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WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

*Shakespeare has been praised for his :(a) knowledge of the human heart;(b) superb poetry;(c) esthetic cunning in his disposition of the action;(d) theatrical skill; (e) ability to create living worlds of people while himself remaining “Like the god of creation within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence; indifferent, paring his fingernails”. - David Daiches

*Eighteen plays of Shakespeare were published in the first folio, the first collected edition, edited by Heminge and Condell in 1623.

*Rowe’s edition of 1709 about editors, scholars, critics, biographers, and later bibliographers’ psychologists brought, first time, knowledge of Shakespeare plays.

*Shakespeare was important member of the Lord Chamberlain’s men from 1594 to 1603 and became the king’s men after 1603.

*Shakespeare’s earliest plays (prentice work) show him interested in a variety of Elizabethan dramatic traditions.

Henry VI

*The three *Henry VI* plays (1590-92) show him developing the chronicle play on English history which was already a popular variety of drama.

*The first part relates to the wars in France after the death of Henry V and the story of the Maid of Orleans. She is here almost as treated as in as Voltaire’s Pucelle. Talbot is a very magnificent sketch. The scene in which he visits the Countess of Auvergne, who seeks to entrap him treatment while a prisoner to the French not less.

*There are few lines like the following: “**Glory is like a circle in the water; / Which never ceaseth to enlarge itself, / Till by broad spreading it disperse to naught.**”

*The second part relates chiefly to the contests between the nobles during the minority of Henry and the death of Gloucester, the good Duke Humphrey. The character of Cardinal Beaufort is the most prominent in the group: the account of his death is one of Shakespeare’s masterpieces.

*The third part describes Henry’s loss of his crown. The character of Gloucester is here very powerfully commenced, and his dangerous designs and long reaching ambition are fully described in his, soliloquy in the third act, beginning, ‘Aye, Edward will use women honourably.’ Henry VI is drawn as distinctly as his high-spirited Queen, and notwithstanding the very mean figure which Henry makes as a king, we still feel more respect for him than for his wife.

Titus Andronicus

* **Titus Andronicus** (1593) shows him exploiting the popular taste for blood-thunder Senecan drama as Kyd had done. It is Shakespeare’s first work.

*This tragedy is framed according to a false idea of the tragic, which by accumulation of cruelties and enormities degenerates into the horrible: the story of Tereus and Philomela is heightened and overcharged under other names, and mixed up with the repast of Atreus and Thyestes.

The Comedy of Errors

* **The Comedy of Errors** (1590) takes its plot from the *Menaechmi* of *Plautus* and exploits the comic possibilities of two pairs of indistinguishable twins. The important characters of this play are- *Antipholises, Dromios, Abbess, Adriana, Luciana and Pinch.*

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*Richard II is a play little known compared with Richard III. In Richard II the weakness of the king leaves us leisure to take a greater interest in the misfortunes of man.

***Richard** (1592-93) shows Shakespeare following Marlowe and building a tragedy around a central villain.

***The Taming of the Shrew** (1594) shows him combining a certain amount of knock- about humor with a romantic love element in a kind of play which has been called “low romantic comedy”, to distinguish it from the “high romantic comedy” of such plays as Twelfth Night.

*It is almost the only one of Shakespeare’s comedies that has a regular plot and downright moral.

* **Petruchio, Catherine, Sly (the tinker), Gremio, Lucentio, Tranio, Hortensio and Biondello** are important characters of the play.

*Play within a play is important feature of this play. It is supposed to be a play acted for the benefit of Sly, the tinker, who is made to believe himself a lord, when he wakes after a drunken brawl.

NOTE

*Of these early plays, only **The Comedy of Errors** with its Roman affinities was not written for the public theatre.

*Robert Greene’s attack on Shakespeare, in a pamphlet written on his deathbed, as “**an upstart crow beautified with our feathers**” seems to indicate that there was a player who had the effrontery to try writing plays as well as acting them. The reference is apparently to the second and third parts of **Henry VI**.

***Falstaff** is one of the best popular comic characters created by Shakespeare in his historical play- **Henry VI**.

*As Dr. Johnson said of Shakespeare, “**his story requires Romans or Kings, but he thinks only on men.**”

***The Two Gentleman of Verona** (1594) it is the first of a series of romantic comedies which includes others.

*It is clearly experimental work. Its sources are -1. Plays of Lyly and Greene 2. The Spanish pastoral romance, “**Diana Enamorada**” of **Jorge de Montemajor** 3. Italian Comedy.

*Heroine disguised as a boy; a story of love and intrigue with a low comedy subplot; talking clowns; neat pairing of characters; intermittent verbal fireworks; male friendship verses heterosexual love are important elements. It lacks blending of different ways and stylized brilliance of **Love’s Labour’s Lost**.

* **Launce, Speed, Valentine, Julia, Proteus and Lucetta** are important characters of this play.

* **Love’s Labour’s Lost** (1598) was described on the title page as “**a pleasant conceited comedy.... presented before her highness this last Christmas. Newly corrected and augmented by William Shakespeare**”.

*It was (except perhaps for Richard III) Shakespeare’s first and successful original play. It owes something to Lyly, something to the Italian **Commedia dell’Arte** with its conventional character and something to the shows and pageants and country-house life.

*It is significant that he began by writing for the popular taste of the public theatre and achieved his first technical success in writing for private performance. It is stylized courtly play, clearly designed for a highly educated taste.

