

# JOURNAL OF TEACHING AND RESEARCH IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

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## **EDITORIAL**

### **Call for Papers:**

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Dear Readers,

I'm delighted to present the latest issue of our E-Journal, Teaching & Research in English Literature.

At the outset, permit me to briefly introduce myself. I'm Shaila Mahan, an educator, administrator and a teacher-trainer with a keen interest in ELT and Indian writings in English which I've pursued for the past three decades. I'm currently working as an Associate Professor at the Commissionerate of College Education of Rajasthan in Jaipur. I'm an IELTS Examiner for the British Council and have been closely associated with ELTAI for about 15 years.

I'm thankful to Professor Rajagopalan for entrusting the task of editing this prestigious Journal. I consider it an honour to be a part of the editorial team and will work hard to live up to the faith reposed in me. With the co-operation and support of all friends, contributors and well-wishers of this journal, I hope we shall be able to carry forward the high standards set by Dr Pradeep Singh Xavier and all other past editors.

I'm happy that after a brief lull, we are able to resume the publication of our journal. Hope this reading material provides a soothing balm to all of us as we grapple with the corona crisis that's currently gripped the whole world. In these stressful times, what could be a better theme than a brief exploration of some Shakespearean plays? Like all literature

enthusiasts, I've a special interest in Shakespeare and feel that the Bard remains as relevant today as in his own times!

Shakespeare holds a unique place in the world of literature and continues to enthral people across various cultures. His works reflect profound insights into the human condition as a wide range of thoughts, emotions and situations in diverse socio-political conditions find articulation in his works. This universality of his writings has inspired countless artistic renderings across time and space. Shakespeare continues to inspire passion and debate even 400 years after his death. As Ben Jonson rightly remarked: "He was not for an age but for all time!"

With this perspective, the present edition brings together some perceptive pieces on a few plays of Shakespeare which were presented in a recent initiative by ELTAI India in the form of an online workshop. We have a variety of papers that begin with CA Lal's analysis of King Lear wherein he gives us a historical overview as also some fresh perspectives on this well-known tragedy. Murali Krishnan TR gives us some insights and critical observations on a lesser known political tragedy, Coriolanus, based on the life of a legendary Roman leader which gives us an idea of the politics of that ancient era.

Besides acquainting us with the plot and characters of Much Ado About Nothing, Shaila Mahan reflects on the enduring relevance of this witty and fascinating comedy. In addition to these three pieces, PN Ramani gives us an absorbing summary of The Merchant of Venice and based on that he has designed some interesting and engaging tasks on the characters and structure of the famous comedy. Finally, TS Chandra Mouli provides a comprehensive interpretation of The Tempest, the last of the Bard's plays regarded by many as his most mature creation which revolves around the key theme of colonisation.

Hope the writings on Shakespearean plays would set the tone for further interesting and absorbing issues.

Shaila Mahan

Editor-in-Chief, JTREL

**GETTING TO KNOW 'KING LEAR'**

## King Lear

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C.A. Lal

Ingratitude is a 'marble-hearted fiend', but it becomes even more hideous when shown to one's own father. This is the strong opinion of the aged whimsical king in Shakespeare's King Lear. Lear's judgement is inhibited by his ego, and he sadly ends up deranged and raving in the stormy moors. Filial ingratitude or the lack of gratefulness towards one's parent, is the basic theme of this highly complex play written in early 17th century. King Lear is a very bitter tragedy with no allowance for the traditional poetic justice which always punishes the perpetrators and rewards the victims. A bit similar to Hamlet, the play closes with all the major characters dead, and a country left to the care of people who have no big claim over it. In the latter half of seventeenth century, in the Restoration period, Nahum Tate's adaptation of the play, titled *The History of King Lear*, nearly overshadowed Shakespeare's original. Tate had given the play a happy ending and made several changes that would fit the tastes of an age which was very different in temperament to that of Elizabethan romantic exuberance.

**The king and his daughters:** Lear, a legendary Celtic king of pre-Roman times has become old, and decides to divide his land among his three daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Written at a time when James I had just united England and Scotland, this idea of division itself bears the forebodings of evil consequences. Evidently a strong king much respected by his people, Lear exhibits his hubris, which is a highly inflated ego, and exhorts his three daughters to tell him how much they love him, before he would grant them the promised domains.

**The daughters profess their love:** This was meant to be a perfunctory procedure as he had already planned the division. But to his utter dismay, the much loved youngest daughter, Cordelia, refuses to follow the fashion of her two sisters who had already professed their love for dear papa on laudatory terms which are overtly hyperbolic. Cordelia is so upset by the obvious insincerity of her siblings that she declares that she loves her father only as much as a daughter should rightfully love her father, and when she marries he would lose some more of her love for him.

**Division of the land:** Flying into an irrational rage Lear disinherits Cordelia and banishes her from his country. The Duke of Burgundy, a suitor of Cordelia, promptly changes his mind, but the King of France accepts her as his wife and they leave England. Cordelia's share of the land is divided and merged with those of Goneril and Regan. Lear also banishes

his loyal courtier, the Earl of Kent, when he strongly points out his folly in misjudging his daughters.

Characters to remember	
Lear	: Celtic King of England
Goneril, Regan, Cordelia	: Daughters of Lear
Duke of Burgundy	:
King of France	:
Earl of Kent	: English nobleman

**After the Division:** Goneril and Regan had agreed to accommodate the King along with one hundred of his knights in their homes in turn. Once the land become theirs the sisters reveal their true colours and make life uncomfortable for their father and his men. Kent rejoins Lear disguised as a servant and who along with Lear's sardonic Fool become his close companions in the harsh times. Highly enraged by the insulting words of his elder daughter Goneril, Lear storms out of her home, affirming that his second child Regan will treat him better. Goneril's temper is so bad that her gentle husband, the Duke of Albany can do little to abate it.

