



## Elements Shakespearean Comedies

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### Abstract:

*The strategies described in this article can help you read a comedy, but how are you going to know whether or not the play you are looking at is a comedy? Don't worry, there's a simple solution using only the title of a play — and it works for almost every play by Shakespeare! If the play title has the name and a number in it, it is most likely a history (Richard III, Henry V). If the title of the play has either a pair of names or a single name, but no numbers, it is probably a tragedy (Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Hamlet). If the title of the play has a phrase or saying in it, you can bet that it is a comedy (A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You like It, Measure for Measure). Shakespeare wrote most of his comedies early in his career; perhaps it is no mistake that the plays he penned in his youth deal with young people rebelling against the social order of their parents' generation, while in the tragedies and romances he wrote at the end of his career, the theme is often of children betraying or refusing to obey their parents. When Shakespeare was writing romantic comedies, the other playwrights of his era were too, and when he later began focusing on tragedies, it was also part of a large shift in the theatrical vocabulary around him. This shift (from comedies to tragedies) corresponds to the change in England's politics as James I succeeded Elizabeth I on the British throne. Elizabeth, the "Virgin Queen," had refused to marry, and all of England was concerned about what would happen to their society if she died without an heir. Perhaps it is because of this that the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries during her life glorified marriage and the positive transformative effect it could have had on the society around it. During the early part of Shakespeare's career, the adult playing companies were primarily based in large, outdoor theaters, but midway through his career they began to move into the indoor playhouses that had once been occupied by children's companies. It is possible that the noisy hubbub of the outdoor playing spaces required more festive, boisterous, celebratory comedies, and that the indoor playhouses, with their more refined audiences, allowed for the more nuanced tragedies and romances.*

**Keywords:** *Comedy, Elements, Shakespeare*

### 1. Introduction

Shakespeare is an unforgettable literary figure and it is not exaggeration if we say that literature is nothing without him. Unfortunately very little is known about him, he is known for what he wrote.

All the writing of Shakespeare deal with love, life and death and these universal themes get beautiful touch by him. His poetry and dramas reflect that he had extraordinary knowledge of human psychology. Therefore, his characters have become memorable in the field of literature.

Shakespeare explored poetry and drama but it is drama that brought fame for him. Even his dramas are poetically crafted. Poetry is inseparable from his writing. He has given immortal lines. "To be or

not to be” is oft quoted line from “Hamlet” that is reflected in a modern man who is caught in the same idea of perplexity.

Shakespeare was influenced by the Roman tragic dramatist Seneca and by the medieval ‘mystery’ plays. Seneca dealt with the theme of revenge and showed blood and horrible deeds on the stage without hesitation. Seneca was admired greatly in England at the time of renaissance. Numbers of tragedies were written following his style.

Shakespeare very much enjoyed making fun of the languages of scholars and courtiers. This is probably the reason why in some of his dramas we find the use of pun.

## 2. Literature Review

To quote Dr. Biswas, these essays, 'present some visions, social and intellectual of the stirring he was times in the midst of which Shakespeare lived of which/certainly the noblest representative.' Regarding Prince Hal, Biswas feels that The Prince is a typical Renaissance figure and his character is marked by a kind of Machiavellian ambivalence which enables him to develop into 'a perfectly balanced personality who can view life from two opposite angles the grave and the gay, the martial and the saturnalia.' In brief., Biswas adopts the attitude of Lytton Strachey Who believes that an explorer of the past Should attack his subject in un expected places, and Throws some fresh light on several issues including the characters of Prince Hal, Touchstone, Jacques and Rosalind. Sitansu Maitra has brought Out two critical books: Shakespeare's Comic Idea (1960) and Psychological Realism and the Archetypes: The Trickster in Shakespeare (1967). His Comic Idea is a study of the comedies Of Shakespeare in the light of the Renaissance Concept of the 'individual.' Maitra displays single-mindedness in dealing with Shakespeare's comedies and presents a compressed account of 'English Renaissance' followed by a study Of the emergence of 'New Individual' and The treatment of the Individual in Shakespearean comedy. According to Maitra, Shakespeare's comedies present his vision of new individual moving about in search of fulfilment of the new value of constancy in love. Commenting on Maitra's book Bernard says, 'the book covers profitable ground in its attempt to delineate the individual sex love that the typical Renai-32 ssance Comedy cultivates.' Maitra's Trickster in Shakespeare aims at emphasising The value of the psychological criticism preached by Freud, Jung and most effectively by Norman Holland. It is thought that whereas a literary Critic tries to establish what a work means, The psychological critic makes an effort to Understand how it succeeds in moving us. As Soon as we begin to consider the responses of an audience to a play we have to admit that it does see the characters as real people.