*Plot- **Ferdinand**, King of Navarre, and his three friend lords (**Biron, Longville, Dumain**) decide to spend three years in study and contemplation, turning the court into a little Academe, still and contemplative art. In that period they will see no women and eat and sleep sparingly. The arrival of a diplomatic mission from France, consisting of the **Princess** and her three ladies (**Rosaline,**

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Maria, Katherine) destroys their resolution. The four men fall in love with the four ladies who tease them with witty mockeries. After the news of Princess' father, the King of France, ladies explain that they had received the gentlemen's protestations of love as "pleasant, zest, and courtesy, as bombast and as living to the time, but now that they realize that they are meant in sober earnest, they purpose to put these conceited, and exuberant young men on trial for a year, after which they will consider their refusal.

*The pairs of lovers, particularly the self-opinionated Biron and the witty Rosaline, are the first of a Shakespearean line.

*The minor characters- The pompous and fantastical Armado and his page Moth, the curate sir Nathaniel; Holofernes, the pedantic schoolmaster Dull, the stupid constable; Costard, the clownish rustic –not only develop in their dialogue a constant stream of ironic criticism of contemporary manners and fashions by means of parody, but also act out within the play a countermovement to the formal motions of the principal characters.

*Armado, boastful and grandiloquent though he is, and ludicrous though his rhymed speech as Hector sounds and is meant to sound, remains patient and courteous under the cruelest mocking.

*The battle of the sexes ceases before the battle of the social classes, and the nobility join in mocking the pretensions and inadequacies of their inferiors.

*The play ends with a simple presentation of the winter and spring, singing two charming and simple songs ("When daisies pied" and "When icicles hang by the wall"), each representing one of these two seasons.

NOTE

*Only three of his plays- *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* were written originally for private performance.

* *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shows Shakespeare moving toward an ideal of "romantic comedy" in which the fortunes of love and humors of character are skillfully blended.

*It is a dream, a jest, a presentation of the comic irresponsibility of young love whose variations are lightheartedly attributed to the mischief-making of Puck.

*In the foreground are the two pairs of lovers (Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius); the women, constant, the men changing their affections as the magic herb, "love in idleness" bids them. In the background is the fairy world, centering on Oberon and Titania and their quarrel which involves the human lovers. Puck moves between the human and the fairy world, and it is interesting that the only human being in the play who comes into direct contact with that world is not any member of Theseus, court or one of the lovers, but Bottom, the weaver.

*Titania's name is from Ovid and Oberon's from the medieval romance – *Huon of Bordeaux*.

*The way in which the love plot, the fairy plot and the activities of Bottom and his fellows are brought together by means of the *Theseus-Hippolyta* background shows Shakespeare at ease in his dramatic Technique in a new way.

NOTE

* *The Merchant of Venice* (1596-1600), *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598-99) *As You Like It* (1599-1600), and *Twelfth Night* (1600-01) have common features:

(a) The witty and lively heroines (b) The carefully placed moments of poetic hush(c) The delicate and happy treatment of love(d) The undertones of melancholy or prevented disaster(e) The element of fairly tale.

*In *The Merchant of Venice* Shakespeare brings three plots together: the fairy tale of plot of caskets, the story of male friendship between Bassanio and Antonio in true Renaissance vein and the story of Shylock and a pound of flesh.

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*In creating **Shylock** he was probably thinking of **Marlowe's Jew of Malta** as well as contemporary prejudice and unhappy case of Rodrigo Lopez the Queen's Portuguese –Jewish physician.

*In this play Belmont provides the golden fairy tale friendship atmosphere while Venice is symbol of harsh realities of Life.

*The famous scene between Lorenzo and Jessica at the beginning Act4 dissolves all disparities in music and moonlight .**Portia's** and **Neressa's** tricks with the rings help to mitigate in retrospect the realities of the great court scene, where **Portia's** speech on mercy rings out with ironic overtones challenging the Christian attitude, to Shylock as well as by Shakespeare's theatrical skill.

*The name of disguised **Portia** is **Balthazar**.

* **Much Ado About Nothing** combines two plots one of which has tragic overtones. In the **Claudio-Hero** story, where the bridegroom is deluded by the wicked **Don John** into believing in his innocent bride's criminal wantonness and so denounces her at the altar provides a context in which the merry world of witty attitude ionizing is shaken into a deeper reality.

***Beatrice** and **Benedict**, man hater and misogynist tricked by friends into believing that each loves the other; discover their real mutual love in the shadow of **Hero's** tragedy.

*The third strand into the play is the comic- realistic strand represented by **Dogberry** and **Verges**, the officers of the watch who accidentally stumble across the villains and proceed, in their slow witted and comically clumsy manner, to examine them.

***AS you Like It** is one of best romantic comedy of Shakespeare whose plot derives from **Thomas Lodge's** prose pastoral romance, **Rosalynde**.

*In it, its happy solution of problems of love and politics in carefree atmosphere of the greenwood (Forest of Arden, France) achieved with carefree ease.

*The important characters of this comedy are -**King Frederick, Rosalind, Celia Orlando, Oliver** and **Adam Sir Rowland De Boys**.

***Rosalind** , disguised as a boy in the green wood teasing her lover in the happy confidence that she is loved by him without having yet to declare her own love is perhaps the most attractive of all Shakespeare's pert and resourceful young heroines.

*The melancholy **Jacques**, commenting on affairs with exhibitionist melancholy Shakespeare's amused portrait of the traveling intellectual returned to sneer at everything at home.

***Touchstone** and **Audrey** representing love between the sexes in its simplest physical aspect contrasted with the romantic love between **Rosalind** and **Orlando** as well as with the exaggerated pastoral passion of **Salvias** for the scornful **Phebe**.

*The songs –“**Under the greenwood tree**”, “**Blow, Blow thou winter wind**”, “**It was a lover and his lass**”-echo through the play with a grave sweetness. As a lyrical comedy of romantic love in a simple moral context whose basic pattern derives from folklore or at least from popular image working on a literary tradition it stands supreme.

*The male disguised name of **Rosalind** is **Ganymede** while **Celia** chose the name of **Aliena** as country lass.