**At the house of the Earl of Gloucester:** Parallel to the story of Lear runs the tale of the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons. Edmund the illegitimate son, whom the father is ashamed to acknowledge, plots the destruction of Edgar, the legitimate son. Lear follows Regan and her equally depraved husband, the Duke of Cornwall, to the castle of Gloucester. He discovers that Regan had put Kent, now disguised as Lear's servant, in the stocks, and realises the magnitude of his folly in trusting his two elder daughters. We see here the supreme moment when the aged king breaks down, rants like a mad man and rushes out to the wild moors ignoring the thunderstorm that rages out there. He is accompanied by the loyal fool and later joined by Kent. In the moors Lear meets Edgar who has gone into hiding, to escape the murderous schemes of his brother Edmund.

Characters to remember	
Duke of Albany	: the noble husband of Goneril
Duke of Cornwall	: the depraved husband of Regan
Earl of Gloucester	: Loyal to Lear
Edmund	: Gloucester's wicked illegitimate son
Edgar	: Gloucester's legitimate son
Fool	: Loyal jester of Lear

**Two wronged fathers in the moors:** Instigated by Edmund, Cornwall tortures and blinds Gloucester for his sympathy towards Lear. Cornwall is in turn killed by a follower of

Gloucester. We also learn that Cordelia is soon to land with a French army to support her father. Blind Gloucester also wanders around in the moorland hoping to jump down from the Cliffs of Dover and die. Edgar finds him and helps him without revealing his identity. Lear continues to roam the moors, totally broken and miserable, and is both supported and teased by the Fool.

**Love intrigues and final tragedy:** Both Goneril and Regan are in love with Edmund and send him love letters. Edgar intercepts one of these and discovers that Regan has designs to have her husband Albany killed. Cordelia lands with the French army and she is briefly reunited with her father. Goneril poisons and kills Regan in a fit of jealousy, and later kills herself. Edgar fights with Edmund and mortally wounds him. The death of Gloucester is announced, and soon after we see a miserable Lear enter with the dead body of Cordelia, who was hanged under the orders of Edmund. Lear dies of a broken heart and a very weary Kent declares he will soon follow his master. We learn that Albany and Edgar alone are left to take care of the land.

From the publication of Nahum Tate's version of Lear in late seventeenth century, up to mid nineteenth century, Shakespeare's King Lear was largely neglected due to its overt tone of pessimism as evidenced by statements like; "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods. They kill us for their sport." In Tate's play poetic justice is in place, with Cordelia and Lear remaining happily alive at the end of the play, and it is much tame and domestic when compared to Shakespeare's stallion which is relentless and untameable. In the twentieth century, however, King Lear regained the attention it deserved, as its nihilism and existentialist tone opened up opportunities for fresh interpretations and insights.

## 'CORIOLANUS'

### Critical Observations

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Murali Krishnan T.R.

#### The background

Coriolanus, the last of the so-called political tragedies by William Shakespeare, was written about 1608 and published in the First Folio of 1623. It is considered as the last of the Shakespeare's four Roman Plays. The others being Titus Andronicus, Julius Caesar and Antony and Cleopatra. For Coriolanus, Shakespeare went to an obscure period of Roman history, the early Republic of 491 BC. Shakespeare found the story of Coriolanus in Sir

Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's Lives of the Nobles Grecians and Romanes. Shakespeare must have also consulted Livy's Roman Historie.

### **Plot outline**

Caius Martius is an aristocratic Roman general with admirable military and combat skills

During the course of the play, he singlehandedly captures the Volscian city of Corioles, a deed for which he is given the surname "Coriolanus."

After returning from the battle for Corioles, Coriolanus is set to be named consul. In order to be elected consul, Coriolanus must "politic" for the voices (votes) of the common people.

But Coriolanus won't do this. He refuses to accept praise for his accomplishments. His pride makes him refuse to give a political speech, since he believes politics are theatrical and dishonest; and he curses out the common people and fails so miserably in his campaign that he ends up banished from Rome.

His first instinct is for revenge, and he partners with his longtime rival Tullus Aufidius to lead an army of Volscian troops against Rome. Ultimately, though, he is convinced to abandon this revenge by his wife, Virgilia, his son, Young Martius, and mostly his mother Volumnia, who humanize him.

In the city of Corioles, Coriolanus presents Volscian Lords with a formal peace agreement. At the protests of the Volscian lords, Aufidius and his conspirators kill Coriolanus.

### **Critical Observations**

As T.J.B Spencer observes, to write Coriolanus was, "one of the great feats of the historical imagination in Renaissance Europe." Regarding the character, Coriolanus, A.C. Bradley has observed that "his faults are repellent and chill our sympathy". John Palmer calls him "a splendid oaf who has never come to maturity". His pride and virtue are aspects that add colour to his character. ("You blame Martius for being proud". II.i) He is dedicated only to one thing, his real pursuit: honour. He says, "I have some wounds upon me, and they smart / To hear themselves remembered"(I.ix). For him war is the measuring rod to count the bravery of a soldier. He does not like people to praise him or thank him. This, too, is a kind of pride. He accepts such words only from his mother. For him, humility is a kind of hypocrisy. For the patricians, he is almost an invincible war machine to create dread among the rivals inside and outside.

Philip Brockbank has opined that “much of the play is concerned with the way inhuman energies are generated from human commitments”. Critics have even gone to suggest that the play is about Rome and Rome only. This is such a vitriolic play wherein which we find animal imagery in its best.

