if he has a lusty mentality or sportive blood. Or, he continues, why should those same individuals judge what he considers to be "good" or "bad" based on their comments about his life? The speaker makes a suggestion that something one believes to be harmful might actually be good. This results in the speaker's resolute declaration that he will be honest about his mistakes. Everything about this is related to his infidelity in the earlier sonnets.

The speaker declares in the third and last quatrain that he is who he is. He won't alter for anyone, least of all the hypocrites he just denounced. Speaking out against him is merely a way for someone to expose themselves. They are equally awful, if not more so. It is plausible that while they "may be corrupt or crooked," he "may be straight." The speaker asserts that it is impossible to assess an individual's behaviour in terms of corruption in the poem's final two lines, which rhyme to form a couplet. He does not want to be judged by these wicked individuals. That is, unless they are prepared to acknowledge that they find it enjoyable to believe that "men are bad" in general. There, they rule or flourish. They would instantly cease being hypocritical if they took this action.

### **Analysis**

The poet is made to question whether or not his acts are wicked after receiving the same kind of public censure as the teenager did earlier in the sonnets. He will not put up with hypocrisy under any circumstances, according to his motto of "It is better to be vile than vile esteemed / When not to be receives reproach of being." The biblical phrase "I am that I am" affirms self-awareness and humility. He will not defend the indefensible in himself, but will own the truth of his mistakes: "No, I am that I am; and they that level / At my abuses reckon up their own." Though there is a tinge of pessimism in the final couplet, the poet will not yield to the judgement of those with "false adulterate eyes" or allow them to turn what he believes to be good into evil.

## UNIT III – COMEDY AND DARK COMEDY

### A MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM – SHAKESPEARE

#### **About the Play**

Since Francis Meres first cited *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1598, a number of academics have placed the play's publication between 1594 and 1596. It was probably written around the same time as *Romeo and Juliet* were produced. The two plays do, in fact, share a great deal in common; in fact, at times it seems as though *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will ultimately lead to the same tragic conclusion that befalls *Romeo and Juliet*.

After being entered into the Stationer's Register on October 8, 1600, the play was first printed in quarto in 1600. This quarto was most likely lifted verbatim from a Shakespearean source. While attempting to fix some of the flaws in the first printing, a second quarto that was printed in 1619 (and mistakenly backdated to 1600) also introduced a number of new errors. The First Folio, published in 1623, was based on the second quarto.

There is a legend that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was originally presented for a private audience following a real wedding. With all of the newlyweds retiring to their individual quarters at the conclusion, the play's three weddings and play-within-a-play featuring Pyramus and Thisbe would seem to match the situation. Nevertheless, there is no proof of this fictitious performance. Instead, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was unquestionably presented by the Lord Chamberlain's Men on the London stage, and William Shakespeare is identified on the first Quarto's title page.

The phrase 'summer solstice' refers to Midsummer Eve, which falls on June 23 and is celebrated with holiday celebrations, fairy tales, and transient insanity. Shakespeare skillfully combines lovers and fairies with socioeconomic classes with the noble Theseus and the 'rude mechanicals,' or craftsmen and labourers. This makes it possible for the play to incorporate both the poetry of the noblemen and the harsher vocabulary of the lower classes, which makes it incomparably more poetic.

Shakespeare makes some very intriguing alterations, one of which is the idea of little, benevolent fairies. The ghost known as Puck, Robin Goodfellow, is said to have previously terrified the locals. According to historical accounts, fairies were thought to be demonic spirits

who abducted infants and offered them as sacrifices to the devil before the Elizabethan era. During this age, fairies were reinvented by playwrights such as Shakespeare, who made them into kind yet mischievous spirits.

A long-standing censorship phobia in Elizabethan theatre is exposed by the play's last act, which is wholly superfluous to the rest of the story. The inferior artisans, who aspire to play Pyramus and Thisbe, attempt to tamper with the plot throughout the play in an attempt to convince the audience that the performance is fictitious and that they have no reason to be afraid of what is happening. This leads to the play's genuine conclusion, where Puck advises that we should just regard the play as a dream if we don't like it. The audience's confusion at the conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* about whether they have actually seen what they have seen or have simply woken up from a shared dream is one of the play's most astonishing elements. Shakespeare is, of course, trying to convey exactly this idea - that the theatre is merely a collective dream. This is why the dream is interrupted so frequently in the Pyramus and Thisbe play, emphasising how manufactured theatre is. Not only do Bottom and his associates present Pyramus and Thisbe to us as figments of our imagination, but they also present the play in its entirety.

Puck's suggestion masks a darker side to the play's comedic delight. The male and female characters exhibit a profound sexual tension that is evident in both Oberon's attempts to degrade Titania and Theseus's conquest of Hippolyta. The play's surefire resolution quickly diffuses this tension, making it appear less genuine. It is important to acknowledge the play's darker aspects as well as the players' quick switching between characters to express their passionate aspirations.

## **Summary**

The setting of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is Athens. The Duke of Athens, Theseus, is organising a grand feast in anticipation of his union with Hippolyta. Egeus walks in, accompanied by his daughter Hermia, her boyfriend Demetrius, and her adored Lysander. Theseus is informed by Egeus that Hermia would prefer to wed Lysander rather than Demetrius. He requests the authority to execute Hermia as punishment for disobedience.

Theseus acknowledges that Hermia must obey her father and threatens to force her to marry the man her father selects or go into a nunnery. Lysander objects, but the law takes

precedence. Then, in order to avoid the law and marry, he and Hermia make the decision to run into the woods that encircle Athens during the night. Helena, a girl enamoured with Demetrius, is informed of their plot. Helena chooses to inform Demetrius about the plot in the hopes of winning his favour.

To commemorate Theseus's marriage, a group of skilled craftsmen and labourers in the area have chosen to put on a play for him. For their play, they decide on Pyramus and Thisbe, then get together to assign the parts. Flute plays the part of Thisbe, while Nick Bottom plays Pyramus. They decide to get together in the woods the following evening to practise the play.

Puck Robin Goodfellow meets a fairy that works for Queen Titania. He informs the fairy that Titania should stay away from his King Oberon, who is in the woods, as they are going to fight once more. But shortly after, Titania and Oberon show up and start fighting over a small boy Titania has taken and is raising. She declines Oberon's demand that she give him the boy.

Oberon chooses to mislead Titania by applying pansy juice on her eyes. She will fall in love with the first person she sees when she wakes up thanks to the magical juice. Oberon hears Demetrius and Helena in the woods shortly after Puck is despatched to retrieve the juice.

Helena is left alone in the forest by Demetrius. Oberon resolves to make this right and gives Robin the order to apply the juice to Demetrius's eyes as he sleeps. After that, he locates Titania and applies the liquid to her eyelids. While searching for Demetrius, Robin encounters Lysander and inadvertently applies the juice to him.

Helena accidentally stumbles upon Lysander and awakens him up. He chases her into the woods after falling in love with her right away. When they come to the spot where Oberon is observing, the two of them realise their error. After applying the pansy juice to Demetrius's eyelids, he wakes up and develops feelings for Helena as well. She feels enraged at their declarations of love because she believes the two men are attempting to torture her because she is in love with Demetrius.

When the labourers get to the woods, they begin rehearsing their performance. They consistently mispronounce the words and botch the play's lines. They choose to lessen the play's realism because they are afraid of censorship. The lion is therefore expected to declare that he is

just a regular man and not a lion. Bottom also feels compelled to inform the audience that he is merely going to act dead and not actually pass away. As Puck watches this absurd situation, he finds Bottom by himself and gives him a hard headshake. They flee in terror as Bottom rejoins his company. Next, Bottom finds Titania and manages to rouse her. The juice in her eyes makes her fall in love, and she takes him with her.

Demetrius and Lysander get ready to battle it out for Helena. When Puck steps in, he takes them in circles through the woods until they finally pass out and fall to the ground. He then takes the two women to the same location and puts them to bed.

Titania is found by Oberon, who then breaks the curse on her. Then he assures the audience that when Bottom wakes up, he'll believe it was all a dream. He also breaks the enchantment on Lysander. The lovers are lying stretched out on the ground when Theseus and his hunting group arrive. To rouse them, he gives the order to sound the hunting horns.

After the lovers give their explanation for being in the woods, Egeus asks to be given the authority to apply the law to Hermia. Demetrius, on the other hand, steps in and informs them that he now just loves Helena and no longer loves Hermia. Theseus makes the bold decision to defy Egeus and allow the lovers to wed him that very day. They travel back to Athens together.

When Bottom awakens, he believes he has been dreaming the entire episode. He gets back to Athens quickly and meets up with his friends. They make their way to Theseus's palace together. After reviewing the options for that evening's entertainment, Theseus decides to see the play of Pyramus and Thisbe. After the performance is performed by Bottom and his friends, everyone goes to bed.

When Puck gets there, he gets to work cleaning the house. For a little while, the prospective parents and couples are blessed by Oberon and Titania. Puck asks the audience to pardon the performers if they were offended after they depart. He then advises the audience to consider the performance to have been merely a dream if they didn't enjoy it.

### **Character List**

**Theseus** - Duke of Athens, who is marrying Hippolyta as the play begins. He decrees that Hermia must marry Demetrius or be sentenced either to death or to life in a convent. At the end

of the play, he insists that all of the lovers marry along with him and Hippolyta and provides a humorous commentary to accompany the performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe."