* “**Sweat are the uses of adversity;**

Which like the toad ugly and venomous,

Wears, yet a precious jewel on his head.” is a quotation taken from this play.

***Twelfth Night or What You Will**: the first title indicates when it was first performed and the second Shakespeare's cheerful carelessness about titles.

*In it the romantic attitude itself is gently mocked at the same time it is glorified.

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*Ship wreck, disguised and misunderstanding romantic love, friendship, boisterous mirth wit, trickery, self deception and above all and throughout all music: these theme and devices Shakespeare welds together in what is perhaps the most perfect of all his comedies.

*If the light playing on **As you Like It** is that of the morning sun, the sun in *Twelfth Night* is now mellower and later afternoon sunshine with a hint of sunset in its quality.

*From its opening with self-indulgent music of the Duke's speech, "**If Music be the food of love, play on,**" to the clown's concluding song, "When **that I was a little tiny boy, With hey, ho the wind and the rain,**" with its sense of wistful futility, the play moves through different phases of the romantic- comic combination to create a world in which passion, adventure, melancholy and folly coexist and help to define each other.

* Duke of Illyria- **Orsino, Valentine, Countess Olivia, Sir Toby Belch, Maria, Knight Andrew Aguecheek, Viola** (Cesario, the male-disguised name of **Viola**), **Feste** (Clown), **Sebastian** and **Antonio** are characters of this play.

*There is no finer fool in literature than **Sir Andrew Aguecheek** and the dialogue between him and **Sir Toby Belch** is splendid in its cheerful folly.

*It is significant too that it is against the background of this comic dialogue that Feste, the clown sings what is perhaps the most haunting of all Shakespeare's songs "**O mistress mine , where are you roaming.**" (Act II, sc.iii)

*With its philosophy of comedy present in the second stanza: "**What is love? 'Tis not hereafter/ Present mirth hath present laughter....**"

*The gulled **Molvolio**, "sick of self love", is presented for our comic disapproval; the love sick duke, **Orsino** is loved by his own page a girl in disguise, whose love for her master redeems him from sentimentalist into true lover; **Viola**, the shipwrecked, the resourceful, the disguised, steers her course as best she can, and in the process keeps the plot moving, until the happy ending can be worked out; the **Lady Olivia**, like the Duke, is turned by events from self indulgent emotion into a truer emotional life.

*Danger, misadventure, self- delusion, self- indulgence, misunderstanding and the constant rise and fall of the human passions and appetites, all work out here to happy ending except for the mocked Molvolio which seems satire on Puritanism.

* The sources of this play are – (1) **Apollonius and Silla** –a tale (**Barnake Riche**), (2) **GI Ingeneration** – Italian comedy, and (3) **Inganini-** comedy.

*Parallel with his development of romantic comedy, Shakespeare was maturing in his handling of the history play. With his history play the three *Henry VI* plays Shakespeare opened his career.

*In *Richard III* he solves the problem of form by concentrating on the central character a Marlovian villain redeemed from mechanical badness by his wit and energy; **Richard** projects his own character by the thoughtful rhetoric of his speech and the Machiavellian virtuosity of his actions and the element of heroism which he acquires in his final defeat is kept from raising any moral difficulties by the passionate picture of the victorious **Richmond**, founder of England's Tudor dynasty, as the savior of his country.

**Richard II* (1595-96) is more complex and interesting and deliberately ritualistic in tone to suggest the Elizabethan view of the Middle Ages.

**Richard* himself, petulant, childish, emotionally self-indulgent, incapable of asserting his authority over factious nobles but brooding and poetizing over his royal status once he is on the point of losing it, is the most complex character that Shakespeare had so far created it.

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***Henry IV** part I and part II (1597-98) Shakespeare combining the political with the comic in a new and striking manner.

Shakespeare clearly thought of **Henry IV as, 'modern' belonging to Shakespeare's own world and his succession the result of personal ambition rather than divine right.

***Henry IV** has the central theme- the education of prince Hal, Henry's son and later **Henry V**.

*In **Henry IV** part I the three levels of the action are introduced- (1) The high political, surrounding **Henry IV**; (2) The low comic, surrounding **Falstaff**; (3) The plausible, even attractive, but politically immoral worked of **Hotspur** and his fellow rebels.

***Falstaff** is no conventional Vice, but a comic figure of immense proportions who embodies in his speech and action an amoral gusto in living at the same time.

***Hotspur's** heroic egotism and **Falstaff's** unheroic egotism are both contrasted, with the attitude of heroic unselfishness which is the implied ideal attitude for the ruler.

*In **Henry IV** part II the country justices Shallow and Silence represent the England- the world of inefficient innocence, unconsciously comic foolish and pretentious yet impressively and averagely human.

***Henry V** (1598-99) concludes the historical series. The witty and aloof prince of the **Henry IV** plays has become a copybook model for a conquering prince.

***Henry V** has none of the tortured idealism of Brutus or the intellectual and moral complexity of Hamlet his kind of success comes to simpler and in some respects less attractive characters.

***Henry V** is the narrowest and occasionally the stuffiest of all of Shakespeare's mature plays.

***King John** (1596-97) stands somewhat apart from Shakespeare's other history plays, where he deals with the cycle of English history from the deposition of **Richard II** to the founding of the Tudor dynasty by **Henry IV** in 1485. It is probably derived from- **The Troublesome Reign of King John** (1591)

*The character of the **Bastard Fauleonbridge**; the dramatic conflicts between **Queen Eleanor**, king john's mother and **Constance**, mother of Arthur John's nephew **Pandolph**; the papal legate succeeding by his cunning rhetorical augment in persuading **king Philip** of France to turn against **John** with whom he has recently sworn amity the pathetic scene between **Hubert** and young prince **Arthur** - these are some of the elements in the play which show Shakespeare bursting the bounds of the older chronicle form to give free rein to a curiosity and an exuberance which make the play lively.