The play seems to presuppose a measure of sympathy for the one against the many, and for the patricians against the plebeians, an attitude perhaps native to this more exclusive, up-market auditorium. But Shakespeare’s play makes it clear that the people of Rome are quite right to recognise that if they make Coriolanus consul, their hard-won right to representation in the state will be abolished. One should also admire Shakespeare’s insight based on the link that he has established with the theme and his contemporary times. Throughout that period there were riots in Shakespeare’s home county against what we would now call the privatisation of public land: agricultural labourers who under an earlier, medieval dispensation had been able to grow most of their own food, were now reduced to working for the landowners who had claimed the right to enclose what had formerly been common ground. With wages low and harvests poor many labourers were becoming dangerously hungry. A declaration issued by ‘the Diggers of Warwickshire’ shows, the leaders of isolated local disturbances sought to make common cause with one another, uniting in a shared demand that the state – the ‘commonwealth’ – should be organised for the well-being of all, rather than in the interests of the rich. This is exactly the impulse which motivates the plebeians and their tribunes in Coriolanus, and the connection between the grievances articulated in the play and those audible in the Warwickshire riots is underlined by one of Shakespeare’s adjustments to his source. In Shakespeare’s England, the commoners are angry about food shortages, accusing the patricians of deliberately hoarding grain to maintain its high market price. Shakespeare had himself been convicted of hoarding grain a decade earlier, and in 1614 he got involved in a dispute about an enclosure project at Welcombe, which the Stratford Corporation opposed: this was subject matter he knew from both sides. (Michael Dobson, 2016)

Tony Parr has observed that Coriolanus is one of the most controlled and tightly organised of all his plays. “If we look at his handling of the four major points of climax in Plutarch’s narrative- the hero’s victory at Corioli, his banishment from Rome, the pact with Aufidius and the intercession of the ladies to save the city- we can see how he binds them into the overall structure to point the thematic development of the action.” Throughout the play, there is only one figure- Coriolanus: he is the object of hatred, envy, fear and admiration.

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## **MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING**

### **Enduring Relevance of 'Much Ado About Nothing'**

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Shaila Mahan

Unlike the modern era, Shakespeare's comedies are difficult to classify because they overlap in style with other genres and many of his plays can be termed as tragic comedies because they mix equal measures of tragedy and comedy. For example, Much Ado About Nothing starts as a comedy but takes on some of the characteristics of a tragedy when Hero is disgraced and fakes her own death, though of course, it reaches a happy ending like all Shakespearean comedies.

All in all, it is a breezy comedy interlaced with acerbic bits of witticisms and merry twists and turns of fortunes that lead to a happy ending. One would not be wrong in saying that many a Bollywood film has taken its wings from this cherubic comedy of William Shakespeare.

At the very outset let's briefly revisit the broad story of this famous play:

The play is set in the house of a respectable nobleman Leonato who lives in the Italian town of Messina along with his lovely daughter, Hero, his clever niece Beatrice, and his older brother, Antonio who is Beatrice's father. The play begins with Leonato all set to welcome



home some friends who are back from a war. These include his close friend Don Pedro and his two fellow soldiers: Claudio, a young but respected nobleman and Benedick, a clever man who makes witty jokes but often at the expense of his friends. Don Pedro's illegitimate brother, Don John a surly troublemaker is also part of the crowd.

Soon after the soldiers arrive at Leonato's home, Claudio falls in love with Hero. Also, Benedick and Beatrice resume their war of witty insults which they have carried on even in the past. Claudio and Hero soon decide to marry. In the week before their wedding, the lovers and their friends strive to get Beatrice and Benedick who seem made for each other, to stop arguing and fall in love. Their tricks succeed and Beatrice and Benedick also fall in love with each other.

But Don John is keen to disrupt everyone's happiness and gets his companion Borachio to make love to Margaret, Hero's serving woman in the darkness of the night, and he brings Don Pedro and Claudio to watch. Believing that he has seen Hero being unfaithful to him, the enraged Claudio humiliates Hero, accuses her of lechery on their wedding day and abandons her at the altar.

Hero's stricken family members now pretend that she has died of shock and grief but, hide her away hoping that the truth about her innocence will soon come to light. After the dramatic rejection, Benedick and Beatrice confess their love for each other. Luckily, the night watchman soon overhears Borachio bragging about his deceitful crime. Once informed, the police arrests both Borachio and Conrad, Don John's followers. Everyone realizes that Hero is innocent and Claudio who thinks she is dead, grieves for her.

In the final phase, Leonato tells Claudio that as punishment, he should tell everyone in the city how Hero was totally innocent. He also asks Claudio to marry his 'niece' - a girl who, he says, looks very similar to the dead Hero. Claudio goes to church preparing to marry the mysterious, masked woman he thinks is Hero's cousin. But when Hero reveals herself as the veiled woman, Claudio is thrilled with joy. Also, Benedick asks Beatrice to marry him and after some arguing, they agree. The joyful lovers finally celebrate their double wedding with a lot of dancing!!

The characters in the play are some of Shakespeare's best-loved comedy creations. Whether it is Beatrice and Benedick's bickering or Dogberry's slapstick antics, the characters in Much Ado About Nothing are what makes this play so memorable. Beatrice and Benedick are both young, funny and locked in a love-hate relationship with one another but are also committed to each other. Since both have sensitive, vulnerable sides to their

put-on hardened exteriors, their jibes and interactions are extremely enjoyable. Though Claudio and Hero's romantic track is one of its own kind, their "muted" love-relationship is but a counterfoil to Benedick and Beatrice's somersaulting romance.