In fact, since those characters are represented on the stage by living actors, it has no alter Native doing so. It is in this field of audience response, Holland suggests that the psycho analytical criticism of Shakespeare has its true role and future. Sitansu Maitra adopts this approach of 'psychological realism' to explain some of the intricacies in various characters especially Falstaff. Critics appreciate the rare insight with which Maitra shows that Shakespeare was "right in causing Falstaff's Rejection and also right in causing us pain at his rejection and yet again right in violating Psychological realism for the sake of achieving Greater truth of life. Critics also point Out that Maitra has used his knowledge of Indian myths to Good purpose and has "offered fresh insights into The significance of complimentary characters In dramatic literature. Jaganpath Chakravarty's The Idea of Revenge In Shakespeare : With a Special Reference to Hamlet(1962)is another Notable contribution to Shakespeare Criticism. In his book Chakravorty traces the development Of the revenge motif in the works of Shakespeare: comedies, histories and tragedies. He maintains that throughout his dramatic development Shakespeare shows a gradual progress from revenge to forgiveness. In this transmutation of revenge, Dr. Chakravorty says, Shakespeare has imparted An ethical character to his tragic heroes and thus Has raised them to a higher plane of forgiveness. In his last plays Shakespeare rejects revenge Completely and hows That j'rarer action is'In virtue than in vengeance.' Discounting the Theory that Hamlet shirks the command of the Ghost, Chakravorty argues that Hamlet doe snot Escape the Ghost's command

but transforms it. Even the Closet Scene is meant to turn his mother's eye; into her 'very soul'. Chakravorty is right when he claims that it is 'for the first time an entire book is being devoted to the study of revenge theme in Shakespeare, covering all the plays from the earliest to the latest.'-He is also justified to assert that his book is 'a close scrutiny of the Shakespearian canon...From the moral point of view.' Hamlet's Soliloquy 'To Be or not to be', Professor Chakravorty explains, seeks to explain why men have conscience or scruple. He adds that Hamlet's Problem is that he has to choose between conscience and crude revenge, moral ethos and instinctive enterprise. 'Hamlet has', says Chakravorty, 'shown concern for the justice and morality of the world, but his greater concern is for the higher morality within himself.'

### 3. Works of Shakespeare

Though there are certainties of Shakespeare's, the First Folio contains thirty-six plays generally attributed to him. Depending upon his growth and experiences there are four different periods of work:

1. Period of Early Experimentation (from his arrival in London to 1595): It is marked by youthfulness and exuberance of imagination by extravagance of language. Sometimes, there is frequent use of rimed couplets with blank verse. The works of this period are Two Gentlemen of Verona, Love's Labor's Lost and Richard III.
2. Period of Growth and Development (from 1595 to 1600): This period is marked by artistic work, better plot and fine knowledge of human nature. The work includes the plays like The Merchant of Venice, Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, and Henry IV.
3. Period of Gloom and Depression (from 1600 to 1607): This period marks the maturity of his powers. Sonnets, Twelfth Night fall in this period. It is the period where you see the great tragedies, Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, Othello, and Julius Caesar.
4. Period of Restored Serenity: The Winter's Tale and The Tempest are the best of his later plays.

### 4. Shakespeare's Poems

It is generally said that if Shakespeare had written no plays, his poems alone would have given him a commanding place in the Elizabethan Age. His two long poems, The Rape of Lucre and Venus and Adonis both contain much poetic fancy but the subjects of the poems are unpleasant. Both of them are seen to be extended to unnecessary length just for showing the play of youthful imagination. Shakespeare's Sonnets (one hundred and fifty-four in number) are direct expressions of his own feelings whereas his plays are the most impersonal in the world of literature.

### 5. Shakespeare's Influence, Place and popularity

Shakespeare holds the foremost position in the world's literature. His works and genius includes all the world of men and nature. The study of nature in his work is nothing but exploring a new country and the study of man in his works is just like visiting a great city. His works show that good always overcomes evil in the long term. Goethe expresses the influence of Shakespeare by saying that "I do not remember that any book or person or event in my life ever made so great an impression upon me as the plays of Shakespeare." The following lines are perfectly suited to him: His life was gentle, and the elements so mixed in him, that Nature might stand up and say to all the world, "this was the man!"

### 6. Shakespeare's Hamlet Summary

Basically, Hamlet is a story of murder and revenge in the tradition of Seneca. Hamlet holds

- The powerful opening where the soldiers are seen to be waiting for the ghost to appear.
- Sad story of Ophelia.
- Violent actions (Hamlet's killing of Polonius, the dueling at the end)

## 7. Universality

The use of poetry and the psychological insight of Shakespeare gave the play uniqueness. Hamlet is the most universal because it has something for everybody:

- The study of human relationship (husband-wife, parent-child, lover-lover)
- The discussion on religious and philosophical issues.
- The complicated character of Hamlet in which everyone sees a reflection of himself or herself.

## 8. Unending Popularity of Hamlet

Hamlet's popularity lies in its universal appeal. It puts before us the most important human problem: thought vs. action.

## 9. Elements Shakespearean comedies Thought and Structure of Comedy

The Tragic and the Comic fade into each other by almost insensible gradations, and the greatest beauty of a poetical work often consists in the harmonious blending of these two elements. Not only in the same drama may both exist in perfect unison, but even in the same character. Great actors generally have a similar quality, and frequently it is hard to tell whether their impersonations be more humorous or more pathetic. This happy transfusion and interchange of tragic and comic coloring is one of the characteristics of supreme art; it brings the relief along with the pain; it furnishes the reconciliation along with the conflict. Shakespeare seems to have taken a special delight in its employment. No principle of his procedure is better known or more fully appreciated. His tragedies never fail of having their comic interludes; his comedies have, in nearly every case, a serious thread, and sometimes a background with a tragic outlook. Life is not all gloom or all delight; the cloud will obscure the sun, but the sun will illumine the cloud—at least around the edges.