***King John** is a most interesting and promising transitional play which occupies an imp though lonely place in the Shakespearean canon.

*About the same time that he wrote **Richard II** (1595-96) he also produced **Romeo and Juliet**, a play of star-crossed lovers based on an Italian story which had already been handled England (via the France), both in prose and verse.

*Shakespeare's immediate source was the verse **Arthur Brooke's** poem – **The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet**.

*It is tragedy of circumstances, not of the characters.

***Romeo and Juliet** themselves are the quintessence of young love; the speed and order of their mutual adoration are embolic of the recklessly dedicated love that is the mark of first real passion which banishes a like sentimentality and false modesty to burn brightly and honestly until fate brings all to an untimely close. We first see **Romeo** as the conventional sentimental lover of **Rosaline**. His first sight of **Juliet**, daughter of the Capulet's with whom his own family if Montague is engaged in deadly feud banishes all that nonsense and makes a man of him. When likely and mocking friend **Mercutio** sees **Romeo** since he and **Juliet** have declared their mutual

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love, he is struck by his wit and liveliness: “Why is not this better now than groaning for love? Now art thou socialize now art thou Romeo...”

*Throughout the play, Shakespeare sets the love of Romeo and Juliet against other views of love: to Capulet, it is a matter of a suitable family alliance; to the Nurse, a matter of physical, sexual satisfaction; to Paris, Capulet’s chosen husband for his daughter, a matter of good breeding and decorum.

*When Romeo disguised, first meets Juliet in the home of his family enemy, they share the speaking of a sonnet together and with its last line comes their first kiss. Juliet’s surging speech as he impatiently awaits her bridegroom’s arrival for the one night forte is to allow them to spend together is a formal epithalamium as well as an expression of physical passion. Lover’s reluctant recognition of the dawn which brings to an end their first and last night of love is in the form of a traditional “aubade” or dawn poem. The Nurse, whose failure to understand that love is more than mere sex finally leaves Juliet to face her fate alone, is one of Shakespeare’s great comic creatures. Mercutio, the witty, mocking gallant, is the ideal renaissance bachelor, and almost steals the show before his death and one of the best creations of Shakespeare. Capulet, Friar Lawrence, Tybalt, Benvolio are other imp characters in the play.

*The picture of the two ideal young lovers discovering their young love only to be trapped by circumstances into premature death is not profound tragedy other than to present glory of true love and the fatuity and futility of those hatreds and conventions that destroy it.

*Life is not indicated; true love remains a glory and the lovers die without disillusionment. Ophelia (*Hamlet*) and Desdemona (*Othello*), who die bewildered ignorant of the cause of their own destruction and of their hero’s cruelty, are part of a sadder world and products of a profounder image.

*During the next few years Shakespeare produced histories and comedies, and when he turns to tragedy again in *Julius Caesar* (1599-1000) he is seeking a profounder way of founding individual human tragedy.

*Its source is , as of all Shakespeare’s Roman plays , is Sir Thomas North’s *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans* , translated from the Greek of Plutarch via the French of Jacques Amyot .

*In Plutarch ‘s *Lives of Caesar , Brutus and Mark Antony* , Shakespeare read history through biography and went on to show dramatically some of the paradoxical ways in which private character influences and is influenced by public affairs .In a sense the theme of the play is the relation between public and private virtue. In it he probes and shows that the liberal idealist bringing about the very opposite result to that which he intended. Brutus, like Hamlet (in *Hamlet*) and in some degree like Othello (in *Othello*), is destroyed largely by his own virtues. In Brutus, nobility of character implies political innocence. In Hamlet, intelligence and sensitivity produce inability to face the world as it as. In Othello, integrity and forthrightness produce whom above all he should have trusted. A worldly more Brutus, a less morally sensitive Hamlet, a tougher and more cunning Othello would have done less in the world. The basic theme of these tragedies is the relation between innocence and virtue. A man destroyed by his own virtues is a truly tragic theme.

**Julius Caesar* is a political tragedy, exploring the relation between private and public virtue, between personal morality and political efficiency, between innocence and action. It is one of the most clean cut and straight forward of Shakespeare’s tragedies. The blank verse is fluent and business like.

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*The moment of quiet in the play –**Brutus** with **Portia**, Brutus with his sleepy page **Lucius** are beautifully managed and add that note of controlled pathos figure and at the end victorious efficiency pays its tribute to defeated innocence. “**Thus was the noblest Roman of them all.**”

*Shakespeare wrote his four greatest tragedies during this period which are- **Hamlet**, **Othello**, **King Lear** and **Macbeth**.

***Hamlet** (1600-1601) is the most popular and the most discussed of Shakespeare’s tragedies.

*This story itself is an ancient one originating in Scandinavia as the **tale of Amleth**, a prince who pretended madness in order to fool his usurping uncle and regain his throne. This one is told by the Danish historian **Saxo Grammaticus** in his Latin **Historia Danica**.

*It is thought that **Kyd** had also written a play named **Hamlet** on this story in 1580 a Senecan play. **Kyd**, following Senecan tragedy introduced some new element to this story of **Saxo**-[1] the ghost crying for revenge; [2] the original murder is done secretly by poisoning not openly; [3] the ghost is required to reveal the truth to **Hamlet**; [4] killing off the hero and other major characters at the end; [5] introduction of fencing match and the poisoned rapier and drink and **Laertes**.

*In the character of **Hamlet**, Shakespeare takes the **Brutus** type and by giving him increased complexity and sensitivity within the story’s traditional atmosphere of ambition, murder and revenge gives the play a new dimension.