Beyond these young couples, is the individual characterization. Here's a brief glimpse of some of the major characters of the play:

**Leonato** is a much-respected, well-off and elderly noble at whose home in Italy, the action is set. As the father of Hero and the uncle of Beatrice, he plays a vital role in giving momentum to the play. As governor of Messina, Leonato is second only to Don Pedro in terms of social power.

**Don Pedro** – also sometimes referred to as "Prince"- is an important nobleman from Aragon who is an old and close friend of Leonato. He is the most politically and socially powerful character in the play. Don Pedro is a courteous, considerate and intelligent man with a warm and friendly attitude towards his friends. He is also fond of and close to the soldiers who have been fighting under him, especially the young guns, Benedick and Claudio. However, he is quick to believe evil of others and rather hasty in seeking revenge.

**Don John** is the illegitimate brother of Don Pedro who is sometimes called "the Bastard." As the villain of the play, John is melancholy and sullen by nature. He creates a devious scheme to ruin the happiness of Hero and Claudio and his evil actions are motivated by envy for his brother's socio-political authority.

**Beatrice** is Leonato's niece who is shown to be 'a pleasant-spirited lady' with a sharp tongue. She is generous and loving, but like Benedick, she constantly mocks other people with elaborately spun jokes and puns. She wages a regular and enjoyable war of wits with Benedick and often wins the battles. At the outset of the play, she appears content never to marry.

**Benedick** is the aristocratic soldier who has recently been fighting a war under Don Pedro who in turn is rather friendly towards him as is Claudio. As an extremely witty character, Benedick is forever cracking jokes and creating puns. He has a constant but "merry war" of wits with Beatrice. Ironically, at the start of the play Benedick, like Beatrice, has strong reservations about falling in love or marrying.

**Claudio** is shown to be a bright, young soldier who has won great acclaim fighting under Don Pedro during some recent wars. On his return to Messina, he promptly falls in love with Hero. However, Claudio has a suspicious nature which makes him believe evil rumours and he seems rather hasty to despair and to seek revenge.

Besides these major characters, three others play noteworthy roles:

**Margaret** is Hero's serving woman, who unknowingly helps Borachio and Don John deceive Claudio into thinking that Hero is unfaithful. Margaret is lower class but honest. However, she does have some dealings with the villainous world of Don John as her lover is the mistrustful and easily bribed Borachio. A special feature is that Margaret loves to break decorum, especially with bawdy jokes and teases.

**Borachio** is, of course, a close associate of Don John and Margaret's lover. The two men conspire to trick Claudio and Don Pedro into thinking that Hero is unfaithful to Claudio. Interestingly, his name means "drunkard" in Italian which could serve as a useful direction for any actor who plays this character.

**Dogberry** is the chief policeman of Messina. He is an extremely earnest and sincere man who takes his job seriously. However, he has a habit of using just the wrong word to convey his meaning. Dogberry is one of the few middle-class characters in the play but his desire to speak formally and elaborately like the high-class noblemen becomes an occasion for parody.

### **Enduring Relevance of Much Ado About Nothing**

Over time society has changed and the views and perceptions of people have also changed. Many of the finest writers try to keep up with a constantly evolving society, using themes and languages that aid them to inspire even modern audiences. Similarly, Shakespeare's themes and messages continue to have significance and relevance to modern readers/viewers though his language may be old fashioned and dated. The themes discussed in Much Ado About Nothing focus attention on relationships, the importance of trust (in maintaining relationships), friendship, love, loss of honour and the role and status of women in society.

Much Ado About Nothing expresses meanings and messages which have lots of relevance even today. Before women's liberation began, a woman's position in society was quite different and rather subservient. What feels quite natural now must have been shocking at

the time Shakespeare wrote this play. For him to draw a woman as an equal player in her romantic destiny (and her own emotional confusion) was no small statement. The point is made clearer by the contrast between Beatrice and her partner Benedick and the other leading couple in the play: the timid and subservient Hero who, enters an arranged marriage with the equally emotionally immature Claudio.

In a broad sense, *Much Ado About Nothing* is Shakespeare's offbeat commentary on the battle of the sexes. The play revisits the issue of power struggles in courtship in a refreshing double plot. The heroine of the more conventional story, Hero, is wooed by the respectable young aristocrat named Claudio who has won his spurs in war and now considers it his pleasant duty to take a wife. But he knows so little about Hero that he gullibly accepts the contrived evidence of the play's villain, Don John, that she has had many lovers, including one on the evening before the intended wedding. Other men as well, including Claudio's senior officer, Don Pedro, and Hero's father, Leonato, are all too ready to believe the slanderous accusation. Only comic circumstances rescue Hero from her accusers and reveal to the men that they have been fools.

In contrast, Hero's cousin, Beatrice, finds it hard to overcome her scepticism about men, even when she is wooed by Benedick, who is also sceptical about marriage. Here the barriers to romantic understanding are inner and psychological and must be defeated by the good-natured plotting of their friends, who see that Beatrice and Benedick are made for one another in their wit and candour if only they can overcome their fear of being outwitted by each other.

The relationship between Benedick and Beatrice is complex, yet at a deeper level it is also straightforward: they are a pairing of sexual and intellectual equals, who can recognize themselves in one another. What they like about themselves, they like about the other. It is a relationship based on self-respect – and that's a role model every young reader even today would like to have. Their pairing is quite influential to our understanding of the modern male-female relationship; and inevitably, that kind of combative couple keeps popping up time and again in popular culture.

No wonder, Beatrice is regarded by many as one of Shakespeare's most admired and well-loved heroines. Her strength of spirit, sense of independence, and fierce wit place her among the most powerful female characters Shakespeare ever created. But her

self-sufficiency does not prevent her from accepting love. Although both she and Benedick have vowed that they will never marry, they change their minds eventually and both decide that marriage is better than being single.