**Hippolyta** - Queen of the Amazons, she is betrothed to Theseus. These two were once enemies, and Theseus won her in battle. In this play, she seems to have lost much of her fighting spirit, though she does not hesitate to voice her opinion, for example, following Theseus' choice of the play "Pyramus and Thisbe."

**Lysander** - The one Hermia adores is Lysander. Lysander does not sit well with Egeus, though we are not sure why. The play backs up Lysander's assertion that he and Demetrius are on an equal footing, with little to no difference between the two lovers. Nevertheless, Egeus is certain that Hermia wed Demetrius. Lysander intends to flee with her to his widowed aunt's house rather than lose his sweetheart in this senseless manner. Lysander unintentionally gets soaked with Oberon's love potion by Puck during a night in the forest, which makes him fall momentarily in love with Helena. As Puck undoes the enchantment once Oberon realises his error, Lysander and Hermia fall in love and become married by the play's conclusion.

**Demetrius** - He adores Hermia and her father's selection of a spouse for her. Demetrius is essentially the same as Lysander; his only real difference is that he is a fickle romantic. Before the show even starts, he ruthlessly abandoned Helena, whom he had previously loved. He not only rejects Helena's intense love for him, but he also threatens to harm her—even rape her—if she doesn't go away. At the play's conclusion, Oberon marries Helena after giving up Hermia with the aid of his love juice. The only character that is impacted by Oberon's love juice indefinitely is Demetrius.

**Hermia** - Despite her love for Lysander, her father demands that she wed Demetrius or face execution for defying him. Theseus slackens the execution penalty by stating that Hermia can choose between death, living in a monastery, or Demetrius. Instead of accepting this terrible fate, Hermia consents to flee with Lysander. Hermia is surprised to see her beloved leave her and confess his love for Helena during the wild night in the woods. She doesn't know how Oberon's love potion is tampering with Lysander's perception. By the play's conclusion, Lysander and Hermia are once again in love after Puck breaks the curse. Her father is still against their match, but Theseus approves of their marriage.

**Helena** - Helena is Demetrius's brutally mistreated lover. He had already left her in favour of Hermia before the performance starts. Since Helena is just as attractive as Hermia, she doesn't understand why he changed his feelings for her. In her desperation to get him back, Helena will stop at nothing, even if it means betraying her best childhood friend Hermia by telling the envious Demetrius Lysander about Hermia's escape strategy from Athens. Demetrius ultimately rediscovers his love for Helena with the aid of Oberon's love potion, and by the play's conclusion, the two are wed.

**Oberon** - The play opens with Oberon, the King of the Fairies, battling with Titania about custody of an Indian boy she is raising. He devises a scheme to put love juice in her eyes in order to woo the boy away from her. She falls recklessly in love with Bottom because of this drink. In the course of her magic-induced romance, Oberon persuades her to give up the kid, whom Oberon intends to use as a page. After capturing the boy, Oberon breaks Titania's curse, bringing the two lovers back together. In order to make Demetrius fall in love with Helena, Oberon had Puck put love juice in his eyes. Oberon demands that Puck correct his error after he unintentionally anoints Lysander, ensuring that the true lovers be together by the play's conclusion. He and Titania bless each and every newlywed in the last scene.

**Titania** - Titania, the Fairy Queen, is Oberon's spouse. There is anarchy throughout both the natural and human worlds as a result of Titania and Oberon's dispute. Titania has promised to nurture the Indian kid after his mother died in childbirth, but Oberon wants the boy she is safeguarding. Titania falls in love with Bottom after Oberon applies the love juice to her eyes, and Oberon snatches the Indian lad away from her. After capturing the boy, Oberon breaks the curse, bringing Titania and him back together.

**Puck, or Robin Goodfellow** - Oberon's jester, Puck is responsible for mistakenly anointing Lysander with the love juice intended for Demetrius. Puck enjoys the comedy that ensues when Lysander and Demetrius are both in love with Helena but follows Oberon's orders to reunite the correct lovers. Puck has the final words of the play, emphasizing that the entire play was just a dream.

**Nick Bottom** - Bottom is a weaver who portrays Pyramus. Puck turns him into an ass, and Titania falls in love with him. He is the most gregarious of the players, wanting to play every

role in "Pyramus and Thisbe." Bottom can't talk about what occurred to him when Puck gets him back to normal, but he makes a promise to have Peter Quince write a ballad about it that will be named "Bottom's Dream."

**Egeus** - Hermia's despotic father is Egeus. He arbitrarily decides that she must wed Demetrius or face execution for her disobedience; daughters in Athens are required to obey their fathers or risk losing their lives. When he finds out at the end of the play that Lysander and Hermia attempted to escape Athens, he is shocked and believes they ought to be punished. He is overruled by Theseus, who forces the lovers to get married.

**Philostrate** - Theseus' Master of Revels, he arranges the selection of performances for Theseus' wedding. He tries to dissuade the wedding party from choosing "Pyramus and Thisbe" but is overruled by Theseus.

**Peter Quince** - A carpenter and the director of the group of actors who perform "Pyramus and Thisbe," which he has written for the celebration following Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding.

**Francis** - A bellows-mender, Flute plays the role of Thisbe. He is displeased to be given a woman's role because he wants to let his beard grow, but Quince assures him that he can play the part in a mask.

**Tom Snout** - Snout is a tinker and plays the role of Wall in "Pyramus and Thisbe."

**Snug** - A joiner, he plays the lion in "Pyramus and Thisbe."

**Robin Starveling** - A tailor, he represents Moonshine in "Pyramus and Thisbe."

**Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, Mustardseed** - Titania's fairies.

## **Analysis**

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is most obviously a play about romantic love, but the play is also about friendship, and what happens when love comes between friends. In the play, lifelong friends Helena and Hermia nearly sacrifice their friendship as they compete for men's attention, raising questions about the value of friendship versus the value of finding a life partner. In a deeply affecting speech, Helena underscores the pain of having a wedge driven

between her and her closest confidante: “Is all the counsel that we two have shared, / The sisters’ vows, the hours that we have spent / When we have chid the hasty-footed time / For parting us? Oh, is all forgot?” (III.ii.) Near the end of the speech Helena goes further, pointing to the irony of Hermia’s apparent conspiracy with men to destroy their friendship: “And will you rend our ancient love asunder / To join with men in scorning your poor friend?” Helena’s speech implies that the female characters in the play face a choice: love or friendship. Believing that Hermia is conspiring with Lysander and Demetrius, Helena assumes that Hermia has chosen love over friendship, leaving her with neither romantic nor platonic love.

Throughout the play, we find suggestions that as the female characters come of age, they are expected to put aside their own interests and desires in order to please the men in their lives. For example, Hermia faces grave consequences for refusing to obey both her father, Egeus, and the figurehead for Athenian law, Duke Theseus. In Athens, as Theseus explains, the patriarch’s word should be sacred: “To you your father should be as a god” (I.i.). We also know that Theseus “wooed” Hippolyta with his sword. Oberon humiliates Titania by making her fall in love with Bottom as punishment for quarreling with him. The suggestion that female characters should honor and obey their fathers and husbands leaves them little room for childhood pursuits like friendship with other females. Hermia’s speech in Act I scene i suggests she’s willing to make this sacrifice even before she fights with Helena. She announces she’s going to meet Lysander “in the wood where often you and I / Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie...” Here, the use of the past tense indicates that Hermia is replacing Helena with Lysander. This sense is reinforced when she says, “Farewell, sweet playfellow.”

By the end of the play, the main source of Hermia and Helena’s conflict – Demetrius’s and Lysander’s enchanted love for Helena – has been removed, and the path is clear for the two women to repair their friendship. However, we don’t see the two women actually make up, so we don’t know whether they resume being friends or not. In fact, once the enchantment has been removed from Lysander and Helena and Hermia are united with their appropriate partners, we hear little from either woman. The last line Hermia speaks is “Yea, and my father” (IV.i.) referring to Egeus’s continued control over her fate. The only reason Egeus agrees to allow Hermia to marry Lysander is because another, more powerful man – Duke Theseus – overrules him, saying “Egeus, I will overbear your will, / For in the temple by and by with us / These

couples shall be eternally knit.” (IV. i.) Hermia and Helena, in becoming married women, are following the commands of men. We can assume they now follow the rules of love (and marriage), rather than the rules of friendship.

### **Themes: Love's Triumph**

The eternal and victorious force of love is one of *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* main themes. Early modern comedies frequently ended with at least one marriage, and this play is no different. But *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is more than just a comedy; it's a demonstration of how love endures in the face of adversity and intricacy. The couples of lovers that exist at the start of the play - Hermia and Lysander and Helena and Demetrius - are married by the play's end, despite the disarray of the plot. As a result, the play humorously and imaginatively examines the difficulties lovers encounter when trying to find their way back to one another.

### **Patriarchal Control**

A gendered gap between the power of older males and the desires of young women is evident at the play's opening. In particular, Hermia wants to wed Lysander rather than Demetrius, even though Demetrius was the suitor whom Egeus, her father, had selected for her. The lovers sidestep this by running into the woods, but Egeus really asks Theseus for permission to execute his daughter for defying his intentions. But this play's opening conflict highlights Hermia's development from a little girl to a young lady, and consequently, her change from a submissive, timid person to an independent individual who opposes patriarchal authority.