* This is the tragedy of moral sensitivity in a wicked world, the tragedy of the idealist come suddenly face to face with reality, the tragedy of imagination betraying its owner.

***Hamlet, the prince** and his innocent life is shattered by the marriage of his adored mother, **Gertrude** to his uncle, **Claudius** who has succeeded his hero-worshipped father, **Hamlet, the king** to the throne which in any case rightly belongs to Hamlet himself, is in a bad enough mental state before the ghost reveals that his uncle-father has more than incest, ambition, and drunkenness to answer for: he is also guilty of fratricide.

*Surrounded by the suspicious **Claudius**, the bewildered **Ophelia**, the lost Queen, the worldly busy body **Polonius** and the spies and opportunists of the court, **Hamlet** can do nothing but brood and indulge his festering imagination. His partly real hysteria and partly feigned serve only to increase suspicion, while his reckless baiting of **Claudius** which seems to resist, plays into the usurper’s hands. In **Ophelia** he sees only tainted womanhood because of his mother’s sin; in **Horatio**, the happy extrovert, “the man who is not passion’s slave”, whom he can admire but not imitate.

***Hamlet**’s one clear chance to kill **Claudius** he will not take, making the excuse that villain is praying and he would prefer to slay him when he is engaged in some activity which will ensure his immediate descent to hell.

***Hamlet** escapes **Claudius**’ plot by a mixture of luck, courage, and contrivance, and comes back to find **Ophelia** dead and **Laertes** incensed against him, meeting his doom at last by **Laertes**’ poisoned rapier, but not before he has finally, in a surge of contemptuous anger, killed **Claudius**. All the major characters are dead at last and **Fortinbras**, the man of action, the soldier who believes in such crude sentimentalities as military glory, succeeds the throne.

***Hamlet** is the ideal Renaissance prince and the conventional malcontent, the traditional-avenger and the sensitive idealist in a brutal world.

***Othello** (1603-04), the second of Shakespeare’s great tragedies, is a more closely packed and concentrated play. It is the most relentless and the saddest of his tragedies.

*This story comes from the Italian writer, **Cinthio**’s collection of stories, the **Hecatommithi**.

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***Othello** himself the romantic Moor with his background of “antres vast and deserts idle” can fight for Venice and save from her enemies but Knows that he does not really know these people and that knowledge makes him **Iago**’s prey.

***Iago**, the ‘realist’ relishes his power to manipulate people like puppets. **Coleridge** calls him “**the embodiment of motiveless malignity**”.

***Othello** was not a philosopher like **Hamlet**, who could at least mark time by introspection and speculation while pondering the problem of irrevocability of performed evil. He killed **Desdemona** for the sake of his moral universe, not for jealous rage. When the truth is finally known, though it can not make life tolerable for Othello. It at least restores his moral universe and he can resume his former dignity of bearing before performing the now inevitable act of self-slaughter.

***King Lear** (1605-06) which **Swinburne** called “**the most elemental and primeval**” of Shakespeare’s plays, is in sharp contrast to the concentrated domestic tragedy of **Othello**.

*The main story goes for back into ancient British mythology; Lear himself is originally the old Celtic sea-god, and **folk tale of the king and his three daughters** was attached to this character by **Geoffrey of Monmouth** in the 12th century.

*With the main story Shakespeare combined the **tale of Gloucester and his two sons** the substance of which he found in **Sidney**’s **Arcadia** to achieve an extraordinary double plotted tragedy where the main action is echoed and commented on by the subplot.

*Shakespeare fills his play with archetypal images and ideas which combine and reverberate to produce a large cosmic view of man’s fate at the same time as the individual tragedies of Lear and his daughters and Gloucester and his sons, are played out.

***King Lear** is the largest in conception and implication of all Shakespeare’s tragedies.

*It is poetic drama heightened to a grand symbol in level without losing that uncanny in sight into ordinary human psychology that continues to astonish us in Shakespeare.

***Lear** himself , being king, being used all his life to pomp and circumstance to the trappings of rank and the automatic protestation of loyalty and devotion to which his position entitles him, has never had the opportunity of seeing things naturally and of understanding himself or others.

*Only when **Goneril** and **Regan** have combined to strip him of the signs of rank he had reserved for himself in giving away his kingdom does Lear begin to see the difference, between what man needs a biological organism and what he wants to sustain his human dignity: “**Allow not nature more than nature needs/ Man’s life is cheap as beast’s.....**”

* **Lear** achieves self-knowledge through suffering: he learns for the first time in his life to see “naturally “as a man rather than artificially as a king: but the conditions of this education are too hard and he learns at the cost of his reason and, in large measure, of his personality.

***The Fool** is a remarkable transformation of a stock Elizabethan dramatic character into a species of chorus, whose wry commentary on **Lear**’s actions between “giving all to his daughters” and his succumbing to madness helps to add a new ironic dimension to the play.

*Lear’s Fool explores the paradoxes of pretention and reality, but he is also a dramatic character himself whose destiny is pathetic rather than tragic.

*Shakespeare presented **Edmund**’s plot against his noble but simpleminded brother **Edger**, who is driven to flee into the country side disguised as a mad beggar. Here, as in his other tragedies, Shakespeare raises the question of the relation between innocence and moral effectiveness.

*His madness grows; a new kind of moral insight emerges to end in the recognition that there is no division into the just and unjust: “**None does offend, none.**” This comes near the recognition

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that we all share in everybody's guilt, which is one of the underlying themes of *Measure for Measure*.

***Gloucester**, the oral simpleton who pays a terrible penalty for his simplicity and finds a new dignity in suffering, sees better blind than he had seen when he had his eyesight just as **Lear** sees the world more clearly after he has gone mad.