In contrast, Claudio and Hero do not enjoy the strong and egalitarian relationship that Benedick and Beatrice do. Hero's plight reminds us that a woman in the Renaissance era was vulnerable to all kinds of accusations or bad treatment by men—including by her own male relatives. Leonato, in his grief, gives orders to let his daughter die after Claudio abandons her and but for the intervention of Beatrice and the friar, it is not clear what might have happened to Hero.

The other important lesson from the play is that it's possible to experience the emotion we call "love" as irritation, frustration and hatred. It takes a mature mind indeed to distinguish fascination from disgust, for there's little difference between them. The witty battle of the sexes between Benedick and Beatrice is amusing and complicated. But their eventual accommodation finds something much closer to mutual respect and equality between men and women – something that's bound to appeal to all sensitive souls in the modern era.

The play contains many themes which remain relevant; among them trust and loyalty. Shakespeare manages to focus attention on trust and its importance in the way he delineates the alleged betrayal by Hero. As trust is seemingly betrayed in the play, both the young Claudio and even Hero's father Leonato are led to believe that Hero has been unfaithful. Given notions of honor and betrayal, Claudio is virtually left with no choice but to abandon Hero. At a deeper level, it seems that Claudio never thought that Hero would cheat and be unfaithful to him but as his own brother says so and he believes what he saw with his own eyes, his trust gets shaken. Shakespeare eventually clears the misunderstanding and reunites Claudio and Hero, but he uses the episode of these star-crossed lovers to underline that trust and loyalty are important in all human relationships.

In a nutshell, *Much Ado About Nothing* is a delightful and empowering lesson in love. Shakespeare's comedy of romance between equals is joyously liberating for every generation. While Beatrice is clearly a woman of today, it's worth noting that even Benedick, the man who acknowledges and yet discards some of the pleasures and entitlements of being born male in order to be with her, has lessons for young men even today. This witty and combative couple remind us that the strongest partnerships are always based on the mind – an enduring truth as significant today as in Shakespeare's times!!

### Questions for discussion:

1. Many feel the Benedick- Beatrice relationship is a model one for couples even today. Would be great to know your views on this.
2. Share your ideas about the male characters in the play. Do they all seem rather flawed?
3. In the pantheon of Shakespearean plays where would you place/ rank Much Ado About Nothing as a text for College / University students?

## THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

### Developing Sensitivity to Literature through 'The Merchant of Venice'

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P. N. Ramani

Dear fellow teachers

Welcome to a reading of Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice. It's a great play by the master craftsman and I hope we will spend an exciting time studying this play together in an effort towards coming to grips with as many interesting aspects of it as possible.

As a first step, please go through the plot summary provided – to refresh the minds of those who have read it at least once and have taught it to students at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels and to initiate into reading it for those who have not had the opportunity or time to read it yet. I hope this is just the beginning of an intensive process of collaborative exploration. Let me assure you that we will have a lot to think about and do during this process of exploration – exploration of plot, themes, characters, literary devices, and language use. Let's begin our journey now.

**TASK 1:** The play has a main plot and a few sub-plots interwoven together in a seamless manner. Let's read the plot summary and find out the main plot and the sub-plots.

- a) What, do you think, are the key points of the play?
- b) What are the sub-plots and how are they linked to the main plot?
- c) Who are the main characters in the play and what happens to each of them at the end?
- d) Who do you feel sorry for, and why? Remember that we have only read the plot summary and we haven't started reading the play yet.

### **Plot Summary**

Antonio is a wealthy and respected merchant of Venice. One of his close friends Bassanio wants to marry a wealthy heiress, Portia, who lives in Belmont. He needs money to visit Belmont and seek her hand to marry him. He doesn't have money, so he requests Antonio to lend him some. Unfortunately, Antonio doesn't have the money to give to Bassanio, as his ships are still at sea. He suggests borrowing money from a moneylender and agrees to stand as the generator for Bassanio. They approach Shylock, a Jewish money lender for the loan.

For a long time, Shylock has been bearing a grudge and hatred against Antonio because Antonio has "abused" Shylock and other money lenders like him for lending money at very high rates of interest. Shylock and other money lenders like him for lending money at very high rates of interest. Shylock, therefore, agrees to lend Bassanio three thousand ducats, but instead of charging any interest, he wants Antonio to sign a bond; according to the bond, if Antonio were to fail to return the money in three months, Shylock will cut a pound of flesh from Antonio's body. Despite Bassanio's protest, Antonio agrees to this bond, for he is hopeful of his ships returning to Venice, when he will have the money to repay the loan.

In the meantime, Portia is vexed that none of his suitors is appealing to her. Besides, according to her father's will, only the suitor who chooses the right casket with her portrait in it from among three caskets – gold, silver and lead – can marry her, she has no other choice in the matter. She and Nerissa, her lady-in-waiting remember Bassanio from one of his visits to Belmont earlier and Portia fondly hopes that he will be successful in the test and marry her.

Bassanio travels to Belmont along with his close friend Gratiano, chooses the correct casket and they both get engaged to Portia and Nerissa respectively. The brides to be give their partners their rings to wear, they caution their husbands against losing the rings at any cost. Amidst joyous moments, Bassanio receives a letter from Antonio saying that his ships have been lost at sea and that he may not live to see Bassanio again if Shylock chooses to go by the bond. Portia and Nerissa ask Bassanio and Gratiano to go back to Venice and be at Antonio's side at this moment. In the meantime, Lorenzo, a friend of Antonio and Bassanio

falls in love with Shylock's daughter Jessica, who elopes with him, taking with her a lot of her father's wealth – cash and jewelry. Shylock's servant Launcelot also leaves his master and joins the service of Bassanio. Shylock is wild with anger and he resolves to enforce the bond against Antonio more than ever when the time comes.