### **Gender and Power**

The play's larger concern in illustrating power dynamics between men and women is tied to the fight between Hermia and her father. The roles of Oberon and Titania, who compete for dominance throughout the play as king and queen of fairies, respectively, are one method it achieves this concept. Often evenly matched, the two are out to get lighthearted retribution on one another. This idea of equality between the two figures implies that gender-specific power becomes mostly meaningless in the fairy realm because magic dictates one's aptitude.

### **Dreams and Imagination**

Many characters are frequently led astray by the play's supernatural element, leading them to think that the strange things that have happened to them are only hallucinations. If, for

any reason, the audience does not appreciate the performance, Puck invites them to believe they were dreaming at the play's conclusion. The play's supernatural story lines are made possible by this emphasis on dreams, which gives the supernatural elements a deeper, more meaningful significance. Rather, both the audience and the protagonists are propelled into a "dream-like" condition where they are able to view their familiar reality in a novel way.

### **Performance**

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* has several meta-theatrical devices, just like many of Shakespeare's plays. The most notable of these is Pyramus and Thisbe's disastrous performance, which is filled with errors and incompetence. The labourers who are presenting the play think that the audience won't be able to distinguish between fact and fiction; this idea speaks to the nature of early modern theatergoing in general as well as to the play's larger plot. Shakespeare illustrates the distinction between 'bad' and 'good' performances through Pyramus and Thisbe's unsuccessful play, thus demonstrating his own playwriting prowess.

### **Magic and the Supernatural**

An essential component of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, magic plays a significant role in propelling the story. The play takes on a dreamlike quality that separates the lovers from the reality of their lives in Athens due to Titania and Oberon's participation into the lives of Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius. As a result, characters are left to reclaim a sense of security in a world that is primarily foreign and illogical, and rationality and explanation vanish.

### **Nature**

More recent studies on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* have started to place the play in the context of ecocriticism, or environmental literary studies. This development has probably happened since the play's main setting - the woods surrounding Athens - has been established. The characters flee to the woods outside of the city, where they come with otherworldly forces and are thrown into a weird sequence of dreamlike happenings. Hermia, in particular, risks certain death if she stays in Athens. Many academics contend that Shakespeare's portrayal of nature is remarkably nuanced, even if it is meant to be amusing for the audience. He portrays nature as both a terrifying and enigmatic force in and of itself and as a haven for people seeking to escape the control of urban life.

## **Appearance and Reality**

Shakespeare frequently addresses the distinction between appearance and reality, which is one of the play's other primary topics. The central theme of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* - and implied by the title itself - is that things are often not what they seem to be. Dreams are not real, even though they may appear so while they are happening to us. Shakespeare uses a variety of deliberate techniques to give his plays a dreamy feel. Characters often go to sleep and wake up thinking that they have dreamed ("I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was"), having dreamed ("Methought a serpent ate my heart away"), or having had magic applied to them to induce a dreamlike state. The play is set primarily at night, and there are allusions to moonlight, which alters the appearance of everything it shines on.

Through the play-within-a-play, the distinction between appearances and reality is also examined, notably to humorous effect. The charm of the theatre rests on the audience's willingness to accept, if only temporarily, that what is being acted out in front of them is real. This is something that the "rude mechanicals" totally miss. We (as well as they) laugh at this foolishness when Snug the Joiner tells the stage audience that he is not a real lion and that they should not be afraid of him, but we also laugh at ourselves because we know that he is an actor posing as a lion rather than just a joiner. That's also a form of magic, since Shakespeare seems to be saying, "We all know that this play isn't real, but you're still sitting there and believing it."

## **Order and Disorder**

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* also deals with the theme of order and disorder. The order of Egeus' family is threatened because his daughter wishes to marry against his will; the social order to the state demands that a father's will should be enforced. When the city dwellers find themselves in the wood, away from their ordered and hierarchical society, order breaks down and relationships are fragmented. But this is comedy, and relationships are more happily rebuilt in the free atmosphere of the wood before the characters return to society. Natural order — the order of Nature — is also broken and restored in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The row between the Fairy King and Queen results in the order of the seasons being disrupted:

The spring, the summer,

The chiding autumn, angry winter change

Their wonted liveries, and the mazèd world  
By their increase knows not which is which.

Only after Oberon and Titania's reconciliation can all this be put right. Without the restoration of natural order, the happiness of the play's ending could not be complete.

### **Women in *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has gained prominence among feminist scholars in recent years, partly because of the way women and femininity are portrayed in all five of the play's acts. The play poses a direct challenge to patriarchal systems of societal authority in many ways. For example, although Theseus makes an appearance in the play's opening act, the king of Athens vanishes from sight after Hermia and the other characters flee into the woods. The play's events that occur outside of Athens have been viewed as a feminine 'retreat' from the male-dominated realm of Ancient Greece. Theseus has long been associated with patriarchal order and authority.

In fact, the play's second part is filled with references to female friendships, fecundity, and femininity. Many have seen Titania's account of her time with the mortal mother of the Indian prince as a critique of gay love since she describes their relationship in such personal detail. Both Hermia and Helena are presented as young ladies who are maturing from childhood to maturity. As such, they are learning to rebel against the people in their lives who take away their freedom, such as Hermia's father Egeus.

Last but not least, the whole setting of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* appears to be dedicated to examining femininity, since characters regularly remark on the moon's state - a traditional emblem of femininity and fertility - as well as the enigmatic quality of the woods. Uncharted or 'dark' terrain was frequently associated with the womb and other female bodily parts in early modern England. The play's main location enthralls and bewilders its protagonists in a manner similar to how exotic locales captivated and perplexed early modern English explorers, leading them to equate their journeys to the ultimate 'mystery' of a woman's womb. By responding to Theseus's unwavering patriarchal philosophy in this way, the play offers a whimsical yet dreamy investigation of a decidedly more feminine realm, ultimately rewarding characters for their desire to venture outside the safe and regulated confines of urban life.

## MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING – SHAKESPEARE

### About the Play

*Much Ado About Nothing* is one of Shakespeare's most frequently performed comedies. Probably written in the latter part of 1598, it was performed soon afterward by the Lord Chamberlain's Men, the theatrical company in which William Shakespeare had a business interest separate from his duties as actor and playwright. *Much Ado* is apparently based on a story in a collection of stories by Italian writer Matteo Bandello, originally published in 1554 and translated into English in 1582. Some plot elements and characters may have been inspired by a lengthy Italian poem, *Orlando Furioso* by Ludovico Aristo, originally published in 1532 and translated into English in 1591. The broad comedy in *Much Ado* has early twentieth-century parallels in the romantic 'screwball' comedies of the 1930s - for example, *It Happened One Night* with Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert, *Ninotchka* with Greta Garbo and Melvin Douglas, and *The Awful Truth* with Cary Grant and Irene Dunne. The scenes with Dogberry and his men find ready counterparts in early movies featuring the Keystone Kops and the Marx Brothers. If *Much Ado* were only a play depicting its characters as products of their circumstances and the situations they encounter, the play would seem quite shallow and would probably not be popular today. However, most of the complications and problems are resolved through psychological growth in several characters rather than merely through changes in circumstances. Most Shakespeare authorities agree that the word 'nothing' in the play's title is purposely ambiguous. In Elizabethan times, 'nothing' was pronounced much like 'noting,' which means not only taking note or observing, but also overhearing or intentionally eavesdropping — actions around which the plot turns and twists.

### Summary

The governor of Messina, Leonato, recently received a letter alerting him to the impending arrival of Don Pedro and his troops in Messina. The messenger also tells him that during the most recent fights, a young man by the name of Claudio gained a lot of notoriety. Leonato's niece Beatrice finds out that Benedick is also in the army when she inquires about him. Leonato accepts Don Pedro's invitation to remain with his men in Messina for a month when he arrives and says hello. Meanwhile, Claudio informs his buddy Benedick that he has fallen in love with Hero, Leonato's daughter. Benedick mocks Hero's appearance and laughs at the idea of

Claudio falling in love. Benedick makes it clear that he will never marry or be made fun of. After talking with Leonato, Don Pedro gets word from Benedick that Hero is the object of Claudio's affections. That evening at the masquerade ball, he makes the offer to court her on Claudio's behalf before approaching Leonato about setting up a marriage. This plan excites Claudio, who accepts it.

Antonio, Leonato's elder brother, informs him that Don Pedro and Claudio were having a conversation in the garden, overheard by one of his manservants. Antonio tells Leonato that his servant says Don Pedro is going to court Hero that evening and propose marriage if he thinks she's suitable. This news excites Leonato, who departs to inform his daughter about the potential engagement. Don Pedro's bastard brother, Don John, is also aware of Don Pedro's scheme to court Hero. He is aware, though, that Don Pedro intends to give her to Claudio, a guy he despises. To get Claudio to believe that Don Pedro is courting Hero so he may have her all to himself, Don John devises a scheme. Hero has been informed by Leonato that Don Pedro will court her that evening and force her to accept his advances. When the soldiers get to the ball, Don Pedro grabs Hero and they start dancing. After they dance, Beatrice calls Benedick the Prince's jester, among other derogatory remarks. Concurrently, Don John and his companion Borachio come to Claudio, informing him that they had heard Don Pedro discussing his intention to seduce Hero for himself. This news crushes Claudio.