*The moving scene where **Lear**, recovered from his madness to find **Cordelia** bending over him fully achieves his new character of the humble and ambitionless private man also shows us **Lear** who had lost the pride and dignity which, moral pitfalls though they were gave stature to his personality.

***Kings Lear** says more about man than any other of Shakespeare's plays.

*In *Macbeth* (1606) Shakespeare took two different stories from **Holinshed's Chronicles of Scotland** (Donald's murder of king Duff and the career of Macbeth). The shortest of the tragedies, it is given power and scope by the poetic expansion of meaning.

***Macbeth** is first presented as a true heroic figure, loyal and brave, in whom the witches prophecy precipitates a phase of consciousness that had hitherto lain submerged below his acknowledged thought. **Lady Macbeth**, the most devoted of wives, steels herself to encourage her husband to win a crown who is called fourth witch by **Coleridge**. They are both aware of the unnatural quality of their act –indeed, contrasts between the natural and “unnatural”.

***Lady Macbeth** plays the perfect wife, encouraging and cheering her husband, for as long as she can but as he is driven by the logic of his position to ever more crimes, to become at last the obsessed nihilist, she can not keep up in body or spirit and takes her own life at last. **Macbeth** is no moral monster; he is sensitive and able man driven by an Obsession with an unexamined ambition to do what he knows to be evil and what at first his whole nature shrinks from. Macbeth's real tragedy lies in his discovery of the meaninglessness of his ambition.

*As in *King Lear*, Shakespeare in *Macbeth* creates a whole symphony of meaning by the patterns of recurring images in the play and overtones of suggestion of the good and evil, of problems of choice and responsibility, of the relation of human behavior to the natural order, of appearance and reality and many things.

*Important characters of this play are :-**Macbeth**, **Duncan** (king of Scotland), **Malcolm**, **Donalbain**, **Banquo**, **Fleance**, **Macduff**, **Lady Macbeth**.

*Dagger scene (Act II sc. I), Porter (Act II sc. ii), Sleep walking scene (Act V sc.i) are important scenes of this play.

**Macbeth* is the most compact of the great tragedies.

**Antony and Cleopatra* (1607) is the most spacious of Shakespeare's tragedies, and the most relaxed.

*The movement to and fro between Rome and Egypt the simple yet cunning way in which the Elizabethan stage is exploited to enable the action to flow with uninterrupted movement the devices Shakespeare uses to suggest that the whole Roman world is involved in Antony's struggle between Roman Loyalty and Egyptian magic, the evocative suggestions of the old Antony contrasting with the Antony we now see “the nemesis of the sensual man”, these among other feature of the play sufficiently demonstrate the author's superb craftsmanship.

*Octavius Caesar, Octavia, Lepidus, Enobarbus, Agrippa and Maecenas, Dolabella are other characters with the characters –Antony and Cleopatra.

*”**Kingdoms are clay**” by Antony is important quotation from this play.

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*The theme is not the conflict between love and duty that **Dryden** made in his **All for Love**. The conflict between private life and public duty and conflict between the Roman and Egyptian ways of life are some important themes of the play.

***Hamlet, Othello, King Lear** and **Macbeth** were apparently written between 1600 and 1606, the phase of Shakespeare's career generally known as his great "tragic period"

*A misanthropist play **Timon of Athens** (1605-1608) not really a tragedy but a picture of human ingratitude and hypocrisy turning the world of men into a work of beasts, lacking all order and health, indicates that Shakespeare was going through a desperately disillusioned period in his own life at his time.

***The Wives of Windsor** (1597) is an uninspired professional Farce.

***Troilus and Cressida** (1602), **All's Well That Ends Well** (1602-04) and **Measure and Measure** (1604) have been called "problem plays" or "bitter comedies".

***Troilus and Cressida** takes two themes-'the story of **Troilus and Cressida**' as developed in medieval and the back ground theme of the '**siege of Troy**'.

*At least as much interest is centered on the difference between the Greek and the Trojan attitude (the Greek- represented by **Achilles** and **Ulysses**, being realistic and 'modern'; the Trojan- represented by **Hector** and **Troilus** himself, being old-fashioned and "romantic") and on character conflicts such as those between **Ajax, Achilles** and **Ulysses** on the Greek side, and **Hector** and **Pandarus** on the Trojan.

*On the Trojan side **Hector** admits that it is unjust and unnatural to hold **Helen**, yet he refuses to surrender her to the Greeks and so end the war because his muddled notions of honor demand that the struggle be carried on. On the Greek side, **Ulysses** gives his famous speech on order and demonstrates how the Greeks' failure to take Troy up till now results from a lack of proper order and subordination in their behavior.

***Thersites**, the licensed fool, covers everything with his scabrous comment, reducing all human actions to their lowest animal level.

*The boorish **Ajax** scores over **Achilles**; the wise **Ulysses** constructs a brilliant plan for bringing the sulky **Achilles** back into the fight, only to have it proved wholly unnecessary when the death of **Patroclus** achieves the same end in a moment. **Achilles** treacherously slays **Hector** when he finds him resting with his armondoffed; **Troilus**, the prudent **Ulysses** by his side, watches with tortured incredulity while his beloved **Cressida** the very night after she has left him, gives herself to **Diomedes**.

*Shakespeare was following the tradition as it had developed after Chaucer, just as his presentation of the Trojan war derives in large part from **Lydgate's Troy Book** and **Caxton's Recuyell of the Histories of Troy**.

***All's Well that Ends Well** is a problem play in a very different sense. In spite of its element of formlessness, it is a mature and interesting play, the product of a powerful imagination and an astringent wit.

*Its theme is a folk story which Shakespeare found in the story of **Gilletta of Narbon** as translated in **William Painter's Palace of Pleasure** from **Boccaccio's Decameron**.