The case of Shylock versus Bassanio is taken to the court presided over by the Duke of Venice. After Bassanio and Gratiano leave Belmont for Venice, Portia sends a letter to her uncle Doctor Bellario, who is a doctor of law in Venice. In the court, Antonio is ready to suffer punishment for the sake of Bassanio. Disguised as a lawyer and his clerk respectively, Portia and Nerissa enter the court, having been sent by Doctor Bellario to appear for the defendant Bassanio. Portia hears the case out and offers three times the money owed to Shylock, but he declines the offer. He has earlier declined twice the amount offered by Bassanio. Shylock demands his "pound of flesh:" from Antonio as per the bond.

Seemingly to speak in favour of Shylock, Portia the lawyer concedes his legal right after making sure he waives his right to the money. Shylock praises the young lawyer's legal acumen and wisdom, and prepares to cut Antonio's flesh from his body. At this point, Portia drops a bombshell: she insists that, according to the bond, Shylock is entitled to take only one pound of flesh, not a little more nor a little less. Moreover, in cutting the flesh from Antonio's body, not a drop of his blood should be spilt.

Shylock now realizes that he has been trapped and cannot have the pound of flesh, so he is willing to take the money. Portia tells him it is too late now, as he has already forfeited his right to the 3,000 ducats owed to him. He faces imprisonment and death. Antonio agrees to forgive him provided that he becomes a Christian and leaves his wealth to his daughter Jessica and Lorenzo. Shylock agrees to these conditions and the Duke spares Shylock's life. The Duke awards half of Shylock's assets to Antonio and the other half goes to the state. Shylock leaves the court crestfallen and beaten emotionally.

There is a comic twist to the tale now. Eager to show his gratitude to the young lawyer, Bassanio is forced to part with the ring given to him by Portia; similarly, Gratiano gives away Nerissa's ring to the lawyer's clerk. Portia's party and Bassanio's leave for Belmont separately. Portia and Nerissa demand their rings from their husbands. After some teasing, they reveal who the lawyer and his clerk actually were. Antonio is also informed that ships have returned. They are all happy including Jessica and Lorenzo, who are pleased to hear of their inheritance from Shylock.

All's well that ends well!



I hope you have read the plot summary. You may recall the first task (TASK 1) assigned on the play and I am sure you have noted down your responses to the questions posed therein.

a) I hope you have marked the key points of the action in the play from the plot summary. We will come back to this later, after we have had an overview of the plot act wise. It will help us to go over the key points of action to reconfirm our understanding.

b) The main plot of the play, you will agree, is the one concerning 'the merchant of Venice' Antonio and the Jewish moneylender Shylock – the ill will the latter bears against, and the opportunity he gets to take revenge on, the former, the former's misfortune in not being able to repay the money borrowed for Bassanio, Shylock taking the matter to court to demand his 'pound of flesh' from Antonio's body, and the sudden turn of events that beat the moneylender legally, financially, and emotionally

The sub-plots that are interwoven around the main plot are: the mutual love between Bassanio and Portia that enables Antonio to be saved from Shylock's vengefulness and the test of Bassanio's love for her after the court battle is over; AND Shylock's daughter Jessica falling in love with Lorenzo, a Christian and friend of Antonio and Bassanio.

c) In TASK 2, you were asked to match the main characters of the play with brief descriptions of their roles in the play. The purpose of this task was to reinforce your understanding of the key roles played by each of the main characters in the overall plot. I hope you have attempted the task successfully. Keep these brief descriptions of the characters for further elaboration later, after you have read the play in full, but as you go along you may be able to add more details about each character. For this purpose, you may create a mindmap for each character.

d) Who do you feel sorry for, and why? Do you feel sorry for Antonio for not being able to repay the loan of Bassanio and, consequently, for being at the mercy of the greedy and vengeful Shylock and nearly losing his life? On the other hand, do you feel sorry for Shylock for being mistreated and humiliated by Antonio and his friends, and for being forced by the clever 'Portia' to forgo the loan amount as well as his wealth and to give up his religion? As you go on reading the play, you may find evidence of either. You may then decide whose character emerges as the more powerful at the end.

### **An Overview of the Structure of the Play and its Setting**

**TASK 3:** Have a look at the structure of the play (i.e., the number of Acts and Scenes in each Act) and the setting for each scene. Every play of Shakespeare is in FIVE Acts and each Act is divided into a few scenes. Each scene has a different setting; sometimes consecutive scenes may have the same setting.

From your study of the number of scenes in Act and the settings for the scenes, what kinds of inferences or conclusions can you make? What do these suggest to you about Shakespeare's stagecraft? This is an exercise in predicting and making reasonable guesses about the key points of action in the play. For instance, how many scenes are there in Acts 4 and 5 compared to the number of scenes in Act 2? What are the common settings used in this play? How do the settings alternate? Remember that there is no right or wrong answer; your guesses and predictions are as good as anyone else's.

