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COURSE WORK

**Theme: The characteristic features of Shakespearean
works**

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Plan:

- I. Introduction**
- II. The Main Part**

- 1. Biography of W. Shakespeare**
 - 1.1 Early life**
 - 1.2 London and theatrical career**
 - 1.3 Later years and death**
 - 1.4 Plays**
- 2. The characteristic features of the comedies**
- 3. The characteristic features of the tragedies**
- 4. The characteristic features of the histories**

Conclusion

Used literature

I. Introduction

The aim of the work is studying of characteristic features of Shakespearean works.

The tasks of the work:

1. Studying biography of William Shakespeare.
2. To analyze the moral values shown in the plays.
3. To investigate the peculiarities of feminine characterization in Shakespeare's comedies, tragedies, histories.

The actuality of the work.

The real actual character is based on the thesis that all Shakespeare's works remain up-to-day even though they had been written more than three centuries ago! One more actual character lies in purely linguistic features: The Great Bard introduced more than 10000 new English words and not in the last degree it concerns the adjectives which Shakespeare used when characterizing women in his comedies.

The **Renaissance** from French: *Renaissance* "re-birth", Italian: *Rinascimento*, from *rinascere* "to be reborn") was a cultural movement that spanned the period roughly from the 14th to the 17th century, beginning in Italy in the Late Middle Ages and later spreading to the rest of Europe. Though availability of paper and the invention of metal movable type sped the dissemination of ideas from the later 15th century, the changes of the Renaissance were not uniformly experienced across Europe.

As a cultural movement, it encompassed innovative flowering of Latin and vernacular literatures, beginning with the 14th-century resurgence of learning based on classical sources, which contemporaries credited to Petrarch, the development of

linear perspective and other techniques of rendering a more natural reality in painting, and gradual but widespread educational reform.

In politics, the Renaissance contributed the development of the conventions of diplomacy, and in science an increased reliance on observation. Historians often argue this intellectual transformation was a bridge between the Middle Ages and the Modern era. Although the Renaissance saw revolutions in many intellectual pursuits, as well as social and political upheaval, it is perhaps best known for its artistic developments and the contributions of such polymaths as Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo, who inspired the term "Renaissance man".

There is a consensus that the Renaissance began in Florence, Italy, in the 14th century.¹⁴¹ Various theories have been proposed to account for its origins and characteristics, focusing on a variety of factors including the social and civic peculiarities of Florence at the time; its political structure; the patronage of its dominant family, the Medici; and the migration of Greek scholars and texts to Italy following the Fall of Constantinople at the hands of the Ottoman Turks.

The Renaissance has a long and complex historiography, and in line with general scepticism of discrete periodizations, there has been much debate among historians reacting to the 19th-century glorification of the "Renaissance" and individual culture heroes as "Renaissance men", questioning the usefulness of *Renaissance* as a term and as a historical delineation. The art historian Erwin Panofsky observed of this resistance to the concept of *Renaissance*.

It is perhaps no accident that the factuality of the Italian Renaissance has been most vigorously questioned by those who are not obliged to take a professional interest in the aesthetic aspects of civilization— historians of economic and social developments, political and religious situations, and, most particularly, natural science— but only exceptionally by

students of literature and hardly ever by historians of Art.

Some have called into question whether the Renaissance was a cultural "advance" from the Middle Ages, instead seeing it as a period of pessimism and nostalgia for the classical age, while social and economic historians of the *longue duree* especially have instead focused on the continuity between the two eras, linked, as Panofsky himself observed, "by a thousand ties".

The word *Renaissance*, whose literal translation from French into English is "Rebirth", was first used and defined by French historian Jules Michelet (1798- 1874), in his 1855 work, *Uisloire de France*. The word *Renaissance* has also been extended to other historical and cultural movements, such as the Carolingian Renaissance and the Renaissance of the 12th century.

II. The Main Part 1. Biography of W. Shakespeare

1.1 Early life

William Shakespeare was the son of John Shakespeare, an alderman and a successful glover originally from Snutterfield, and Mary Arden, the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer. He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon and baptised there on 26 April 1564. His actual date of birth remains unknown, but is traditionally observed on 23 April, St George's Day. This date, which can lie traced back to an 18th-century scholar's mistake, has proved appealing to biographers, since Shakespeare died 23 April 1616. He was the third child of eight and the eldest surviving son.

Although no attendance records for the period survive, most biographers agree that Shakespeare was probably educated at the King's New School in Stratford, a free school chartered in 1553, about a quarter-mile from his home. Grammar schools varied in quality during the Elizabethan era, but grammar school curricula were largely similar, the basic Latin text was standardized by royal decree, and the school would have provided an intensive education in grammar based upon Latin classical authors.

At the age of 18, Shakespeare married the 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. The consistory court of the Diocese of Worcester issued a marriage license on 27 November 1582. The next day two of Hathaway's neighbours posted bonds guaranteeing that no lawful claims impeded the marriage. The ceremony may have been arranged in some haste, since the Worcester chancellor allowed the marriage banns to be read once instead of the usual three times, and six months after the marriage Anne gave birth to a daughter, Susanna, baptised 26 May 1583. Twins, son Hamnet and daughter Judith, followed almost two years later and were baptized 2 February 1585. Hamnet died of unknown causes at the age of 11 and was buried 11 August 1596.

After the birth of the twins, Shakespeare left few- historical traces until he is mentioned as part of the London theatre scene in 1592. The exception is the appearance of his name in the 'complaints bill' of a law case before the Queen's Bench court at Westminster dated Michaelmas Term 1588 and 9 October 1589. Scholars refer to the years between 1585 and 1592 as Shakespeare's "lost years". Biographers attempting to account for this period have reported many apocryphal stories. Nicholas Rowe, Shakespeare's first biographer, recounted a Stratford legend that Shakespeare fled the town for London to escape prosecution for deer poaching in the estate of local squire Thomas Lucy. Shakespeare is also supposed to have taken his revenge on Lucy by writing a scurrilous ballad about him.

Another 18th-century story has Shakespeare starting his theatrical career minding the horses of theatre patrons in London. John Aubrey reported that Shakespeare had been a country schoolmaster. Some 20th-century scholars have suggested that Shakespeare may have been employed as a schoolmaster by Alexander Houghton of Lancashire, a Catholic landowner who named a certain "William Shakeshaite" in his will. Little evidence substantiates such stories other than hearsay collected after his death, and Shakeshaite was a common name in the Lancashire area.