* There are indeed two folk themes: the story of **Helena's** curing the king and the reward in obtaining a husband of her choice; the story of the deserted wife winning back her husband by substituting herself, unknown to him in the bed of his mistress and so fulfilling seemingly impossible conditions.

*The character of **Parolles** (an inglorious **Falstaff**) occurs in this play.

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***Bertram**, the physically courageous but morally weak hero who repudiates the gifted wife who has chosen him, remains cad until the end, in spite of the machinery of redemption which Shakespeare appears to have prepared for him, while **Diana** (the lady whom Bertram thinks he is with the night he sleeps with his own wife) and her mother exist simply to speak the words that carry forward the story to its required end.

**Measure for Measure* is at once the most interesting and the most challenging among the “dark comedies”.

*The plot was taken by Shakespeare from a play and a prose tale of English writer **George Whetstone** which was taken from a tragedy and as a prose tale in the work of the Italian writer **Cinthio**.

*In the first place there is an ironical theme of the judge himself guilty of what he has others punished for.

*Finally there is the Christian element in the story which Shakespeare emphasizes in his title (cf. Luke Chapter VI; “judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, ye shall not be condemned; forgive, and ye shall be forgiven... for with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again”)

*Shakespeare complicated the story by having a disguised duke, the real ruler; watch over all proceedings unknown to the actors.

*The Duke gives over his rule to **Angelo**, hoping that **Angelo**, a sternly puritanical character will have the firmness to revive laws which the **Duke** himself has been too kindhearted to enforce with resulting increase of sexual immorality among all classes. Angelo begins by sentencing to death young **Claudio** for intercourse with his fiancée and refusing to listen to any pleas for mercy.

***Claudio**'s sister **Isabella**, passionately chaste and about to enter a nunnery, pleads with **Angelo** for her brother's life, and **Angelo** suddenly smitten with lust for **Isabella**, agrees to save him if she yields herself to him for one night.

*She of course refuses, but the **Duke** disguised as a friar persuades her to agree to a plot where by **Mariana**, formerly betrothed to Angelo but later deserted by him when her dowry was not forthcoming, is substituted for **Isabella** without **Angelo**'s aware of the substitution. After spending some hours secretly at night with the supposed **Isabella** **Angelo** goes back on his word and orders **Claudio** to be immediately executed but the disgusted Duke arranges for the head of man who has died in prison to be brought to **Angelo** as **Claudio**'s and **Claudio** is spared.

*Finally, in a carefully contrived denouement **Angelo** is exposed and after a plea for his forgiveness made by **Isabella** while she still thinks **Claudio** has been executed, forgiven.

*Every character has some conflicting states of mind. The character of **Angelo** is “a man who has sublimated his tendencies towards the sadistic sensuality in the practice of stern justice but who, on being faced with a beautiful woman pleading for mercy for a brother condemned to death, regresses into the sensualist and sadist.”

* *Measure for Measure* has elements of Jonsonian comedy, Sophoclean irony and Christian morality.

**Coriolanus* is, in a sense, a political play dealing with the fortunes of a hero whose aristocratic pride provoked popular ill will.

***Coriolanus**, egotistical, aristocratic, contemptuous of the people, is opposed by the tribunes for his anti popular attitude and, in spite of his great military services to Rome, is exiled to make him lose his temper and display his “treasonable” attitude to the people. It is partly this lack of understanding which leads him to treat the people with such contempt for to him they are not

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beings but an aggregate of foul smelling changeableness. Enraged at his banishment, he joins his country enemies and leads a Volsion army against Rome. When he is finally prevailed upon by his mother to spare Rome, it is because he is overcome by an unfamiliar emotion which is all the more powerful because of its unfamiliarity. He meets his death the same boyish, bewildered instinctive character he is at the beginning.

**Coriolanus* is one of the last tragedies after which Shakespeare started to look at the dramatic possibilities of the tragic situation.

NOTE

*Shakespeare's final group of plays, the so-called "romances" have certain characteristics in common and seem to reflect a new attitude both to life and to his art.

**Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest* all deal in one way or another with evil and innocence, guilt and atonement, uncorrupted youth undoing original sin and starting life afresh.

*In *Pericles*, *Marina* and her mother, both assumed to be dead are found in the end alive and innocent.

*In *Cymbeline*, *Imogene* comes alive again.

*In *The Winter's Tale*, the statue of *Hermione* proves to be living Hermione long thought dead.

*In *The Tempest*, *Alonso* and his company are miraculously redeemed from drowning to find repentance and new virtue.

* The story of *Pericles* has been derived from tale of Greek origin told by *John Gower* in his *Confessio Amantis*.

*This play is a symbolic play, a religious play, dealing with death and resurrection, with ritual purification and the redemptive power of innocence.

**Antiochus*, the king of Antioch, has incestuous relations with his own daughter. *Pericles*, the prince of Tyre discovers this, thereby arousing *Antiochus* anger.

*To avoid the effects of *Antiochus*' wrath *Pericles* flees from his own kingdom of Tyre and lands at Petropolis after his shipwrecked where he marries *Thaisa* the king's daughter. While returning to Tyre he is again shipwrecked during the storm *Thaisa* gives birth to a daughter, *Marina*, before apparently dying. Her body is cremated to the sea in chest. The chest is washed up at Ephesus where *Ceriman* restores dead *Thaisa* live and she becomes priestess of Diana. *Pericles* leaves *Marina* in the care of *Cleon*, governor of Tarsus and his wife *Dionzza* before returning to Tyre.

*She is planned to be killed but before her murder she is carried off by pirates to Mytilene where she is sold to a brothel, but her angelic innocence converts the customers to virtue and she retains her chastity. After the news of death of his daughter, *Pericles* devotes himself to grief but by fate he reaches there and finds his daughter. Finally under Diana's guidance he proceeds to Ephesus where he finds his wife long supposed dead.