Claudio is so distraught about losing Hero that he lashes out at Benedick and walks away when he tries to bring him outside. When Don Pedro finally shows up, he asks Benedick what's wrong. Don Pedro refutes Benedick's claim that it was inhumane to court Hero before robbing her of Claudio. Then, Benedick gripes that Beatrice referred to him as the prince's jester. Benedick bolts at the sight of Leonato and Beatrice, who are brought back by Claudio. Don Pedro tells Claudio that Leonato has approved of their marriage and that he was successful in courting Hero on his behalf. Claudio is speechless and at a loss for words. Hero doesn't say anything either. The men decide to schedule the wedding for seven days after Beatrice departs. Next, Don Pedro devises a scheme to get Benedick and Beatrice to fall in love. When he asks the others to cooperate, they consent to assist him.

Don John is enraged that Claudio was able to make everything work out. He finds out via his pal Borachio that there may yet be a chance to ruin the wedding. Don John is informed by

Borachio that he is friendly with Margaret, one of Hero's attendants. He believes it would be simple to persuade Margaret to come closer to him by standing in front of Hero's chamber window. Don John approves of the plan since he knows that Claudio will believe Margaret to be Hero if he witnesses Borachio seeing her in Hero's room. If the plot works, Don John will give Borachio a thousand ducats. When Benedick notices Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio getting closer, he is in Leonato's garden. After observing him disappear behind some woods, they move to a location where he can hear them. They act as though Beatrice is deeply in love with Benedick and that she won't be able to tell him before she passes away. Following their departure, Benedick emerges and remarks that he cannot let his reputation suffer by not returning Beatrice's affection.

Subsequently, Margaret is sent by Hero and Ursula, one of Hero's servants, to inform Beatrice that she heard them chatting about her in the garden. Beatrice follows her into the garden, hides herself there, and listens in on their talk because she believes her. After that, Hero and Ursula act as though Benedick is deeply in love with Beatrice. Hero says he won't tell her since he knows Beatrice will treat him with contempt, like she always does. Following their departure, Beatrice reappears and promises the audience that she will love Benedick back out of fear for her reputation. Don Pedro and Claudio tease Benedick, who has become quite serious since finding out that Beatrice is in love with him. Don Pedro remarks that Benedick must be talking to him about Beatrice when he eventually draws Leonato aside to discuss a serious matter. When Don John gets there, he informs Claudio that he has evidence that Hero is not being loyal to him. Don John persuades Claudio to go into the garden that evening to spy on Hero's chamber window, even though Claudio doesn't trust him.

In charge of the night watchmen, Dogberry and Verges bid their soldiers good night and instruct them to rouse them only in case of emergency. After designating one of the watchmen as the leader, they depart. Conrad and Borachio arrive shortly afterward. Borachio informs Conrad that he visited Margaret in Hero's chamber as the watchman listens to all they say. Claudio believed that Hero was seeing someone else while he observed the entire scene. Conrad is told with a chuckle by Borachio that Don John gave him a thousand ducats in exchange for the trick. Emerging from his hiding spot, the watchman takes the two men into custody on the Prince's behalf.

Dogberry goes to Leonato the following morning and tells him that he nabbed two shady persons the previous evening. Dogberry is instructed to handle it by Leonato, who informs him that he does not have time to question the guys. Friar Francis queries Claudio about his intention to wed Hero at the wedding. Saying no, Claudio goes on to tell that he witnessed Hero the previous evening with another man. Hero passes out while Don Pedro continues to support his story. Leonato is embarrassed by the allegation and wishes Hero had passed away to spare her the humiliation. Friar Francis informs them that he observed Hero at the time of her accusation and believes she is innocent. When Hero wakes up, she tells her father that she doesn't know who Claudio is referring to. If Leonato is telling the truth, he will exact revenge.

Astutely, Friar Francis instructs Leonato to act as though Hero has passed away. In this manner, Leonato is able to convert the derision of the village into empathy and induce shame in Claudio for his actions. When everyone else has left the church, Benedick and Beatrice stay behind. Benedick swears to do everything for Beatrice, and they both profess their love for one another. He grudgingly consents to challenge Claudio to a duel after she gives him the command to murder Claudio. In an attempt to force them to confess, Dogberry has hauled Borachio and Conrad before the town Sexton. They decline to assist. The watchman who heard them is then forced by the sexton to explain what they said. The Sexton informs them that Don John fled covertly that morning following Hero's fainting and death, and he discloses the scheme against the hero. It is ordered that the men be chained and brought to Leonato's.

On the street, Leonato and Antonio run across Don Pedro and Claudio. Claudio is challenged to a duel by Leonato right away because he killed his daughter and disgraced him. Antonio moves up to challenge them as well, but Don Pedro laughs at the challenge. To stop his brother, Leonato tries. Don Pedro will not listen to them and will not accept the challenge because he believes it to be beneath his dignity. Then Benedick shows up, challenging Claudio to a duel. Don Pedro and Claudio tease him about his anger and declare that he is insane. Benedick gives Claudio his challenge once more before walking away. Borachio arrives with Dogberry and the constables. When Don Pedro sees the men, he knows they are his brother's friends, who Benedick had told him had fled. When Borachio divulges the full scheme against Hero, Claudio and Don Pedro react fearfully and with guilt.

After learning from the Sexton that Don John was planning to harm Hero's reputation, Leonato returns. He finds out that Don Pedro and Claudio were unintentionally lured into the conspiracy since they were unaware that it was a plot. Claudio is forced by Leonato to write an epitaph for Hero's grave and to make a marriage vow to Antonio's daughter, Hero's cousin. Leonato makes all the women wear masks on the following wedding day so the guys won't be able to identify them. After arriving, Claudio waits to see his prospective wife. Antonio hands him Hero, who is disguised and unknown to him. He is taken aback when she removes her mask, exclaiming, "There's another hero!"

Then Benedick requests to visit Beatrice. He asks her whether she loves him once she removes her mask. The woman responds, "No more than reason" (5.4.74). When Benedick confirms this to her, they both come to the realisation that their pals had duped them into believing the other was in love. But before they can break up, Claudio and Hero present sonnets that Benedick and Beatrice had written to one another. Benedick consents to marry Beatrice, remarking that their handwriting contradicts what they just said. Turning to Don Pedro, Claudio and Benedick advise him to get a wife and settle down. At the very end, a messenger shows up to let them know that Don John has been taken prisoner and sent back to Messina. He will be punished in the morning, Benedick swears.

### **Character List: Leonato:**

Leonato was the Italian Renaissance city of Messina's governor. The majority of the play is set in and around Leonato's estate and house. In addition to being Don Pedro and his group's host, he is also the father of Hero, Beatrice's uncle and guardian. From the opening scene to the very end, Leonato serves as a unifying figure for the play's plot lines. He is amiable and simple, influenced by the appearances and opinions of others.

**Don Pedro** - A prince of Aragon (spelled Arragon in some editions), a region of northeast Spain (which helps explain why he carries the Spanish title of respect, Don). Like Leonato, Don Pedro is a linking character, playing key roles first in the wooing of Hero for Claudio, then in the deceptions of both Beatrice and Benedick, and finally as an unwitting eyewitness to Don John's staging of Hero's unfaithfulness. He apparently likes to control events around him but in fact becomes a victim of them and seems the lesser for being deceived.

**Hero** - Leonato's daughter and the future bride of Claudio. Calm, conservative, submissive, and innocent, she unknowingly falls prey to Don John's scheme to wreak havoc for Don Pedro and Claudio. Her allegiances are quickly switched; she was first inclined to accept Don Pedro's seeming proposal before going straight to Claudio. Later on, even after he humiliates her, she is ready to wed a contrite Claudio.

**Beatrice** - Beatrice was Leonato's orphaned niece who grew up as a second daughter in his home. Strong-willed, opinionated, and frank, she has developed a defence mechanism against Benedick through sarcasm, wit, disparagement, and seeming indifference because she was emotionally hurt by him in past interactions. Hero, her cousin, is under her guard.

**Claudio** - A young count from the city of Florence (he has an uncle in Messina) who is a companion to Don Pedro and has played a heroic part in the fight against Don John. Having admired Hero before going off to war, on his return he is much taken with her — and perhaps with her future inheritance. He seems immature and easily misled by the suggestions and actions of others, including Don Pedro, Don John, and Leonato. His affections are mercurial — back and forth between infatuation and rejection. He is committed to a personal code of ethics that prevents him from accepting a "tarnished" bride.

**Benedick** - Another soldier in Don Pedro's company, not a count like Claudio, but referred to respectfully as "signor." Benedick enjoyed the company of Beatrice at some earlier time but went away without any commitment, causing her to harden her attitudes about men and marriage — an appropriate match for Benedick's own attitudes about women and marriage. He is witty and often sarcastic, independent in spirit, loyal to friends — and not really the misogynist (woman hater) he appears to be. He is quite ready to believe that Beatrice loves him and is not afraid of changing his mind, even publicly.

**Don John** - Brother to Don Pedro. Because he was born outside of marriage, he has no official claim to any of his family's wealth or position. He tried to overthrow his brother in battle but lost. Now his brother's generosity in accepting him as part of his company grates on Don John's unaccommodating personality, and he longs to get back at his brother.

**Borachio** - One of Don John's personal followers. Borachio has had a personal relationship with Margaret, one of Hero's attendants. He uses this relationship for Don John's mischief and his own

personal profit by devising the deceptive "window scene." His later repentance seems to stem at least partly from a recognition that the deception went too far.