1.2 London and theatrical career

“ALL the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players: they have their exits and their entrances; and one man in his lime plays many parts...”

It is not known exactly when Shakespeare began writing, but contemporary allusions and records of performances show that several of his plays were on the London stage by 1592. By then, he was sufficiently well known in London to be attacked in print by the playwright Robert Greene in his *Groats-Worth*

of Wit. ...there is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide*, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute *Johannes factotum*, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country.

Scholars differ on the exact meaning of these words, but most agree that Greene is accusing Shakespeare of reaching above his rank in trying to match university- educated writers such as Christopher Marlowe, Thomas Nashe and Greene himself (the "university wits"). The italicised phrase parodying the line "Oh. tiger's heart wrapped in a woman's hide" from Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part 3*, along with the pun "Shake-scene", identifies Shakespeare as Greene's target. Her *Q Johannes Factotum*—"Jack of all trades"— means a second-rate tinkerer with the work of others, rather than the more common "universal genius".

Greene's attack is the earliest surviving mention of Shakespeare's career in the theatre. Biographers suggest that his career may have begun any time from the mid- 1580s to just before Greene's remarks. From 1594, Shakespeare's plays were performed by only the Lord Chamberlain's Men, a company owned by a group of players, including Shakespeare, that soon became the leading playing company in London. After the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603, the company was awarded a royal patent by the new king, James 1, and changed its name to the King's Men.

In 1599, a partnership of company members built their own theatre on the south bank of the River Thames, which they called the Globe. In 1608, the partnership also took over the Blackfriars indoor theatre. Records of Shakespeare's property purchases and investments indicate that the company made him a wealthy man. In he bought the second-largest house in Stratford, New Place, and in 1605, he invested in a share of the parish tithes in Stratford.

Some of Shakespeare's plays were published in quarto editions from 1594. By his name had become a selling point and began to appear on the title pages. Shakespeare continued to act in his own and other plays after his success as a playwright. The 1616 edition of Ben Jonson's *Works* names him on the cast lists for *Every Man in His f honour* (1598) and *Sejanus His Fall* (1603). The absence of his name from the 1605 cast list for Jonson's *Volpone* is taken by some scholars as a sign that his acting career was nearing its end. The First Folio of 1623, however, lists Shakespeare as one of "the Principal Actors in all these Plays", some of which were first staged after *Volpone*, although we cannot know for certain which roles he played. In 1610, John Davies of Hereford wrote that "good Will" played "kingly" roles. In 1709, Rowe passed down a tradition that Shakespeare played the ghost of Hamlet's father. Later traditions maintain that he also played Adam in *As You Like It* and the Chorus in *Henry V*, though scholars doubt the sources of the information.

Shakespeare divided his lime between London and Stratford during his career. In 1596, the year before he bought New Place as his family home in Stratford, Shakespeare was living in the parish of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, north of the River Thames, lie moved across the river to Southwark by 1599, the year his company constructed the Globe Theatre there. By 1604, he had moved north of the river again, to an area north of St Paul's Cathedral with many fine houses.

There he rented rooms from a French Huguenot named Christopher Mountjoy, a maker of ladies' wigs and other headgear.

1.3 Later years and death

Rowe was the first biographer to pass down the tradition that Shakespeare retired to Stratford some years before his death. It is perhaps relevant that the London public playhouses were

repeatedly closed for months at a time during the extended outbreaks of the Plague {a total of over 60 months closure between May 1603 and

February 1610), which meant there was often no acting work. Retirement from all work was uncommon at that time, and Shakespeare continued to visit London, hi 1612, Shakespeare was called as a witness in *Bellott v. Mountjoy*, a court case concerning the marriage settlement of Mountjoy's daughter, Mary. In March 1613 he bought a gatehouse in the former Blackfriars priory'; and from November 1614 he was in London for several weeks with his son-in-law, John Hall.

After 1606-1607, Shakespeare wrote fewer plays, and none are attributed to him after 1613. His last three plays were collaborations, probably with John Fletcher, who succeeded him as the house playwright for the King's Men. Shakespeare died on 23 April 1616 and was survived by his wife and two daughters. Susanna had married a physician. John Hall, in 1607, and Judith had married Thomas Quiney, two months before Shakespeare's death.

In his will, Shakespeare left the bulk of his large estate to his elder daughter Susanna. The terms instructed that she pass it down intact to "the first son of her body". The Quineys had three children, all of whom died without marrying. The Halls had one child, Elizabeth, who married twice but died without children in 1670, ending Shakespeare's direct line. Shakespeare's will scarcely mentions his wife,

Anne, who was probably entitled to one third of his estate automatically. He did make a point, however, of leaving her "my second best bed", a bequest that has led to much speculation.

Some scholars see the bequest as an insult to Anne, whereas others believe that the second-best bed would have been the matrimonial bed and therefore rich in significance.

Shakespeare was buried in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church two days after his death.

The epitaph carved into the stone slab covering his grave includes a curse against moving his bones, which was carefully avoided during restoration of the church in 2008.

Good frend for Iesvs sake forbear,

To digg the dvst enclosed heare.

Bleste be ye man yt spares thes stones.

And cvrst be he yt moves my bones

Sometime before 1623, a funerary monument was erected in his memory on the north wall, with a half-effigy of him in the act of writing. Its plaque compares him to Nestor, Socrates, and Virgil. In 1623, in conjunction with the publication of the First Folio, the Drocshout engraving was published.

Shakespeare has been commemorated in many statues and memorials around the world, including funeral monuments in Southwark Cathedral and Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

1.4 *Plays*

Most playwrights of the period typically collaborated with others at some point, and critics agree that Shakespeare did the same, mostly early and late in his career. Some attributions, such as *Titus Andronicus* and the early history plays, remain controversial, while *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and the lost *Cardenio* have well-attested contemporary documentation. Textual evidence also supports the view that several of the plays were revised by other writers after their original composition, 1 he first recorded works of Shakespeare are *Richard Iff* and the three parts of *Henry VI*, written in the early