*In *Cymbeline* Shakespeare took a story (from the *Decameron* of *Boccaccio*) of a husband, making a wager on his wife's virtue, tricked by his friend into believing that the friend has succeeded in seducing her) and the setting from that part of *Holinshed* which deals with the ancient British kingdom.

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*The theme of *Cymbeline* is innocence triumphant, emerging victorious from the darkest possible circumstances.

***Imogen**, the princess who marries against her parents wishes; Cymbeline's Queen, the nicked step mother; the potion which brings apparent death but really only sends the drinker into a prolonged swoon: - these are familiar enough elements in any folk literature.

*The evil **Cloten**, son of the wicked stepmother, is also a folk character, though Shakespeare gives him a fully individualized personality.

***Imogen's** banished husband turned against her by the vile trick of **Iachimo**; the wicked **Cloten** pursuing her misfortune and evil dogging her footsteps wherever she goes; she yet takes her destiny into her own hands and having survived from the shock of hearing that her husband has ordered her to be murdered and the counter shock of seeing what she thinks is the dead body of her husband, survives to win her husband back in the final scene of explanation and reconciliation.

*This is a tragicomedy, a play in which all the terror of tragedy is given full vent before the tide is allowed to turn.

*Tragicomedy was the fashion now, the Black friars' audiences wanted all the thrills of tragedy with the happy ending of comedy, and they wanted, too, the masques- like devices, the music and pageantry, which Shakespeare yielding to public taste, now freely gave them.

The Winter's Tale's* source is **Robert Greene's prose pastoral romance, **Pandosto** or **The Triumph of Life**.

*It is considered to be the greatest of Shakespeare's tragic comedies. It is notorious for flouting the "unity of time" as well as of place with superb confidence.

* The first three acts accures in Sicily. **Leontes** grows causelessly jealous of his wife **Hermione** imagining that she is having an affair with his friend **Polixenes**, king of Bohemia; **Polixenes**, warned in time, flees in time and **Hermione** is brought to trial and accused of adultery with him. The obsessed **Leontes** insists on believing her guilt even when the oracle of Apollo has declared her innocence, but news of queen's death in prison shocks him to his senses.

*Meanwhile **Hermione's** infant daughter, born in prison and suspected by **Leontes** of being **Polixenes'** bastard, has been ordered by **Leontes** to be put to death, but **Antigonus**, on whom the charge is laid, carries the baby off the sea, to leave her on the seacoast of Bohemia before being himself pursued and eaten by a bear. At the end, **Mamillius** dead, **Hermione** dead and her infant daughter on the way to destruction the consequences of **Leontes**, wicked jealousy appear to have worked themselves out.

*Act IV takes us to Bohemia sixteen years later, and it is a new world. The lost princess is now **Perdita**, a shepherd's supposed daughter. She attracts prince **Florizel**, Polixenes's son and the two fall in love. **Autolycus**, the rogue, is the most engaging of all Shakespeare's minor villains.

*When **Polixenes** threatens them, they flee to Sicily where **Leontes** receives them kindly; after the discovery of **Perdita's** identify turns all to happiness.

*The climax is reserved for the discovery by **Leontes** that Hermione is still a live. **Paulina** introduces her as a newly finished statue of the dead queen but the statue turns to be the living queen kept in seclusion all these 10 years. **Hermione** returns from the grave to give her blessing to them. The play ends with **Leontes** trying in his pattering speech to act the part of the leader of this group who has eyes for one another rather than for him.

* *The Tempest* (1611) treats the theme of forgiveness and the younger generation most explicitly. While writing it, Shakespeare's imagination had been turned in that direction by news of a shipwrecked crew, surviving nine months in the Bermudas.

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*Prospero's island is not subject to the normal loss of human destiny, for Prospero controls all with his magic and he can set the stage for the desired solution. Ariel is the wise man's spirit, representing the scientist's control over nature. Ariel is the helper of Prospero but Caliban is the conquered savage who has rejected the education of his master and is punished by slavery for that rejection.

*The action takes place throughout on the Island washed by the purifying sea. It is shipwreck which saves Alonso and Antonio from their wickedness; it is shipwreck too, that brings Ferdinand to Miranda and then she exclaims:

"O wonder! / How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world/ That has such people in't!"

**The Tempest* is a magical play, full of grave beauty and rich poetry, a play out of this world, a wish- fulfillment play in which virtue has all the power and innocence meets its appropriate destiny.

*Shakespeare's last words can hardly be Prospero's: **We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep.**

*Shakespeare spent the last seven years or so of his life at Stratford in new place the large house he had bought there in 1597.

*Probably Shakespeare had helped his younger colleague John Fletcher in writing *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

**Henry VIII* is a lively dramatic rendering of the high points of that king's reign. Henry's repudiation of his first wife, Katherine of Aragon and his love for Anne Boleyn; the trial of Katherine, the rise of Cranmer and Cromwell; the birth of Elizabeth are treated in sequence. The character of Queen Katherine is probably Shakespeare's own.

* *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a dramatization of the story told by Chaucer in his *Knight's tale*. Shakespeare used prose for comic, ironic, mad or simply realistic scenes.

*Shakespeare had the true objectivity of the artist, the supreme craftsmanship of the man of the theatre, a humane curiosity about man and his nature, an extraordinary ability to conceive and create character and an unrivalled mastery of the English language .he remains the unchallenged champion in the whole field of English literature.

*Dryden wrote in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*[1668]; 'as for Jonson...I, think him the most learned and judicious writer which any theater ever had...he has deeply conversant in the ancients both Greek and Latin ,and he borrowed boldly from them...if I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit .Shakespeare was the homer or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil the pattern of elaborate writing; **I admire him but I love Shakespeare.**'