### **Act 1**

Scene 1: Venice – A street  
Scene 2: Belmont – A room in Portia's house  
Scene 3: Venice – A public place

### **Act 2**

Scene 1: Belmont – A room in Portia's house  
Scene 2: Venice – A street  
Scene 3: Venice – A room in Shylock's house  
Scene 4: Venice – A street  
Scene 5: Venice – Before Shylock's house  
Scene 6: Venice – Before Shylock's house  
Scene 7: Belmont – In Portia's house  
Scene 8: Venice – A street  
Scene 9: Belmont – A room in Portia's house

### **Act 3**

Scene 1: Venice – A street  
Scene 2: Belmont – A room in Portia's house  
Scene 3: Venice – A street  
Scene 4: Belmont – A room in Portia's house  
Scene 5: Belmont – A garden

### **Act 4**

Scene 1: Venice – A court of Justice  
Scene 2: Venice – A street

### **Act 5**

Scene 1: Belmont – Avenue to Portia's house

## Main Characters

**TASK 2:** Match the characters with their descriptions.

Character	Description
Jessica	Heiress to a great fortune. She is one of Shakespeare's most intelligent and shrewd heroines. Her father had decreed in his will that she should marry only the suitor who chooses the correct casket (one of three caskets) containing her portrait.
Lorenzo	Shylock's young daughter who falls in love with Lorenzo and elopes with him dressed as a boy. She dislikes her father and is not happy to live with him in his house.
Shylock	The wealthy 'Merchant of Venice'. He sometimes lends money, but doesn't charge interest. In this play, he borrows money for Bassanio from a Jewish moneylender.
Nerissa	A typical Elizabethan lover and nobleman, generally careless in spending his money. In this play, he requests his close friend to lend him money so that he can appear rich when he tries to win Portia.
Antonio	A Jewish moneylender, who believes that, as a moneylender, it is his right to charge interest, so he is hated for his greed. Christians also hate him for his religion.
Portia	Portia's merry lady-in-waiting and confidante, who sympathizes with Portia in her predicament and her lack of freedom in choosing her husband.
Bassanio	The light-hearted friend of Bassanio. He never gets tired of talking and goes with him to Belmont. He falls in love with Nerissa.
Gratiano	A friend of Antonio and Bassanio. He woos and wins Jessica's love.

## Key to the Matching Task (TASK 2)

Character	Description
Portia	Heiress to a great fortune. She is one of Shakespeare's most intelligent and shrewd heroines. Her father had decreed in his will that she should marry only the suitor who chooses the correct casket (one of three caskets) containing her portrait.
Jessica	Shylock's young daughter who falls in love with Lorenzo and elopes with him dressed as a boy. She dislikes her father and is not happy to live with him in his house.

Antonio	The wealthy 'Merchant of Venice'. He sometimes lends money, but doesn't charge interest. In this play, he borrows money for Bassanio from Shylock.
Bassanio	A typical Elizabethan lover and nobleman, generally careless in spending his money. In this play, he requests his close friend Antonio to lend him money so that he can appear rich when he tries to woo Portia's love.
Shylock	A Jewish moneylender, who believes that, as a moneylender, it is his right to charge interest, so he is hated for his greed. Christians also hate him for his religion.
Nerissa	Portia's merry lady-in-waiting and confidante, who sympathizes with Portia in her predicament and her lack of freedom in choosing her husband.
Lorenzo	A friend of Antonio and Bassanio. He woos Jessica and wins her love.
Gratiano	The light-hearted friend of Bassanio. He never gets tired of talking and goes with him to Belmont, where he falls in love with Nerissa.

[**NOTE:** *What is published here is the initial part of a series of materials posted for an online workshop on Shakespeare being conducted using **Edmodo** by Prof. S. Rajagopalan on behalf of ELTAI.*]

## THE TEMPEST

### Notes on 'The Tempest'

T.S.Chandra Mouli

William Shakespeare is a master craftsman who mesmerised audience of his times with the themes that enthused them, employing a language that transcends all norms of evaluation to cast him into a mould. His plays conform to the prevalent conditions of Elizabethan theatre, suited to the tastes of the audience regaling them beyond description. Themes chosen by him carry an abiding appeal, defying tyrannical constraints of time and space. The plots have been sustained by exquisite poetic extravaganza that captivated audience of all times and climes. Many passages are often quoted and innumerable poetic expressions in his plays are used as proverbs. His plays can be related and relished by people across the globe even in the Twenty First Century. Universality is cardinal to his works that have immortalised him. He has liberally borrowed themes and expressions from diverse sources.

One can explore the heart of Shakespeare through his work only. The Tempest, one of his most popular plays belongs to the last phase of his career, which is characterised by an all pervasive tolerance and kindness, hallmarks of a mature person who has witnessed