1590s during a vogue for historical drama. Shakespeare's plays are difficult to date, however, and studies of the texts suggest that *Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* may also belong to Shakespeare's earliest period. His first histories, which draw heavily on the 1587 edition of Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, dramatise the destructive results of weak or corrupt rule and have been interpreted as a justification for the origins of the Tudor dynasty. The early plays were influenced by the works of other Elizabethan dramatists, especially Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe, by the traditions of medieval drama, and by the plays of Seneca. *The Comedy of Errors* was also based on classical models, but no source for *The Taming of the Shrew* has been found, though it is related to a separate play of the same name and may have derived from a folk story. Like *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in which two friends appear to approve of rape, the *Shrew's* story of the taming of a woman's independent spirit by a man sometimes troubles modern critics and directors. Shakespeare's early classical and Italianate comedies, containing tight double plots and precise comic sequences, give way in the mid-1590s to the romantic atmosphere of his greatest comedies. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a witty mixture of romance, fairy magic, and comic lowlife scenes. Shakespeare's next comedy, the equally romantic *Merchant of Venice*, contains a portrayal of the vengeful Jewish moneylender Shylock, which reflects Elizabethan views but may appear derogatory to modern audiences. The wit and wordplay of *Much Ado About Nothing*, the charming rural setting of *As You Like It*, and the lively merrymaking of *Twelfth Night* complete Shakespeare's sequence of great comedies. After the lyrical *Richard II*,

written almost entirely in verse, Shakespeare introduced prose comedy into the histories of the late 1590s, *Henry IV, parts I and 2*, and *Henry V*. His characters become more complex and tender as he switches deftly between comic and serious scenes, prose and poetry, and achieves the narrative variety of his mature work. His period begins and ends with two tragedies: *Romeo and Juliet*, the famous romantic tragedy of sexually charged adolescence, love, and death; and *Julius Caesar*—based on Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*—which introduced a new kind of drama. According to Shakespearean scholar James Shapiro, in *Julius Caesar* "the various strands of politics, character, inwardness, contemporary events, even Shakespeare's own reflections on the act of writing, began to infuse each other".

In the early 17th century, Shakespeare wrote the so-called "problem plays" *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All's Well That Ends Well* and a number of his best known tragedies. Many critics believe that Shakespeare's greatest tragedies represent the peak of his art. The titular hero of one of Shakespeare's most famous tragedies, *Hamlet*, has probably been discussed more than any other Shakespearean character, especially for his famous soliloquy which begins "To be or not to be; that is the question". Unlike the introverted Hamlet, whose fatal flaw is hesitation, the heroes of the tragedies that followed, Othello and King Lear, are undone by hasty errors of judgement. The plots of Shakespeare's tragedies often hinge on such fatal errors or flaws, which overturn order and destroy the hero and those he loves. In *Othello*, the villain Iago stokes Othello's sexual jealousy to the point where he murders the innocent wife who loves him. In *King Lear*, the old king commits the tragic error of giving up his powers, initiating the events which lead to the torture and blinding of the Earl of

Gloucester and the murder of Lear's youngest daughter Cordelia. According to the critic Frank Kermode, "the play offers neither its good characters nor its audience any relief from its cruelty". In *Macbeth*, the shortest and most compressed of Shakespeare's tragedies, uncontrollable ambition incites Macbeth and his wife, Lady Macbeth, to murder the rightful king and usurp the throne, until their own guilt destroys them in turn. In this play, Shakespeare adds a supernatural element to the tragic structure.

His last major tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*, contain some of Shakespeare's finest poetry and were considered his most successful tragedies by the poet and critic T. S. Eliot.

In his final period, Shakespeare turned to romance or tragicomedy and completed three more major plays: *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, as well as the collaboration, *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Less bleak than the tragedies, these four plays are graver in tone than the comedies of the 1590s, but they end with reconciliation and the forgiveness of potentially tragic errors. Some commentators have seen this change in mood as evidence of a more serene view of life on Shakespeare's part, but it may merely reflect the theatrical fashion of the day. Shakespeare collaborated on two further surviving plays, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, probably with John Fletcher.

2. The characteristic features of the comedies.

First of all, in order to develop this paper taking a close look at the concepts of comedy and humour is required and therefore

searching the dictionaries to see what the definitions for these terms are will be very useful. According to the Wikipedia, *comedy has a classical meaning (comical theatre) and a popular one (the use of humour with an intent to provoke laughter in general)*. In the theater, its Western origins are in ancient Greece. Tragedy is a genre characterized by a grave fall from grace by a protagonist hewing high social standing. Comedy, in contrast, portrays a conflict or agon (Classical Greek ἀγών) between a young hero and an older authority, a confrontation described by Northrop Frye as a struggle between a "society of youth" and a "society of the old". The word "comedy"¹ is derived from the Greek κωμωμα, which is a compound either of κωμος(Classical Greek κωμος(revel) and ωῶος(singer), or of κωμη (village) and ωῶος it is possible that κωηος itself is derived from κωμη and originally meant a village revel.

Amongst its styles, the Black comedy, the Satire, the Parody, the Political Satire, the Adage, Irony or the Alternative Comedy can be found. *For the Oxford English Dictionary, comedy should be a stage-play of a light and amusing character, with a happy conclusion to its plot. Such are the comedies of the ancient Greek and Latin writers, and of the modern stage. But in the Middle Ages the term was applied to other than dramatic compositions, the happy ending ' being the essential part of the notion. As it can be seen, the use of humour or, at least the attempt to achieve it is an essential part of the comedy. Therefore, it is necessary to define the term humour. Trying to find a clear explanation, it has been found the wikipedia saying that Humour (also spelled humor) is the ability or quality of people, objects, or situations to evoke feelings of amusement in other people. The term encompasses a form of entertainment or human communication which evokes such feelings, or which makes people laugh or feel happy.*

The origin of the term derives from the humoral medicine of the ancient Greeks, which stated that a mix of fluids known as humours controlled human health and emotion.

A sense of humour is the ability to experience humour, a quality which all people share, although the extent to which an individual will personally find something humorous depends on a host of absolute and relative variables, including, but not limited to geographical location, culture, maturity, level of education and context. For example, young children (of any background) particularly favour slapstick, while satire tends to appeal to more mature audiences.

Some claim that humour cannot or should not be explained. Author II B. White once said that "Humour can be dissected as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process and the innards are discouraging to any but the pure scientific mind." Another explanation is that humour frequently contains an unexpected, often sudden, shift in perspective. Nearly anything can be the object of this perspective twist. This, however, does not explain why people being humiliated and verbally abused, without it being unexpected or a shift in perspective, is considered funny. Another explanation is that the essence of humour lies in two ingredients; the relevance factor and the surprise factor.

First, something familiar (or relevant) to the audience is presented. (However, the relevant situation may be so familiar to the audience that it doesn't always have to be presented, as occurs in absurd humour, for example). From there, they may think they know the natural follow-through thoughts or conclusion. The next main ingredient is the presentation of something different from what the audience expected, or else the natural result of interpreting the original situation in a different, less common way.