**Conrade (spelled Conrad in some editions)** - Another of Don John's personal followers.

**Balthasar** - A musician in Don Pedro's company.

**Antonio** - Brother of Leonato and a member of his household.

**Margaret** - One of two gentlewomen (maidservants) to Hero. Margaret's remarks often include sexual innuendoes. She is innocently misled by Borachio into the plot to deceive Claudio and Don Pedro.

**Ursula** - The second of Hero's maidservants. Ursula plays a small role in deceiving Beatrice about Benedick's love.

**Friar Francis** - The good friar who is to perform the marriage of Hero and Claudio. Friar Francis proposes the scheme to hide Hero after her denunciation, pretending she is dead.

Don Pedro's Company.

**Dogberry** - The constable of Messina, in charge of the night watch — a wonderfully comic figure. Dogberry may be a man of "low station" and rough habits, especially as demonstrated in his garbled speech, but his pride and his wit suggest that some of his actions and expressions may be intentionally ambiguous and provocative.

**Verges** - The deputy constable ("headborough") of Messina and Dogberry's constant companion.

**George Seacoal and Other Watchmen** - The words and actions of the watchmen make them seem more alert and intelligent than Dogberry and Verges. After all, they overhear Don John's plot with Borachio, report the misdeed, and provide testimony that convicts Borachio and ultimately Don John.

**Sexton** - A public official who records the testimony in a trial.

### **Themes: Marriage**

Early modern English comedies traditionally end with one or more marriages, and *Much Ado About Nothing* is no exception. However, marriage appears in the play as more than a

simple plot device. Marriage is central to the play's social fabric, and indeed Claudio intends to marry Hero almost as soon as he sees her. Still, other characters have a more playful approach to marriage, with the notion of fidelity becoming the butt of many of Benedick's jokes. Beatrice also has a unique stance, especially as a female character: she rejects marriage because she has seen too many women lose their autonomy once married. Thus, marriage serves as both an essential element of the play and an experience that affects each character differently.

### **Maturity**

Early on, the play establishes a striking gap between the younger characters like Claudio, Hero, Benedick, and Beatrice and the elder characters like Leonato and Don Pedro. The younger characters are immature and easily prone to wounded pride, naive to love and focused mainly on their own reputations. The older characters, by contrast, are shown as intelligent but also rather antiquated. Notably, the maturity of characters does not necessarily alter during the course of the play, demonstrating that immature behavior can often create more conflict and greater immaturity.

### **Deception**

Deception, lying, and otherwise manipulating are common themes in Shakespeare's plays. While in tragedies, deception tends to be the mark of a malicious or villainous character (think Iago in *Othello*), comedies that feature deception plots offer a much more ambivalent reading of characters lying to one another. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, deceptive behavior is at times malicious (as in the case of Don John's scheme to disrupt the happiness of Claudio and Hero) and at other times playful and benevolent. Consider, for example, how the friends of Beatrice and Benedick deceive them in order to bring them closer together. As such, the play prompts the audience to consider the utility of deception at the same time it encourages one to be wary of characters' particular motives.

### **Love**

In a play with such a heavy focus on marriage, it is fitting that love would also play an important role. However, somewhat paradoxically, love is of secondary concern to the characters most of the time. Claudio and Hero, for example, are not necessarily in love: their marriage is presented as a dutiful formality, and their love a by-product of that ceremony. Even Beatrice and Benedick – who bicker like long-time lovers – only come to acknowledge their feelings for one

another after being manipulated (successfully) by their friends. Thus, the play presents love as largely incidental; it is not the driving force behind characters' decisions but rather something that appears as a consequence of other plot developments.

### **Reputation**

The characters in *Much Ado About Nothing* are invested in cultivating their own reputations and destroying others, but the play showcases how reputation is a fundamentally unstable concept. Hero's reputation, for example, is destroyed as quickly as it is created when Don John maliciously plots against her. Other characters are introduced to the audience through report (a common dramatic device on the early modern stage) that then turns out to be at odds with their true character. The play therefore emphasizes how reputation is more often crafted by others than by oneself, and therefore how it cannot be trusted in evaluating someone's character.

### **Gender**

Gender plays a key role in *Much Ado About Nothing* because of the unusual manner it develops expectations for all characters, not just women or simply males. Both female and male characters accept the notion that a potential mate will be disloyal (thus all the jokes about cuckoldry, or men whose wives have committed infidelity). Beatrice, who rejects marriage because of the expectations it would put on her as a woman, in turn has her own expectations for the ideal husband. Thus, gender in the play often appears through a rather ironic lens, as the characters' expectations of one another suggest that gender is a prescribed social role.

### **Communication**

Language and communication are always crucial parts in early modern play, as the way characters speak with one another dictates the plot development. In this play, however, communication is less crucial to the events than miscommunication: individuals misread, misinterpret, and misunderstand one another throughout the play, and these mistakes are what accelerate the conflict. Furthermore, language is inherently a form of hiding and deception; characters that utilise strong language in the play are almost always lying about their genuine goals, attempting to disguise the truth with rhetoric. Thus, the play supports mistrust in the audience when it comes to characters' statements coinciding with their actions and views.

## UNIT IV – TRAGEDY

### KING LEAR – SHAKESPEARE

#### **About the Play**

King Lear was originally printed in 1608. This initial printing is now referred to as the First Quarto. Another Quarto version was issued in 1619, and King Lear appeared again in a 1623 Folio edition. The First Quarto contains 300 lines not found in the Folio, whereas the Folio contains 100 lines not found in the First Quarto. Because significant discrepancies exist between the Quarto and Folio editions, several contemporary anthologies of Shakespeare's works contain play text from both editions, and may additionally include a conflated edition created from a combination of both the First Quarto and Folio copies.

Although the text was not written until 1608, the play was performed in December 1606. The actual year of composition is not known, so researchers frequently try to base the period in time on references in the play itself. Due to this uncertainty as well as the linguistic references, King Lear could have been composed between 1604 and 1606.

In Elizabethan England, the well-known legend of King Lear and his daughters was widely accepted as historical fact, having been drawn from the annals of ancient British history. It's possible that a historical court case deserves recognition for adding to the drama. Two daughters tried to have their father declared crazy in order to inherit his wealth, a move that received a lot of media attention. Cordell, the youngest daughter, opposed.

There may have been some interest in bringing back a well-known plot due to the name and narrative's resemblance. However, King Lear's story appears in a number of books, so Shakespeare might have looked elsewhere for information on this old tale.

The tale of Lear can be found in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, which was released circa 1135. This literature provides information about the monarchs of pre-Christian ancient Britain. Years later, Raphael Holinshed retells Lear's story in *Chronicles of England*, published in 1577. In this version, Cordelia and Lear both survive the betrayal of their sisters. After her father passes away, Cordelia takes the throne as his heir, but she subsequently ends her life in prison. The name Albany is introduced in the John Higgins 1574 edition of

Mirror for Magistrates. Additionally, there is a narrative about Cordelia in which she commits herself, which does not happen in the older play. Edmund Spenser's 1590 epic poem *The Faerie Queene*, which features Cordelia's hanging suicide, is another telling of the Lear narrative. Sir Philip Sidney's poem "Arcadia" from 1590, which tells the story of an ageing prince who is blinded by his illegitimate son but is eventually saved by his rightful son, may have served as inspiration for the Gloucester narrative. This source serves as the basis for many of the events that Gloucester experiences.

Although no trace of its publishing exists until the 1605 edition, the *True Chronicle of King Leir* is first recorded in the Stationers' registry in 1594. Shakespeare's *Lear* and the tale of the ancient Leir both lack the Christian foundation that this source, though it has the essential elements of the Lear story, does. Though there isn't as much overt emphasis on Christianity as there is in Shakespeare's primary text, many historians do discover plenty of evidence of Christian ideology in *King Lear*. The pleasant ending of the classic play rewards good deeds and punishes wickedness, so strengthening Christian belief in the justice of God. Shakespeare lets his audience consider the nature of God and divine justice rather than providing such simple solutions. Shakespeare combined historical narratives and his own words, as he frequently did when referencing other authors' works, to build the framework of his own *King Lear*.

## **Summary**

The dialogue between the earls of Kent and Gloucester in the prologue of *King Lear* reveals to the spectator that Gloucester is father to two sons: Edgar, who is his legitimate successor, and Edmund, his younger illegitimate son. The secondary or subplot will be revealed by this information. King Lear then appears to declare his intention to abdicate all responsibilities and worries in life. Lear informs the audience, pointing to a map, that he has split his kingdom into three portions, which will be distributed to his three daughters according to how much love each of them has professed. Goneril and Regan, the two older daughters, tell their father that their love for him is beyond everything that is reasonable, which is an exaggeration of their feelings. Cordelia, Lear's youngest daughter, confesses her love for him on the condition that a daughter only love a father. Feeling betrayed and dissatisfied by Cordelia's apparent lack of commitment, Lear splits his kingdom equally between Goneril and Regan and banishes Cordelia. Later, France consents to wed Cordelia, who has been banished and is now

dowerless. Kent gets banished by Lear for trying to stand up for Cordelia. In the meantime, Goneril and Regan determine that they will have to decide what disciplinary measures to take if Lear starts to bother them too much.

Edmund laments in the escalating subplot about being an illegitimate son and being disinherited. Edmund presents a fictitious letter to his father, Gloucester, claiming that Edgar is suggesting that they kill their father and divide the fortune equally as part of his scheme to take credit for something that is not truly his. With ease, the crafty Edmund persuades his father that Edgar cannot be relied upon.