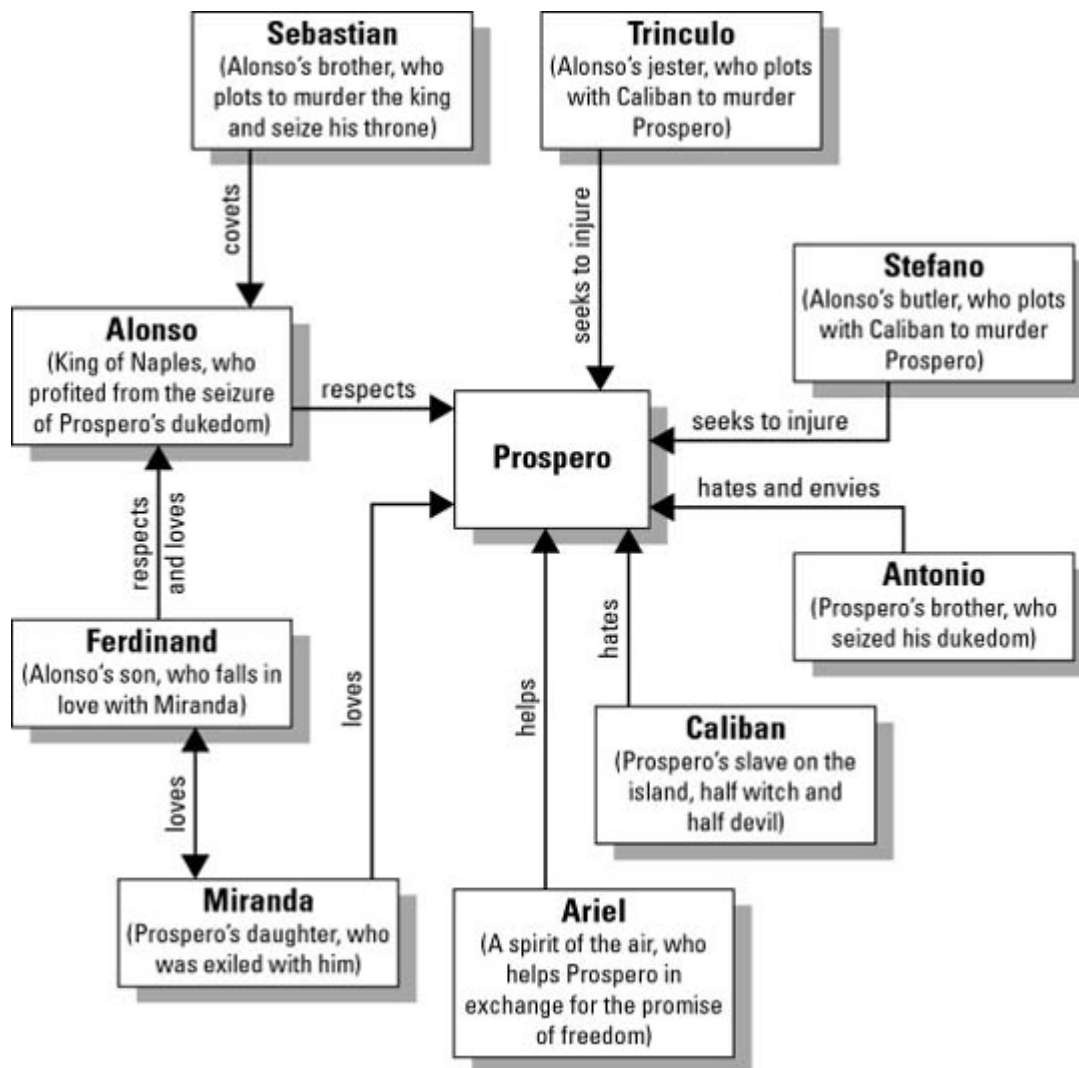
vagaries of life. Scene of action shifts from courts and palaces of his earlier works to an enchanted island. A consummate playwright, Shakespeare took liberty with language and the poetic lines cast an enthralling magic spell in consonance with the charms and power unleashed in the island by Prospero, the protagonist in the play.

The Tempest may be termed as the last play of Shakespeare, where he bids adieu to the thunderous applause of his audience. Prospero at times reminds one of Shakespeare the master craftsman. 'Revenge,' 'power' and 'forgiveness' make the plot outstanding and one cannot but agree with Prospero when he says:

".....We are such stuff As dreams are made on; and our little life Is rounded with a sleep."

As in most of his plays, the opening scene strikes the key note of the play. A fierce storm rages functioning as antimasque for the real masque presented subsequently. Conflict an essential part of any society manifests itself in this play that carries various strands like hegemony, patriarchy, quest for identity, resistance, rebellion that is quelled with an iron hand by Prospero besides reconciliation and forgiveness that are so vital to establish harmony in society for the survival of humankind. Freedom, confinement, betrayal, love and compassion may also be construed as various themes one comes across in the play. 'Quality of mercy' that is 'twice blessed' is reiterated in this play as a way of life to ensure peaceful and humane environment. Several aspects of Postcolonial Studies can be traced in the play, though it was literally written for Elizabethan audience. This is where genius of Shakespeare astounds audience even in the Twenty First Century.

Character map furnished here helps in knowing about the characters and understanding the plot of The Tempest.



Colonisation seems to be the major concern as the Elizabethan age was characterised by exploration of seas and finding new lands to settle and establish European Colonies there. Subjugating the natives of the land in addition to introducing educational patterns in a condescending manner suited to perpetuate coloniser's rule was a ploy used then. Prospero represents the spirit of the age in educating Caliban and keeping him in confinement. Power has its own share of prominence to reign as was done by him. Further, he has magical charms at his disposal to cast a spell and direct action as desired. He is at the centre of all action in the play. Ariel, a spirit set free by Prospero remains loyal and lends a hand in softening his master's attitude in forgiving all those who harmed him. Caliban remains adamant and vindictive till the end. Miranda is the only lady character in The Tempest peopled by men of various hues and proclivities. Caliban who feels betrayed by Prospero, stages a rebellion and attempts rape of Miranda which finds echoes in Raj Fiction of Twentieth Century. That's the charm of a Shakespearean play!

#### Topics for Discussion:

1. Give an account of Shakespeare's craftsmanship.
2. Is Prospero an antagonist or Protagonist?
3. Do you like Ariel or Caliban? Justify your response.
4. What are the features of the play that appeal to 21st Century audience?

## Call for Papers:

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Papers are invited for the next issue of for our E --Journal of Teaching and Research in English Literature [www.jtrel.in](http://www.jtrel.in) on any theme/ aspect of English Literature.

## Submission Guidelines:

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- The file must be in Microsoft Word format following MLA 8th Edition carrying a self-declared note that it is an original work and has not been published /sent for publication anywhere else
- **Font size:** Times New Roman 12, titles bold 14 font size
- **Word limit:** 1000-1500
- **Abstract:** 100 words
- A brief Bio-Note of about 50 words
- **Deadline:** June 15th, 2020
- Contributors are requested to send their Papers for consideration to [shailamahan@gmail.com](mailto:shailamahan@gmail.com) / [editor.jtrel@gmail.com](mailto:editor.jtrel@gmail.com)