When looking at the Oxford English Dictionary, the matter turns out to be not that clear. Therefore, it can be found many

different meanings for the term, going from Any fluid or juice of an animal or plant, either natural or morbid. (Chiefly in medieval physiology; now rare), the greek concept of body fluids (In ancient and medieval physiology, one of the four chief fluids (cardinal humours) of the body (blood, phlegm, choler, and melancholy or black choler), by the relative proportions of which a person's physical and mental qualities and disposition were held to be determined), and finally getting to the one of major interest which is That quality of action, speech, or writing, which excites amusement; oddity, jocularly, facetiousness, comicality, fun. Also the faculty of perceiving what is ludicrous or amusing, or of expressing it in speech, writing, or other composition; jocose imagination or treatment of a subject.

Along this part, the main goal is to comment the comedy conventions and, specially, Shakespearean comedy conventions. There will be also an analysis of what differentiates comedy from other genres such tragedy. Historical plays... The intention is to demonstrate that a comedy, usually, has a set of rules that are important to follow in order to create the atmosphere and emotional landscapes necessary to make people laugh. Because that is the main goal of a comedy: to make people laugh so much, that they forget their real problems for a while. However, there are other aims such as social criticism, and comedies can also be used for didactic purposes since each comedy can be seen as a lesson to be applied in human lives.

When an author is writing a comedy, he must know that there are a set of rules that he must follow, because, indeed, those conventions/rules are what the audience is waiting for in order to start laughing. However, some authors prefer to break down those rules and shock the audience. Nevertheless, comedy itself has a set of conventions, which are less strict, than other genres. According to John Morreall, these are the main

differences between tragedy and comedy: He claims and defends the high tolerance that comedy has with chaos, different endings, different types of heroes... He states that tragedies are, somehow, less interesting than comedies, because there is no point for ambiguity: everything is good or bad: all the events are solved with violence and death and characters tend to be more psychologically flat.

Traditionally, the plays of William Shakespeare have been grouped into three categories: tragedies, comedies, and histories. Some critics have argued for a fourth category, the romance.

Shakespeare did not invent himself the comedy conventions. He maybe gave them a new breath, but he adapted these conventions from the Greek-Latin theatre.

These conventions have been used by authors since then, and they have been repeated again and again in order to make people laugh.

Main Shakespearean comedies' conventions are:

- A struggle of young lovers to overcome difficulty that is often presented by elders.
- Separation and unification (reconciliation and forgiveness).
- A clever servant.
- Mistaken identities.
- Heightened tensions, often within a family.
- Multiple, intertwining plots.
- Frequent use of puns.
- Suspension of natural laws.
- Contrast between social order and individual
- Turning the basis of tilings upside down.
- The element of marriage.
- A "happy ending".

It is also important to mention that it is assumed that Shakespeare learned how to organize a comedy plot from the readings of the Latin comedies of Terence and Plautus (they were much studied in Elizabethan schools). This five-act structure moves from:

1. Exposition: A situation with tension or implicit conflict;
2. Rising Action: Implicit conflict is developed;
3. Turning point: Conflict reaches height; frequently an impasse;
4. Falling Action: Things begin to clear up;

Conclusion: Problem is resolved, knots untied. As it can be observed, although the plots, the characters, the events .. may change, the basis and the structure of a comedy play are always repeated. For example, most of Shakespearean comedies end with the concept of "Marriage" (which is a symbol of union). Marriage is also a symbol of the upcoming and the future; it is the total union of the purely personal element, sexual attraction and romantic love. Whereas tragedy's focus on the individual makes death the central fact of life, comedy insists in the process of love, sex and birth as a metaphor of life continuity and procreation. Life goes on after the play ends, characters do not die and they share their lives together.

The plot is very important in Shakespeare's comedies. They are often very convoluted, twisted and confusing, and extremely hard to follow. Another characteristic of Shakespearean comedy is the themes of love and friendship, played within a courtly society. Songs often sung by a jester or a fool parallel the events of the plot. Also, foil and stock characters are often inserted into the plot. Furthermore, the major genre that Shakespeare developed throughout comedies is the romantic comedy; all Shakespeare's comedies are driven by love. Love is the most important thing in all his comedies; all the obstacles

presented to love are overcome, conflicts are resolved and errors are forgiven, in a typical end of reconciliation and marital bliss at the play's close. As one of the most important characteristics of comedies is the concept of forgiveness, there is no matter how 'wrong' the events were going along a play, because at the end, there must be a happy ending, in where reconciliation and union are the basic points.

Maybe, all those assumptions seem to be contradictory: On the one hand, comedies must be a progression of chaos, disorder, exaggeration... and, on the other hand, a comedy must follow a certain structure that is totally necessary to develop the play. Somehow, the important aspect, and the most interesting, one of a comedy is not the ending which is merely the same along all the plays, but the development of the play itself.

SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDY STEREOTYPES

Stock Characters.

In Shakespearean comedies many characters are repeated through different plays. This is especially easy to see in the case of "fools", "clowns", "buffoons", or "vices", for instance. These repeated characters are usually called stereotypes or stock characters.

A tradition in British comedy dating back to Shakespeare is to laugh at lack of intellect of a character. Shakespeare always uses fools who are considered to be lacking of intellect by the other characters but are actually wiser. Fools and clowns who have important roles (at least two can be seen in each play) in early plays of Shakespeare share certain characteristics. They are clumsy, ridiculous and slow-witted. The function of the clowns and fools is to keep the comic action going throughout the play. However the function of clowns and fools is not only to get the audience or reader started laughing but also to show

the important truths often ignored by the others: the deepest secrets hidden from the wise may be revealed by a child or a fool. Actually they don't appeal to the intellect but to the emotions. Some characters in Shakespearean comedies show us that there are two kinds of fools: the conscious fool and the unconscious one. The most interesting example of a fool can be that of Feste from "Twelfth Night". There is an ironic situation since the licensed fool (Feste) is not actually a fool but a wise character who contributes to the meaning of the play, and the actual fool (Sir Andrew's or Molvolio) is the most entertaining character with his foolish actions. By acting as a fool, Feste becomes privileged in telling the truth of the people around him.

The clown is used as a free observer that mocks the faults of the other characters. Feste (clown in "Twelfth Night") with his intelligence is aware of what others do and criticizes the actual fools, the characters who are not seen as witty at all. Lack of self-knowledge makes the characters fools as Molvolio or Sir Andrews in 'Twelfth Night'.