Lear relocates to Goneril's palace shortly after. Goneril informs Lear that he requires a smaller regiment that is more appropriate for the king's age and rank and behaves more decorously. The enraged monarch threatens to gather his subjects and relocate to Regan's mansion. As his rage grows, Lear curses Goneril's womb by calling on nature. Goneril responds by revealing fifty members of Lear's entourage.

In the course of the subplot, Edmund slightly injures himself while acting as though Edgar has attacked him. Gloucester swears to find a way to make Edmund his heir, knowing full well that Edgar will attempt to assassinate him as well. Edgar makes the decision to assume the identity of Poor Tom, a Bedlam beggar, after making his getaway into the woods. Cornwall, in the meantime, commands that an enraged Kent be put in the stocks. When Lear arrives, he soon discovers that Regan has joined Goneril in his attempt to usurp Lear's power. Lear tells his daughters that he provided them all they have today, but they don't seem to care. Calling for his horse in a fit of rage, Lear rides into the storm with his Fool by his side for safety. The Fool, who is out in the storm, tries to talk sense into his monarch, but Lear would not listen, especially not in front of his daughters. Edgar, posing as Poor Tom, soon joins the king and Fool.

Unaware that he is disclosing the intentions to a traitor, Gloucester informs Edmund of the scheme to save the king. Edmund decides right away to inform Cornwall of the scheme. Edmund soon gets the estates and title of Gloucester as his reward. Regan and Cornwall torment the trapped Gloucester, pulling off his beard and gouging out his eyes, but not before one of Cornwall's attendants draws a sword and stabs Cornwall, who later succumbs to his wounds.

Later, when one of his tenants leads a blindfolded Gloucester inside, Edgar is equally shocked and appalled. Gloucester is led by the disguised Edgar to the cliff he is looking for, where he tricks Gloucester into believing he is standing on a precipice. Edgar has no trouble persuading his father that he has somehow survived a fall from the cliffs after Gloucester jumps and passes out. When Oswald shows up, Edgar kills him instead of killing Gloucester. Oswald hands Edgar a note from Goneril as he lies dying, telling Edmund to kill Albany so she can marry Edmund without hindrance.

Goneril and Edmund quickly discover that Albany has undergone a transformation; he is now happy to hear of France's planned invasion but unhappy to discover that his younger son Edmund has taken Gloucester's place. In the meantime, Cordelia comes to England with an army to protect her father after learning of the worsening mental state of her father. A little while later, Cordelia and her father get back together. Edmund decides that Lear and Cordelia will perish despite Albany's best efforts to keep them alive. Edmund gives the order to put Lear and Cordelia in jail. Edmund is joined by Albany, Goneril, and Regan, and a fight breaks out amongst the four of them. After Edmund's betrayal is exposed, he fights with Edgar - whom Edmund does not acknowledge as his brother - and gets hurt. Goneril poisons Regan soon after, and she ends her own life. Edmund acknowledges that the accusations made against him are true now that he is dying, and he is looking for his killer. Edgar announces the passing of their father, Gloucester, and acknowledges his brotherly ancestry.

Edmund discloses his and Goneril's scheme to have Lear and Cordelia killed and to have Cordelia's death appear to be a suicide. Edmund claims he wants some good to come from so much death. It's too late to reverse these commands, as Lear soon arrives with a lifeless Cordelia. The king also passes away, his body covering that of his youngest daughter, unable to accept Cordelia's death. Kent responds that he will soon depart from this world to be with his master when Albany tells him and Edgar that they must now control the kingdom together. Edgar is left to discuss the depressing consequences of these occurrences, which everyone must now bear.

### **Character List**

**King Lear** - King of Britain. Lear is the protagonist whose willingness to believe empty flattery leads to the deaths of many people.

**Goneril** - Lear's eldest daughter who, after professing her deep love for her father, betrays him and plots his murder.

**Regan** - Lear's second daughter. Regan joins forces with Goneril to destroy their father. Regan initially appears less harsh than her elder sister, but in the end, she proves to be as blood-thirsty as Goneril.

**Cordelia** - Lear's youngest daughter. Cordelia genuinely loves her father, but her refusal to flatter him leads to her tragic death.

**Fool** - Loyal member of the king's court. The Fool assumes the role of protector to Lear when Cordelia is banished.

**Earl of Gloucester** - Lear's cohort and loyal friend. Gloucester is a foolish old man whose inability to see the truth in his youngest son's words parallels Lear's own difficulties with Goneril and Regan.

**Earl of Kent / Caius** - Lear's loyal friend and supporter. Although banished, Kent disguises himself as Caius in an effort to stay close to his king.

**Edgar / Poor Tom** - Gloucester's older son. Edgar is Gloucester's only legitimate heir, but he must flee and hide from his father, disguised as Poor Tom, when he comes under suspicion.

**Edmund** - Gloucester's younger, illegitimate, son. He is an opportunist whose ambitions lead him to form a union with Goneril and Regan.

**Duke of Albany** - Goneril's husband. Albany grows in stature during the play and ultimately finds the strength to resist his wife's efforts to have Lear killed.

**Duke of Cornwall** - Regan's brutal husband. Cornwall is vicious and savage as he tries to eliminate Lear and Gloucester.

**Oswald** - Goneril's steward. Oswald is a willing accomplice to Goneril's plotting and proves a foil to Kent's devotion to Lear.

**Curan** - Gloucester's servant.

**King of France** - Marries Cordelia. France is honorable and willing to support Cordelia's efforts to rescue her father.

**Duke of Burgundy** - Suitor for Cordelia. Burgundy rejects Cordelia when he discovers that she will bring him no dowry.

**Old Man** - Tenant of Gloucester.

**Servants to Cornwall** - Cornwall's retainers, who attack him in defense of Gloucester.

**Doctor** - Attendant to Cordelia.

## **Themes**

### **Inheritance**

The idea of inheritance is at the centre of King Lear's main conflict. Before giving his three daughters their share of his property, Lear wants to test their allegiance at the start of the play. The possibility of this inheritance is what drives Goneril and Regan's uncivilised actions, but it's also Lear's self-serving means of maintaining control over his three daughters. The bequest that is suggested at the play's opening serves as a metaphor for Lear's final avenue of authority.

### **Order**

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### **Chaos**

Predictably, Lear's plan in Act One to impose order on his three daughters quickly disintegrates, in part because of Lear's own ego. Once Cordelia confesses her true, but misunderstood, loyalty to her father, Lear strips Cordelia of her inheritance altogether. This decision is what leads to Goneril and Regan's betrayal of Lear and the general breakdown of

order in the play. His decision also catalyzes his own descent into madness and his ultimate demise.

### **Aging**

Contemporary renditions of King Lear typically showcase Lear as a visibly aged character, emphasising his physical deterioration as the play goes on. The play's tensions and storylines revolve around this theme of ageing, as Lear's advanced age causes him to become anxious and incites avarice in Goneril and Regan, who ultimately turn against him for their own gain. Ironically, Lear pushes himself farther into senility in an attempt to hold onto family and political power despite his physical decline.

### **Madness**

Many people characterise Lear's development throughout the play as a descent from strict authority figure to lunatic. In fact, Lear's incident at Dover Beach is frequently cited as proof of his diminished sense of reality. It's crucial to remember, though, that in his apparently failing state, Lear learns from his failures as a parent and a king. Ironically, Lear's "mad" digressions even start to sound like the fool's comments, who is frequently regarded as the play's wisest character.

### **Sight and Blindness**

The drama is full of images of darkness, blindness, and brightness. This concentration is a mirror of the figurative "blindness" that both Gloucester and Lear are guilty of, as they both make grave mistakes about their children at the start of the play and then suffer the repercussions. Act Three literally renders Gloucester blind due to Regan and Cornwall, but Lear, strangely, acquires metaphorical "sight" as he spirals farther out of control. But Gloucester, like Lear, does not acquire a kind of "sight" until he really loses his sight, highlighting the fact that truth frequently only becomes apparent after the fact.

### **Justice and Nihilism**

King Lear is frequently cited as a play that is fixated on justice and punishment: Goneril and Regan's vicious behaviour finally results in their murder-suicide; Lear blinds Gloucester for possible treason; and Cordelia loses her inheritance as a result of Lear's misinterpretation of her declaration of love. The extreme number of fatalities and harsh penalties are typical for the

tragedy subgenre. The play, however, makes the basic argument that these deaths were caused by miscommunication, misunderstandings, and uncertainties. Because of this, many contend that *King Lear* portrays a nihilistic perspective on the world, one in which all values—including the idea of justice—are fundamentally useless.

### **Doubling**

Doubling (to create either oppositions or parallels) adds tremendously to the *King Lear* experience. At various times, fools are contrasted with wise men, reason is set opposite to nature, the upper class is set apart from the beggar, and the family is paralleled with by society. False service, as in the case of Oswald, is contrasted with true service, represented by Kent. The selfish and false love of Regan and Goneril is a foil for the honest devotion of Cordelia.

### **Parent-Child Relationship**

The audience is aware of father-child disputes and fathers who are easily tricked by their kids throughout. By dismissing a decent child and believing a dishonest child, each father exhibits bad judgement. Act I, Scene I's subsequent events demonstrate how accurate Regan's statements will turn out to be. As Goneril and Regan work to limit Lear's authority and retinue size, it will soon become clear to both the characters and the spectator just how little he knows and understands his daughters.