Still, the Comic is not the Tragic, however subtle may be their intertwining, and however rapid their interaction. They rest upon diverse, and in some respects opposite, principles. Criticism must seek to explain the difference between them for the understanding, and must not rest content with a vague appeal to the feeling of beauty. Tragic earnestness springs from the deep ethical principle which animates the individual. He, however, assails another ethical principle, and thereby falls into guilt. The tragic character, moreover, must have such strength and intensity of will that it can never surrender its purpose. Reconciliation is impossible; death alone can solve the conflict. In Comedy also there is a collision with some ethical principle on the part of the individual; he intends a violation, but does not realize his intention; he is foiled through external deception, or breaks down through internal weakness; to him wants that complete absorption in some great purpose which is the peculiar quality of the tragic hero. The common realm of Tragedy and Comedy, therefore, is the ethical world and its collision. Their essential difference lies in the different relation of the leading characters to this ethical world. Here we are brought face to face with the first point which must be settled — what constitutes the Comic Individual? But a single person does not make a comedy; it requires several who are in action and counter-action; hence the second part of the subject will be the Comic Action; thirdly, a termination must be made which springs necessarily from the preceding elements; this gives the Comic Solution. Each division will be taken up in its natural order.

**1. The Comic Individual** — He is, in one form or another, the victim of deception. He fights a shadow of his own mind, or pursues an external appearance; his end is a nullity, his plan an absurdity; he is always deceived; he really is not doing that which he seems to be doing. His object may be a reasonable one, his purpose may be a lofty one, but he is inadequate to its fulfillment; the delusion is that he believes in his own ability to accomplish what he wills. His object also may be an absurd one; he pursues it, however, with the same resolution. It may be called a foible, a folly, a frailty — still the essential characteristic is that the individual is pursuing an appearance, and thus is the victim of deception, though he may even be conscious of the absurd and delusive nature of his end.

The two limitations of this sphere are to be carefully noticed. The Comic Individual must not succeed in violating the ethical principles which he conflicts with; these are the highest, the most serious, interests of man, and cannot even be endangered without exciting an apprehension, which destroys every comic tendency. Successful seduction, adultery, treason — in fine, the violations of State and Family — are not comic; nor is villainy, which attains its purpose. Such an intention of wrong-doing may exist, but it must never come to realization; it must not only be thwarted, but also punished. The delusion, therefore, ought not to go so far as to produce a violation of ethical principles.

**2. The Comic Action** — This has the essential elements of every dramatic action, which may be analysed into the Thread, the Movement, the Collision. The Comic Individual is driven to act by his delusion; he has an end which he is seeking to realize. He does not usually stand alone, but is surrounded by his instruments, his friends, his enemies, as in real life; there are connected with him a number of persons who have to perform for him certain medications. This constitutes the Thread. There is, generally, the one central figure around which the others gather, and which is the bearer of the leading principle; the rest may aid, or also may thwart, the main purpose. Often characters pass from one Thread to another in the course of the play. Shakespeare has never less than two of these Threads, often three, and, sometimes, a nice analysis might find more. But there is a proper limit which ought not to be exceeded. There must be neither too few nor too many Threads, and there must be neither too few nor too many characters in a Thread. The genuine dramatic instinct will avoid dearth on the one hand, and undue complexity on the other.

These Threads — or groups, as they may also be called — stand in mutual relation; they run alongside of one another; they also have some common principle of harmony, of contrast, of opposition. They move together through one phase of the action — this is called a Movement of the play. Then there follows a transition into a new stage, which must be directly evolved from that which goes before. These transitions are the great joints of the work, and are to be carefully noted. Such is the Movement — binding together all the Threads, and sweeping forward into a new phase of the play. The comparison may be made with a river which rolls onward as a whole, with all its parallel currents, eddies, and counter-currents, while it passes from one country into another. Of these Movements every drama written by Shakespeare has two or three, but hardly more. The critic may here be reminded of his duty. He should state in a general form the essential principle of each Movement, point out its limits, and show the ground for the transition into the next Movement.

**3. The Solution** — This means that the appearance be dissolved and the reality be restored. That which has caused the delusion in the Comic Individual must vanish, because it is not actual — is untruth. Since the action rests upon some deception, internal or external, this deception must be discovered and brought home to each character; thus the source of the mistakes and complications becomes known. The Solution, however, will vary according to the instrumentality employed. In the case of Natural Resemblance, the persons who are alike are at last brought together, and the similarity which has caused so much trouble is detected. Everybody then can account for the mysterious occurrences which have just transpired. In the case of Disguise, since the whole entanglement rests in the mask, this is torn off and the plotter is caught, or, at least, is revealed. Here, too, a touch of retribution may enter for the deception practiced by the contriver. It is satisfactory to see that disguises are not without danger.

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