Also the clown Touchstone in 'As You Like It' can be considered as wise as Feste. Shakespeare explains the importance of such characters in his plays with these words: "It is meat and drink for me to see a clown".

When we have a look at the roles of the clowns and fools in the comedies of Shakespeare, almost all of them are the servants of heroes or heroines. This can be seen in the clowns Touchstone and Feste, the servants Dromios (servants of Antipholus in "The Comedy of Errors"), in the character of Tranio (servant of Lucentio in "The Taming of the Shrew"), in Grumio (servant of Petruchio in "The Taming of the Shrew"), or in Maria (servant of Olivia in "Twelfth Night"). On the other hand, Ariel (the spirit helper of Prospero in "The Tempest") and Puck (the servant fairy of Oberon in "A Midsummer Night's Dream") are the vices whose role is to cause a great deal of disguising. In

two plays they cause the misunderstandings and make the play more complex.

Shakespeare gives place to buffoons and vices in his comedies. His aim in creating buffoons is to increase the mood of festivity rather than contribute to the plot.

A few examples can be seen in some Shakespearean comedies: Nell, who is the fat maid of Adriana and Antipholus of Ephesus and Dromio of Ephesus' wife ("The Comedy of Errors"), Snug ("A Midsummer Night's Dream") or Tinculo and Stefano ("The Tempest").

The other stereotypes in Shakespearean comedies can be considered the "blocking characters" which are seen in most of the comedies. They always put boundaries or some rules that can cause a chaos in the play. Generally these blocking characters are seen in the beginning of the play and the comedy starts with the problem caused by them. If they were not in the comedies, the events would not be like what can be read in the plays. If Egeus were not in "A Midsummer Night's Dream", the lovers Hermia and Lysander would not have escaped to the forest and there would not be a chaotic situation that makes us laugh, or if Minola Baptista, the father in "The Taming of the Shrew", had not decided that Kate would have to marry before Bianca, all those events would not have taken place.

Duke Frederic who banishes his brother and his niece in "As You Like It" or Solinus, the duke of Ephesus, in "The Comedy of Errors" can be considered as "blocking characters" as well.

Shakespeare sometimes uses disguises and mistaken identity that makes the play more complex and funny. Viola in 'Twelfth Night' and Rosalind in As You Like It can be the best examples of stereotypes of women living in Elizabethan times. Adriana and Luciana in "The Comedy of Errors" are the contrast female stereotypes of that time, and also Bianca, who is admired by gentlemen and her father, in "The Taming of the

Shrew” is the stereotype of a “young modest girl”, but after marrying she reveals her true face. By creating Bianca, Shakespeare criticizes the social roles of people, especially the role of women in marriage. However, Kate is far from being the stereotype of the modest maiden, and by creating Kale, Shakespeare also shows that he rejects the social roles of people at that time.

Costumes in Shakespearean plays.

Elizabethan clothing.

Clothes in the Elizabethan era were dazzlingly beautiful and elaborate. It was a time when sumptuous fabrics, new dyes and exuberant dress prevailed. In the 16th century there was an improvement in the economy and the richness of the country so there was a greater elaboration in dress.

Clothing functioned as a mirror of that wealthy period, of the prosperity and energy of the age, so the more dramatic, opulent and luxurious the costume, the better. Through this clothing the vitality and the high points of the period could be observed. There were a lot of clothes of foreign origins such as the French hose, the French hood. Venetians or the Spanish bonnet.

Dressing functioned more for display than for comfort. Such was the level of extravagant exaggeration that “The Sumptuary law” against the excess of apparel was passed to regulate how people could dress. The Church of England supported the restrictions in clothing in 1563.

Men and women dress in Shakespearean plays.

There is not too much accurate information about the clothes worn in the early productions of Shakespeare. However, it is known that whatever geographical setting or chronological period were, the whole time and geographical canon for Shakespeare was the Elizabethan England. There was little

attempt to present historical accuracy. So even in a play set in the ancient Rome, for example, the actors wore contemporary clothes.

The fashion's central tendency at that time, above all in the upper classes, emphasized gallantry and beauty .

The prototypical women's figure could be described as a structure in which shoulders must be wide, the waist must get narrower, and finally opened up to a flared skirt. The bosom was lifted at the neckline. The perfect women's appearance would be the image of an hourglass.

Typical garments used by women were:

- A smock, which was an ankle-length shirt worn next to the skin used to protect clothing from body oils.
- A bodice. (Part of a dress above the waist)
- A skirt, (known as kirtle or petticoat)
- A triangular piece known as "stomacher" which formed the front section and was joined to the bodice proper at the sides by ties, hooks, or pins. (Garment consisting of a V-shaped panel of stiff material worn over the chest and stomach in the 16th century)

The silhouette of men was characterised by its squared form reinforced by the abundant padding. It was very common to find vents and slashes as they made reference to sword battles that had taken place previously.

The typical garments used by men were:

- A smock, which was an ankle-length shirt worn next to the skin used to protect clothing from sweating.
- Drawers called "trousers"
- Boots
- Breeches
- A jerkin vest (tight sleeveless and collarless jacket often made of leather), a doublet (close-fitting jacket worn during the Renaissance) and an adorned hat made for a smart outfit.

Men's garments.

“How oddly he is suited! I think he bought his doublet in Italy, his round hose in France, his bonnet in Germany, and his behaviour elsewhere.”

This male model which is going to be described is French in design and it is influenced by clothes from several countries, but it makes reference to the typical English Elizabethan garments.

Peascod doublet

The characteristic shape of the peascod-bellied doublet was that of a pot belly and to achieve this effect, three things were needed: a stiff tight under-lining, buckram to make prominent shape, and “bombast” (padding) to hold it out. The doublet had a peplum (skirt) and small wings surrounded the armhole and hide the points which were used to tie on the sleeves.

In this picture, the Duke of Alencon (1 Henry of Navarre's younger brother) wears a peascod doublet,

Venetians, hose, shoes without heels, and a band (ruff). The sleeves are usually detachable and interchangeable with other outfits. The Venetians are brocade and he also wears hose made of silk held up by fringed ribbons (handwoven silk hose became the rage during the Elizabethan period in England). Over this basic model, he was dressed in a jerkin and his slops.

Jerkin

A jerkin was often worn over a doublet. It was usually tight and had buttons to close the front. However, because of the peascod doublet, the jerkin cannot be closed.

Venetians

The upper thigh was covered by the Venetians, which were originally called “upper stocks” or “canions” when they started to be used by 1570. They are called “Venetians” because of its

place of origin:

Venice. Venetians wore hose which could be padded.