### **Character Analysis - King Lear**

The main character is Lear, who causes numerous deaths by accepting his elder daughters' hollow flattery. Lear proves that he lacks common sense and the ability to recognise his older daughters' deceit by depending solely on the test of their love. Lear is unable to discern Cordelia's candour from the flattery he so desperately needs. The intensity of Lear's rage at his loyalist Kent suggests an overabundance of pride—Lear won't admit he's wrong. Hubris causes Lear to make a grave error in judgement, and his outburst of rage towards Kent also betrays a fragile mental state. The Greek word for excessive and harmful pride is hubris. Hubris frequently led to the tragic hero's demise in the realm of ancient Greece. This is obviously the case with Lear, who lets his inflated ego ruin his family.

The play allows the audience to witness Lear's problem-solving techniques throughout. Since Lear is king and expects to be obeyed, he is shocked when people do not comply as they

have in the past. But rather than confronting the difficulties, Lear turns to the Fool for amusement to help him forget about them. Despite being taunted and humiliated in his capacity as king, he is ill-prepared to deal with the perpetrators. Rather, Lear frequently reacts to issues with rage, profanity, and, when provoked, physical violence. When insults are directed at him, Lear is defenceless, at the mercy of his daughter and her attendants, and he frequently gives in to hopelessness and self-pity. The monarch, who was formerly supreme, finds it difficult to cope with his diminished authority.

The king eventually confesses that, despite his fears and anxieties for the future, he will not bow to the judgement of others. Even if he makes bad or risky decisions, Lear still wants to be in control of his own fate. Lear has to maintain some degree of control, so he decides to brave the storm. Lear believes there is no other option except to submit to his daughters' authority, and that is not a decision he should make. This is only one more way that Lear, who is obstinate like a mischievous child, tries to cope with the things that are in charge of his life. Like a child running from an unforgiving reality, Lear runs into the storm.

Lear is a complicated guy whose punishment far outweighs his careless mistakes, and as such, he deserves the audience's sympathy despite his dejection and self-pity. Ultimately, Lear shows guilt, regret, empathy, and compassion for the impoverished, a group that Lear had not before acknowledged. Since Lear concentrates on the similarities between the impoverished and his own life, his sympathy for them is really a mirror of his own feelings of sympathy for his own predicament.

As God's incarnate and anointed king, Lear bears some of the burden of enforcing justice on earth. He understands that he is equally accountable for the troubles he faces as well as those of others. Recognising his role in the subsequent events is a critical first step towards taking accountability and admitting his fallibility. Lear has discovered via his own suffering that even he is subject to God's justice.

## UNIT V – HISTORICAL

### ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA – SHAKESPEARE

#### **About the Play**

Scholars believe that Shakespeare wrote *Antony and Cleopatra* in 1606, immediately after *Macbeth*, and it is one of the last great tragedies that Shakespeare produced. The most geographically sweeping of Shakespeare's plays, *Antony and Cleopatra*'s setting is the entire Roman Empire, its backdrop the well-documented history of Octavius Caesar, Mark Antony, and Cleopatra. Shakespeare's primary source for *Antony and Cleopatra* was the *Life* of Marcus Antonius contained in Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, which was translated into English by Sir Thomas North in 1579.

North's language was so rich that Shakespeare incorporated large, relatively unchanged excerpts of it into his text. The plot of the play also remains close to North's history, although characters like Enobarbus and Cleopatra's attendants are largely Shakespearean creations.

The action of the story takes place roughly two years after the events of Shakespeare's earlier play about the Roman Empire, *Julius Caesar*. At the beginning of that tragedy, Caesar has triumphed over his rival Pompey the Great, the father of young Pompey in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and aspires to kingship. Caesar is then assassinated by Cassius and Brutus, who hope to preserve the Roman Republic. Instead, Cassius and Brutus are defeated by Mark Antony and Octavius Caesar, Julius's nephew, who then join Marcus Aemilius Lepidus to create a three-man government, or triumvirate, over the empire.

Historically, the action of *Antony and Cleopatra* takes place over a ten-year span, whereas in the play the story is compressed to fit the needs of the stage. Antony is clearly much older than he was in *Julius Caesar*, and his political instincts seem to be waning. Octavius Caesar was only a minor character in the earlier play, but here he comes into his own as the man who will rise to become the first Roman emperor, reigning as Caesar Augustus from 27 BCE until his death in 14 CE. Most of the political battles and machinations depicted are historically accurate, as is the romance of the title characters.

## Summary

One of the three Roman Empire emperors, Mark Antony, spends his time in Egypt enjoying a life of extravagance and having an affair with Cleopatra, the stunning queen. Antony makes the decision to go back to Rome after receiving word that his wife Fulvia has passed away and that Pompey is organising an army to overthrow the triumvirate. Octavius Caesar and Lepidus, the other triumvirs, are concerned about Pompey's growing power while Antony is away. Caesar chastises Antony for putting his luxurious lifestyle by Cleopatra's side above his responsibilities as a statesman and military officer.

Antony feels obligated to return to Rome after learning of his wife's passing and the impending fight. He and Caesar fight when he gets there, and Lepidus makes a vapid attempt to patch things up. Understanding that they must work together to defeat Pompey, Antony and Caesar decide that Antony would wed Caesar's sister, Octavia, in order to bolster their mutual allegiance. The closest friend of Antony, Enobarbus, tells Caesar's troops that Antony will undoubtedly go back to Cleopatra despite the marriage.

When Cleopatra finds out about Antony's marriage in Egypt, she becomes enraged with jealousy. But after hearing from a messenger that Octavia is unremarkable and unglamorous, Cleopatra gains confidence that she will win Antony back. The triumvirs meet with Pompey and amicably resolve their differences. In return for control over Sardinia and Sicily, Pompey promises to maintain the status quo. To commemorate their truce, the four men have a drink that evening. When one of Pompey's troops reveals to him a plot to kill the triumvirs and seize control of the globe, Pompey rejects the idea as a betrayal of his honour. In the meantime, one of Antony's generals defeats the Parthia kingdom.

Octavia and Antony leave for Athens. Once they are gone, Pompey is defeated by Caesar, who breaches their truce and declares war on him. He charges Lepidus of treason, imprisons him, and seizes his belongings after employing Lepidus's troops to win. Both this news and the rumours that Caesar has been publicly criticising him infuriate Antony. Octavia begs Antony to keep her brother and her relationship amicable. She claims that her feelings for Caesar and Antony would be severely divided if they were to battle. After sending her on a peace mission to Rome, Antony swiftly returns to Egypt and Cleopatra. There, he musters a sizable army to oppose Caesar, who is enraged at Antony's treatment of his sister and retaliates accordingly.

Caesar sends orders for his navy and soldiers to Egypt. Despite Enobarbus's adamant protestations, Antony chooses to attack him at sea, disregarding all advice to the contrary and granting Cleopatra command of a ship. When Cleopatra's ship flees and Antony's follows, leaving the rest of the fleet defenceless, Antony's forces lose the battle.

Dejected, Antony swiftly forgives Cleopatra despite her having brought him into disgrace. Together, he and Cleopatra write a letter to their conqueror, in which Antony demands permission to reside in Egypt and Cleopatra pleads that her kingdom be given to her legitimate successors. Caesar denies Antony's request, but in the event that Cleopatra betrays her beloved, he guarantees her a fair trial. When Antony storms in, cursing her for her betrayal and ordering the messenger to be whipped, Cleopatra appears to be considering Caesar's message. Shortly after Antony pardons Cleopatra, Enobarbus declares his master's work is over and abandons him to join Caesar's army.

In combat with Caesar's army, Antony unexpectedly prevails. Upon discovering Enobarbus's desert, Antony bemoans his own misfortune, feeling that it has tainted a man of honour. After sending his friend's belongings to Caesar's army, he comes back to Cleopatra to celebrate his triumph. Enobarbus falls under the weight of his remorse and passes away, devastated by humiliation at his own betrayal. Another day, a new fight, and another encounter at sea between Antony and Caesar. Once more, the Egyptian fleet shows its treachery by giving up the battle and leaving Antony to lose. Antony swears to assassinate Cleopatra after becoming convinced that she has betrayed him. She isolates herself in her monument and announces her suicide as a means of self-defense. Grieving, Antony makes the decision to go to the afterlife with his queen. He gives an order to one of his attendants to kill him in order to keep his word to provide unquestionable service.

Instead, the attendant takes his own life. Then, Antony trips over his own sword, although the injury is not life-threatening right away. The lovers are momentarily reunited at Cleopatra's monument before Antony's demise after he is taken there. After taking the queen prisoner, Caesar intended to exhibit her in Rome as a symbol of the power of his empire. However, the queen discovered his scheme and used multiple deadly snakes to end her own life. She is interred next to Antony by Caesar.

## **Character List**

**Mark Antony** - Along with Lepidus and Octavius Caesar, Mark Antony is a middle-aged Roman general who leads the Roman Empire. He struggles to balance the responsibilities of becoming the world's ruler with his feelings for Cleopatra.

**Octavius Caesar** - Octavius Caesar is only in his early twenties, but he is determined to become the only ruler of the Roman Empire. He is the adopted son of Julius Caesar, his grand-uncle.

**Lepidus** - As a member of the Triumvirate, he serves as a mediator between Antony and Caesar, the two rivals; he has no real power of his own.

**Cleopatra** - Although she is conscious of her responsibilities as Queen of Egypt, she is utterly enamoured with Antony. Her bravery is demonstrated when, after their loss, she decides to die in Egypt rather than be taken prisoner back to Rome.