- Pans id Slops

The Pansid Slops consist of a series of panes of one colour which are padded with padding in another colour. This garment usually goes over the Venetians.

- Hose

Handwoven silk hose became the rage during the Elizabethan period in England. On the sides of the hose silk scarves act as a garter for each leg.

- Band (ruff)

The ruff was a long strip of material which was attached on one edge to a band which would be tied around the neck and under clothing, the ruff was heavily starched and then an iron poking stick or setting iron was used to create the characteristic flutes.

- Shoes without heels

Women's garments.

This female model which is going to be described is based on a French tapestry in which a portrayal of Marguerite of Valois can be seen (1575), but it makes reference to the typical English Elizabethan garments.

- Farthingale

This undergarment was used to control the shape of the skirt. The farthingale was as long as the petticoat and there were three different kinds of farthingale during the Elizabethan era. One of them was the *wheel or drum farthingale*. The second one was the *belt om Spanish farthingale*. This bell shape was achieved by sewing stays onto a skirt.

Finally, (the third type was called bum-roll farthingale and consisted of a padded sausage-like hoop that lied in front and rest on the hipbone. The bum-roll was placed over petticoats

and a petticoat and the skirt would rest over it. It is curious that women had to use cushions to sit down on them instead of using chairs because of the voluminous farthingales.

In this Picture. Marguerite of Valois wears a square neckline which was typical at that time. The shoulder roll is added to the upper sleeve. The girdle pendant includes a pomander. Her skirt rests on a bum-roll farthingale. The sleeves and bodice are made of brocades, while the underskirt matches the band around the skirt • *Corset*

It was an elaborate steel corset which was worn under the dress.

The front bands of steel (lined and covered with thin silk or other material and often decorated with flat embroidery) extended downwards in a long tapering point as far as the pit of the stomach and the sides converged as low down as the hip bone would permit. It was the line from this to the lowest point of the corset that deceived the eye and made the figure look longer and the waist smaller than they really were. These steel bands were fastened by light-lacing the back.

Decoration / Materials.

Colours and decoration in clothing functioned as a whole to create a greater impact on the audience in the Elizabethan era. Both, men and women costumes were ostentatious and varied in colours, materials and ornamentation.

Women wore rich and gorgeous dress its men did but men attire was even more complex as it has been expounded before the garments were highly decorated with braid, embroidery, pinking (pricking in patterns), slashing or puffing and sometimes encrusted with pearls, jewels, or spangles or trimmed with lace or artificial flowers.

Hats also played an important role in clothing. For example, craftsmen and London citizens usually wore a small cap similar to a beret. Feathers were a very common ornament used to embellish hats.

3.The characteristic features of the tragedies.

**Show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy ~ F. Scott
Fitzgerald**

I think the above quote applies very well to William Shakespeare's works, for he has created such beautiful pieces of literature in the form of tragedies. However, the attempt of categorizing his works under a category is quite difficult because every work of art created by him is an experiment to create something different from the previous one, and he achieved success each time. However, there are certain aspects that he has followed consistently in each of his tragedies and we shall be looking at those aspects. There are some other elements that make the play a complete form of Shakespearean tragedy, which are dealt in detail in further sections.

Shakespearean tragedies are highly influenced by Greek drama and Aristotle's notion of tragedy. It was Aristotle who had first described the genre of tragedy in his Poetics which is followed even today to analyze modern drama. Take a look at the following characteristics shared by most Shakespearean plays.

Most of the tragedies written by Shakespeare are revenge and ambition tragedies. For instance, Othello, Hamlet, King Lear and Macbeth are the dark tragedies showing revenge and ambition. However, there is an exception to this in the form of a romantic tragedy, rather the only romantic tragedy written by Shakespeare and that is Romeo and Juliet. Unlike the revenge/ambition tragedy, there are two tragic characters in Romeo and Juliet. Romeo becomes impulsive and acts without thinking about consequences, which causes the separation and ultimately the death of the two lovers. Coming back to revenge/ambition tragedies, there are some noticeable features which are dealt with, in the following part.

Tragic/Fatal Flaw O farewell,

Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife;
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
And O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
Th' immortal Jove's dread clamors counterfeit.
Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone. – Othello

A 'tragic flaw', by definition, is a personality trait that leads to the downfall of the protagonist. It can also be a wrong action performed by the protagonist that results in his own ruin. It is the most important element in the tragedy and almost every hero/heroine of a Shakespearean tragedy possesses a tragic flaw. Examples of tragic flaw in Shakespearean tragedy are: Macbeth's obsession with power, Othello's jealousy and Hamlet's indecisiveness.

Supernatural Elements

By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way come; [Knocking]
Open locks,
Whoever knocks! – Macbeth

Use of super-natural elements is a common characteristic of the Elizabethan drama, to which Shakespeare's plays are no exception. Supernatural powers contribute to the fate of the protagonist. However, they are not solely responsible for the downfall of the hero, it still lies in the deeds/actions of the hero. Usually, these actions are the outcome of the protagonist's over-ambitious nature (as in Macbeth where he wants to become the king) or the feeling of revenge. Furthermore, they are not illusions in the mind of the hero

because they contribute to the action of the play with their presence in more than one or two scenes. The effective use of witches in Shakespeare's plays reflect the ancient social beliefs in the evil powers who practice evil rites to affect the central character(s). For instance, in Macbeth, when Macbeth encounters the three witches, he starts believing whatever they say without questioning their existence. This is what the ancient social belief in the evil spirits reflected in Shakespeare's tragedy.

Internal and External Conflict

I' th' last night's storm I such a fellow saw.
Which made me think a man a worm. My son
Came then into my mind, and yet my mind

Macbeth, when Duncan's sons Malcolm and Macduff are planning to defeat Macbeth and at the same time trying to support the collapsing kingdom. Macduff suggests that Malcolm take the throne, but Malcolm is not mature enough to hold the falling empire.

The theme of foul and revenge

I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself,
And falls on th'other... – Macbeth

As it is a tragedy, foul has to counterfeit fair; an unwritten rule of a Shakespearean tragedy. In fact, "fair is foul and foul is fair" is the refrain of the play. The entire play revolves around the theme of foul turning fair. Similarly, in Hamlet, revenge is the theme built cleverly right from the beginning of the play and making it the driving force behind the character of Hamlet.

Paradox of Life

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

Shakespeare's tragedies reflect the paradox of life, in the sense that the calamity and suffering experienced by the tragic hero are contrasted with the previous happiness and glory. This paradox is very clear in the play Macbeth. Initially, Macbeth is portrayed as the most brave and loyal soldier of the action and is rewarded by King Duncan for his bravery and love for the nation. However, Macbeth is not satisfied with whatever he gets and desires more. This desire or over-ambitious nature leads him to think evilly and act on it which is an extreme end of his real personality.

Tragic structure

A tragic story (Shakespearean) can be divided into four parts and they are as follows:

Exposition: Exposition is the beginning of the play where the reader/audience gets to know the characters and their traits, the general setting of the story, the major conflict in the story and most importantly, the tragic flaw of the hero. Normally, exposition begins and ends in the first act itself, however, sometimes there are some characters who enter late into the story.

Rising Action: Rising action develops through the second act and extends up to the third and the fourth act. This is the time when the plot gathers momentum and the action increases. The plot eventually reaches the crisis where the hero makes a

decision that changes the course of the play, sealing his own fate. For example, Macbeth kills Duncan in act II whereas Lear's foolish decision to divide the kingdom occurs in act I.

This is how the location of the crisis differs from play to play. By the end of the rising action, the hero is left alone for the rest of the story.

Falling Action: From the beginning of the fourth act, the opposite forces become active and start an open resist, They also start plotting the removal of the tragic hero as a result of which the power of the tragic hero starts declining.

Resolution: In the last and final act. the opposite forces reach the full power and defeat the isolated tragic hero. This is the time when the hero recognizes his faults, yet, cannot do anything about it.

Shakespeare wrote 10 tragedies in all namely, Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus,

Hamlet, Julius Caesar, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, Timon of Athens and Titus Andronicus, out of which the four dark tragedies, Hamlet,

Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, and King Lear are the most admired. Apart from tragedies, important works of Shakespeare include romantic comedies, historical plays and 154 love sonnets.

4.The characteristic features of the histories.

Shakespeare's plays have not only been translated into the major languages of the world but are also being performed all over the world **Shakespeare's History Plays** include *King John*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV, Part 1*, *Henry IV, Part 2*, *Henry V*, *Henry VI, Part 1*, *Henry VI, Part 2*, *Henry VI, Part 3*, *Richard III*, *Henry VIII*. **Shakespeare's history plays** offer glimpses of the politics prevalent in the Medieval and Renaissance era

and give insights of the life of the royal court, nobility and even the lower strata of the society such as brothels and beggars.

The source for **Shakespeare's history plays** can be found in the *Chronicle of English history by Raphael Holinshed*. Shakespeare's Roman histories include *Coriolanus*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Julius Caesar*. The source for Roman histories was the translation of *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans Compared Together*, by Sir Thomas North. **Shakespeare's history plays** delineate only a part of the characters' lives and often do not include significant historic events for maintaining the How of the story.

Shakespeare grew up during the rule of Queen Elizabeth I who was the final ruling monarch from the house of Tudor. So **Shakespeare's history plays** are often seen as Tudor propaganda as they hold the founders of the Tudor kingdom in high esteem and dwell on the perils of civil war. For example in *Richard III*, the last member of the house of York is depicted as an evil monster while Henry **VII** is described in glowing terms. The influence of the Tudor dynasty can also be seen in *Henry VIII* which concludes with an extravagant celebration of Elizabeth's birth.

However the plays also record the downfall of the medieval world. **Shakespeare's history' plays** basically revolved around the lives of English kings and could be called "English history plays". However plays that depicted older historical figures were classified as tragedies which include *Macbeth*, a Scottish king, *Julius Caesar*, *King Lear*, *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Shakespeare's history plays chronicle medieval power struggles encompassing five generations. They dramatize the *Hundred Years War* waged with France right from Henry- V to the valiant Joan of Arc.

Shakespeare's history plays also depict the *Wars of the Roses*

fought between York and Lancaster.

Henry IV, Part 1 is one of the popular **Shakespeare's history plays** that feature Sir John Falstaff as the opportunistic miscreant. Henry IV, Part 2 belongs to the second tetralogy of Shakespeare's history- plays which also includes the other history plays Richard II, Henry IV, Part 1 and Henry V which is the last in this tetralogy. King Henry is regarded as Shakespeare's ideal king. Henry VI, part 1 is the first play in **Shakespeare's trilogy of history plays** on the War of the Roses fought between York and Lancaster. Henry VIII is considered to be the last of Shakespeare's history plays.

Common features of the Shakespeare Histories:

The Shakespeare histories share a number of common features, as outlined below

- Set against Medieval English history. The Shakespeare histories dramatize the Hundred Years War with France and therefore comprises the *Henry Tetralogy*, *Richard II*, *Richard III* and *King John* - many of which feature the same characters at different ages.
- Not historically accurate. In writing the history plays, Shakespeare was not attempting to render a historically accurate picture of the past. Rather, he was writing for the entertainment of his theater audience and therefore molded historical events to suit their prejudices.
- Provides social commentary. Following on from the previous point the history plays say more about Shakespeare's time than the Medieval society in which they are set. For example. Shakespeare cast King Henry V as an every man hero to exploit the growing sense of patriotism in England. His depiction of this character is not necessarily historically accurate.

Explores the social structure of the time. Shakespeare's history plays offer a view of society that cuts right across the class system.

These plays present us with all kinds of characters from lowly-beggars to the monarchy. In fact, it is not uncommon for characters from both ends of the social strata to play scenes together. Most memorable is Henry V and Falstaff who turn up in a number of the history plays.

All in all. Shakespeare wrote 10 histories. These plays are distinct in subject matter only - not in style. The histories provide an equal measure of tragedy and comedy.

The 10 plays classified as history are so follows:

1. Henry IV. Part I
2. Henry IV. Part II
3. Henry V
4. Henry VI. Part I
5. Henry VI. Part II
6. Henry VI. Part III
7. Henry VIII
8. King John
9. Richard II
10. Richard III

Conclusion

Having said about Shakespeare's comedies we dare to say that it is the most important milestone in the creative activity of him. But even amongst his immortal works of this kind the play "A Midsummer Night's Dream" stands in the special play. The first reason of this lies in the period of writing of it. The play is referred to the third, last period of creative activity, it is seemingly summarizes the whole life of the dramatist and the death of the main heroes at the fourth act is a hint for the

closest death of Shakespeare himself. So one another reason for the significance of the comedy follows just after: it maybe the only work of Shakespeare where the humour and laughter are being mixed with the tragedy. And this mixing appears on the background of the exact description of humans life and characters which arc closely similar to the historic chronicles. In our work we tried to demonstrate this spirit of comedy mixed with the tragicomic chronicles of the author himself.