**Octavia** - She proposes to Antony in an effort to solidify their political and military cease-fire with her brother, Caesar.

**Sextus Pompeius (Pompey)** - Sextus Pompeius, also known as Pompey, was a former Roman who departed Rome leading a group of pirates and members of Julius Caesar's navy. He made an attempt to establish his own country and managed to wreak havoc on the Triumvirate by stealing their ships.

**Enobarbus** - Antony's trusted lieutenant and close friend; eventually, he deserts the man he both admires and pokes fun at, yet he later commits suicide in remorse.

**Ventidius** - Another of Antony's officers, he is sent to fight the Parthians. He is a brave and capable general and is absolutely loyal to Antony.

**Searus** - Another of Antony's officers; he serves as Antony's aide after Enobarbus deserts his general.

**Dercetas** - Following Antony's suicide attempt, he is among the first to locate the man. Dercetas deserts to Caesar's group, believing that the adversary is on the verge of defeat thanks to Antony's sword.

**Demetrius and Philo** - These friends of Antony's are among those who go with him to Egypt. They long to see their general as he was before he fell in love and forgot about his political and military duties.

**Canidius** - He is a Lieutenant General to Antony, but he deserts Antony's camp for Caesar's faction after Antony's first major defeat.

**Euphronius** - He serves as an ambassador from Antony to Caesar.

**Fulvia** - She does not appear in the play, but she is Antony's first wife.

**Taurus** - As lieutenant General to Caesar, his strategies help Caesar to win the war against the forces of Antony and Cleopatra.

**Maecenas** - An officer and a friend of Caesar; when the triumvirs meet at the house of Lepidus in Rome to effect a truce, Maecenas is present.

**Agrippa** - Another friend of Caesar; along with Maecenas, he never judges Antony quite as lightly as does his general.

**Proculeius** - This friend of Caesar acts as a messenger and tells Cleopatra on behalf of Caesar that she need not be afraid for her welfare.

**Dolabella** - Unlike Proculeius, Dolabella sympathises with Cleopatra and cautions her that Caesar might not be sincere in his promises.

**Thyreus** - He also acts as a messenger, telling Cleopatra of Antony's defeat and Octavius's victory.

**Charmian** - She is one of Cleopatra's closest friends and court confidantes.

**Iras** - Another of Cleopatra's attendants.

**Alexas** - A servant of Cleopatra who acts as a messenger between her and Antony.

**Mardian** - This member of Cleopatra's entourage is a eunuch, a fact which Cleopatra enjoys teasing him about.

**Menas** - A pirate; he advises Pompey to take the triumvirs captive and have them murdered while they are attending a banquet aboard his ship.

**Menecrates** - As a chief officer of Pompey, he helps his general plan strategies.

**Varrus** - He is warlike and ambitious, like Pompey, but he is less unscrupulous than Menas.

**Eros and Gallus** - Eros is a friend of Antony's; Gallus is a friend of Caesar's.

**Silius** - An officer in Ventidius's army.

**Seleucus and Diomedes** - Attendants to Cleopatra.

**A Soothsayer** - A fortuneteller who tells Charmian that she will outlive Cleopatra.

### **Themes: History and Fate**

Compared to most of Shakespeare's plays, the course of events in Antony and Cleopatra is presented as more predetermined. Despite the fact that many plays make use of expectancy, prophesy, and fulfilment, soothsayers or astute observers like Enobarbus predict every action in this play. The forces of historical necessity, which call for one man to rule Rome alone, appear to be working together to pit Octavius against Antony. And even a reader who has never read the story before can tell right away that Octavius is going to prevail. In light of historical necessity, personal agency appears to be restricted, and the lovers' suicides in the end seem to be a last act of self-assertion—the only action available to them.

Shakespeare can present events as fated because he works with history, yet Plutarch is the source of the Soothsayer and his ominous prophecies. The soothsayer's use highlights the concept of fate, which can be interpreted in a variety of ways in a play based on actual events. We believe that Antony's downfall is predetermined and fated, as it has already occurred. The soothsayer's presence gives the historical event that is unfolding in front of us a frightening inevitability. Less logical ideas of fate and destiny are mixed up with historical processes. The soothsayer's presence gives history a supernatural quality that is outside the realm of human understanding.

## **Chaos**

Shakespeare's drama *Antony and Cleopatra* is frequently regarded as one of his most erratic works. In fact, it has more scene changes than any other play in Shakespeare's theatrical canon. As a result, the play's structure mirrors its deeper thematic questions: the play itself finds it difficult to keep up with Antony and Cleopatra's schemes and worldviews, even as they attempt to reconcile their connection with their various countries and systems of power. Throughout the play, there are misunderstandings and miscommunications that emphasise how difficult it is to combine the decadent variety of Egypt with the regulated and regular life of Rome.

## **Rome versus Egypt**

Shakespeare frequently draws comparisons between the Egyptian and Roman worlds. This play has more spatial leaps than any other Shakespearean drama; in a few short scenes, we travel from Egypt to Rome to Athens to various regions of the world. Shakespeare tackles a number of themes through Rome and Egypt, which are arranged according to oppositions: change versus the status quo, martial virtues versus self-indulgence, masculine authority versus feminine authority, and the ideals of a former Republic versus the ideals of despotism.

These dichotomies capture not only the characteristics shared by the two locations but also the transformations Antony experiences based on his location. In certain aspects, Antony is one man in Egypt and another in Rome. A delightful diversion from a life of military service and civic responsibility is Egypt, an exotic frontier. In Egypt, Antony is essentially in charge as a king—the kind of king more renowned for his avarice than for his capacity for governance. It is possible to draw comparisons with past historical periods where a large number of men have led lifestyles of hedonistic pleasure while serving their empires away from home. From debauched Frenchmen in Indochina to Romans in Egypt, men have been able to escape and live in luxury along imperial frontiers, enjoying a level of freedom that was unattainable for them back home. Between duty and desire, self-indulgence and soldiership, political ambition and the love of life and all its sensual delights, Antony is torn. Egypt appears to be Antony's favourite place to escape from his Roman identity. Even if the Romans find these emotions fascinating, Antony is free to give in to them in the East.

## **Duty and Honor**

Antony never manages to balance his personal desires with his Roman obligations. In Rome, the importance of duty is greatly valued. His soldierly persona is entirely undermined by his infatuation for Cleopatra. A part of him perishes at Actium when he is unable to fulfil his duty to his men. For Romans, duty and honour are intertwined. Roman standards of honour are distinctly male-oriented and had distinct expectations for men and women. Compared to Antony, Cleopatra is held to a far lower standard.

Throughout the play, many characters' definitions of honour either inspire or constrain them. Keep an eye out for the perspectives of Enobarbus, Antony, Pompey, Cleopatra, and Octavius on the many definitions of honour. Enobarbus views honour as the commitment of friends to one another, and his inability to uphold this ideal causes him to pass away from grief. When Antony realises too late that his honour as a Roman is dependent upon duty, he seeks to save his honour by using his bravery in battle. Pompey values honour so strongly that he is willing to give up ultimate power in favour of morality. Octavius does away with allegiance and bases his arguments on an ambition-driven definition of honour. His responsibility is to fate itself. Cleopatra lacks comprehension of Roman notions of honour and is frequently perplexed by Antony's descent into madness, as he is unable of comprehending the values he has neglected to maintain. However, she defines honour according to her own standards, which are based on the glitz and uniqueness of her own identity. With such self-centered honour, she refuses to be treated like a prize by Caesar and will instead be paraded across Rome.

## **Dynamic Change versus Static order**

This dichotomy is strongly related to the topic of historical necessity and fate, which has both transformative and destructive aspects. Egypt, controlled for centuries by the same family, is a stagnant world. This relative stability contrasts sharply with Rome, where the power structures are ever-shifting and many generals hold varying positions of authority. With the collapse of the Republic and the impending start of the new Empire, Rome is going through a very turbulent time. Rome becomes a metaphor for transformation because of its dynamic nature. While the pictures in Rome are full of significant developments that have an impact on the entire Mediterranean region, the ones in Egypt depict a rather serene status quo. Rome's presence indicates that Egypt is afflicted by both the constructive and destructive forces of change when it

is attacked towards the play's conclusion. Egypt will be eternally changed when old orders crumble and new ones are erected, more than 3,000-year-old pharaonic rule that has persisted in Egypt under various dynasties.

### **Masculinity versus Femininity**

Cleopatra's court is dominated by women. Rome is a world dominated by men. Rome is rife with fear of female dominance and is fixated on duty and military values. Alexandria is a paradise of pleasure, where the dominion of the feminine sovereign is unquestionable. It is evident that the Romans are fascinated by Cleopatra despite their distaste for her manipulation of Antony and their hasty dismissal of her as a cunning whore. Many of the Roman troops are eager to hear stories about Egypt's glories, especially Cleopatra, when Antony and his men return to Rome.

### **Republic versus Despotism**

Rome had a long history of citizenship as a republic. Egypt is both a sovereign and a subject country. Although they are both Romans and Enobarbus is under Antony's authority, he is free to express his opinions. Messengers are encouraged to communicate openly with Antony. When faced with the same circumstance, Cleopatra is not afraid to beat the one bringing unpleasant news. A Roman leader has to appease the rabble; Cleopatra doesn't need to win over her people by dressing like a goddess.