Our work aimed to show the novelty of the play though it was written three- four centuries ago, we tried to prove that even being a dream the narration does not lose the real character. We made our conclusion that fairy tales cannot but link with the real life and the problems of life, love, happiness, sadness, revenge exist in both at the Heavens and the Earth.

In work we tried to give some light to the following items:

- a. To show the unusual, unique compositional structure of the play on the example of the most significant scenes of each act of the play.
- b. To analyze the main themes of the play.
- c. To prove the brilliant nature of the Shakespeare's language.

To compare the different features of the main heroes in their controversy and similarity.

Having worked on our qualification work we could do the following conclusion and notes:

1. Being not volumable play it remained in our hearts as one of the most
2. brilliant things created by the "Avon Bard".
3. The main idea of the play was to show the interrelations between life and dream, the different state of minds of illiterate but kind and passionate wandering actors and foolish, cruel, envious power "handlers".
4. The main themes of the play are order and disorder, love and marriage, appearance and reality.
5. The genius of the author is concluded in mixing and

installation of one narration into another, assistance of prose and poetry with single rcpliques and comments.

6. The heroes of the play arc not happy even having got the things they dreamt.

In the very end of our qualification work we would like to say that the play "A Midsummer Night's Dream " seems to us as the most meaningful not only for those who is interested in Shakespeare but for the whole humanity.

Shakespeare's Tragicomedies and women images in them.
The Winter's Tale (tragicomedy)

Enlightenment and contrition are prerequisite to the happy ending of The Winter's Tale, too. Here again a husband falls victim to vengeful jealousy, and here again die plot builds up to the moment when he can be forgiven the folly that, so far as he knows, has brought about his innocent wife's death. Based primarily on Robert Greene's Pandosto: The Triumph of Time, a prose romance first published in 1588 and reprinted under a new title in 1607, The Winter's Tale was probably- completed in 1610 or 1611. Its initial appearance in print was in the 1623 Folio.

The action begins when Leontes, King of Sicilia, is seized with the "humour" that his wife Hermione has committed adultery with his childhood friend Polixenes. It is abundantly clear to everyone else, most notably I lermione's lady- in- waiting Paulina, that Leontes' suspicions are irrational. But he refuses to listen either to the counsel of his advisers or to the oracle at Delphi-persisting with this "trial" of Hcrmione until he has completely devastated his court. He drives Polixenes away w ith the faithful Sicilian lord Camillo; he frightens to death his son Mamilius; and he pursues Hermione so unrelentingly that she finally wilts into what Paulina declares to be a fatal swoon. At this point, suddenly recognizing that he has been acting like a madman. Leontes vows to do penance for the remainder of his life.

Years later, after Perdita (the "lost" child whom the raging

Leontes has instructed Paulina's husband Antigonus to expose to the elements) has grown up and fallen in love with Florizel, the heir to Polixenes' throne in Bohemia, the major characters are providentially regathered in Leontes' court. Leontes is reunited with his daughter. And then, in one of the most stirring and unexpected moments in all of Shakespeare's works, a statue of Hermione that Paulina unveils turns out to be the living-and forgiving-Queen whom Leontes had "killed" some sixteen years previously. In a speech that might well serve to epitomize the import of all the late romances. Paulina tells the King "It is requir'd/You do awake your faith." The regenerated Leontes embraces his long-lamented wife, bestows the widowed Paulina on the newly returned Camillo, and blesses the forthcoming marriage of Perdita to the son of his old friend Polixenes, the object of the jealousy with which the whole agonizing story has begun.

Tempest (tragicomedy)

The circle that is completed in *The Winter's Tale* has its counterpart in *The Tempest*, which concludes with the marriage of Prospero's daughter Miranda to Ferdinand, the son of the Neapolitan king who had helped Prospero's wicked brother Antonio remove Prospero from his dukedom in Milan a dozen years previously.

Like *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* was completed by 1611 and printed for the first time in the 1623 Folio. Because it refers to the "still-vext Bermoothes" and derives in part from three accounts of the 1609 wreck of a Virginia-bound ship called the *Sea Adventure*, the play has long been scrutinized for its supposed commentary on the colonial exploitation of the New World. But if the brute Caliban is not the noble savage of Montaigne's essay on cannibals, he is probably not intended to be an instance of Third World victimization by European imperialism either. And Prospero's island is at least as

Mediterranean as it is Caribbean. More plausible, but also too speculative for uncritical acceptance, is the time-honored supposition that the magician's staff with which Prospero wields his power is meant to be interpreted as an analogy for Shakespeare's own magical gifts-with the corollary that the protagonist's abjuration of his "potent art" is the dramatist's own way of saying farewell to the theater. Were it not that at least two plays were almost certainly completed later than *The Tempest*, this latter hypothesis might win more credence.

But be that as it may, there can be no doubt that Prospero cuts a magnificent figure on the Shakespearean stage. At times, when he is recalling the usurpation that has placed him and his daughter on the island they have shared with Caliban for a dozen lonely years, Prospero is reminiscent of Lear, another angry ruler who, despite his earlier indiscretions, has cause to feel more sinned against than sinning. At other times, when Prospero is using the spirit Ariel to manipulate the comings and goings of the enemies whose ship he has brought aground in a tempest, the once and future Duke of Milan reminds us of the Duke of Vienna in *Measure for Measure*. But though his influence on the lives of others turns out in the end to have been "providential," Prospero arrives at that beneficent consummation only through a psychological and spiritual process that turns on his forswearing "vengeance" in favor of the "rarer action" of forgiveness. Such dramatic tension as the play possesses is to be found in the audience's suspense over whether the protagonist will use his Neoplatonic magic for good or for ill. And when in fact Prospero has brought the "men of sin" to a point where they must confront themselves as they are and beg forgiveness for their crimes, it is paradoxical!) Ariel who reminds his master that to be truly human is finally to be humane.

Uniquely among the late tragicomic romances. *The Tempest* has long been a favorite with both readers and

audiences. Its ardent young lovers have always held their charm, as has the effervescent Ariel, and its treatment of the temptations afforded by access to transcendent power gives it a political and religious resonance commensurate with the profundity of its exploration of the depths of poetic and dramatic art. In the end, its burden seems to be that an acknowledgment of the limits imposed by the human condition is the beginning of wisdom.

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