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B.A. HONS SEMESTER II (ENGLISH SUBSIDIARY)

PAPER I

UNIT II – DRAMA

THE BALCONY SCENE FROM *ROMEO AND JULIET*

Introduction to the play :

- *Romeo and Juliet* is William Shakespeare's first romantic tragedy.
- Written early in Shakespeare's career (believed to have been written between 1591 and 1595)
- The first performance of the play took place in the autumn/winter of 1594 at the playhouse called The Theatre .
- Was first published in a quarto version in 1597.
- Shakespeare has used an English poetic retelling of an old Italian tale , Arthur Brooke's *The Tragical Historye of Romeus and Julie* (1562).
- Along with *Hamlet* , it is the most frequently performed play of William Shakespeare.
- Has been adapted numerous times for stage , film, musical and opera venues.
- Set in Verona, Italy during the 14th century.
- Is considered one of the greatest love-stories of all times.
- A tragic tale of a pair of star-crossed lovers, Romeo and Juliet, who belong to the two rival families of Verona , the Montagues and the Capulets.
- Their deaths ultimately reconcile their feuding families .
- Romeo and Juliet represent the archetypal young lovers.
- Several critics have praised the play for its use of language and dramatic effects.
- In the words of David Diaches , the play is “ a tragedy of circumstances rather than of character , brilliantly rendered in passionate lyrical-dramatic terms. Romeo and Juliet themselves are the quintessence of young love”.

The Balcony Scene :

- Act ii Scene ii of *Romeo and Juliet* is commonly referred to as the 'balcony scene' .
- This beautiful and poetic scene is considered one of Shakespeare's most famous love scenes.

- The scene portrays the development of relationship between Romeo and Juliet.
- Is one of the main turning points of the play.
- The scene follows the Capulet's party, the masquerade ball, where Romeo in disguise meets Juliet for the first time and kisses her.
- Hoping for a glimpse of Juliet, Romeo secretly climbs over the wall into the orchard of the Capulet family and waits under her window.
- Juliet comes out onto the balcony and, thinking that she is alone, proclaims her love for Romeo.
- Juliet is surprised and embarrassed to know that Romeo has overheard her declaration of love.
- Romeo returns the proclamation of love.
- Juliet challenges Romeo's proclamation, "*If that thy bent of love be honourable , thy purpose marriage, send me word to-morrow*".
- Romeo agrees to the marriage.
- Juliet promises to send Romeo a messenger in the morning to make plans for their wedding.
- The lovers reluctantly say goodnight although it is almost morning.
- The scene conveys their genuine feeling of love for each other.
- Is remarkable for Shakespeare's use of rich figurative language and literary devices .
- Foretells many future events and also acts as a catalyst to several actions in the play.
- Exemplifies the poetics of love – stands alone as one of English Literature's most poetic , romantic exchanges between two lovers.

THE GRAVEDIGGERS' SCENE FROM *HAMLET*

Introduction to the play :

- Shakespeare's first major tragedy- his longest play.
- Believed to have been written between 1599-1601.
- Considered among the most powerful and influential works of world literature.
- One of Shakespeare's most popular plays with a story capable of "seemingly endless retelling and adaptation by others".
- Source for the plot of *Hamlet* seems to be the legend of Amleth , preserved by the 13th century Danish historian , Saxo Grammaticus in his *Gesta Danorum* , the first full history of Denmark.
- This legend was subsequently retold by the 16th century French scholar , Francois de Belleforest in his *Histoires tragiques* (1570).

- According to one theory , Shakespeare’s main source is an earlier play , *Ur-Hamlet* (now lost , possibly written by Thomas Kyd or Shakespeare)
- Three different early versions of the play are extant – the *First Quarto* (Q1,1603) ; the *Second Quarto* (Q2, 1604) and *the First Folio* (F1, 1623)
- Has clear affinities with the revenge tragedy of Seneca , an ancient Roman dramatist.
- Set in Denmark , the play depicts Prince Hamlet and his revenge against his uncle , Claudius , who has murdered Hamlet’s father in order to seize his throne and marry Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude.
- Has been termed as a tragedy of reflection.
- Shakespeare’s focus is on the character and the inner struggle – it is through the soliloquies, not the action, that Hamlet’s motives and thoughts are revealed.
- The play raises several questions – Is Hamlet really mad or does he feign madness? Does Hamlet love Ophelia? If so , why does he treat her so terribly? Why does Hamlet who , on certain occasions , acts with an unexpected promptness and without loss of time ,go on postponing the vital task of avenging his father’s murder ?
- While Hamlet’s irresolution and procrastination – his hesitation to kill his uncle (problem of delay)- has been viewed by some as merely a plot device to prolong the action, others interpret it as a dramatization of the complex philosophical and ethical issues that surround cold-blooded murder , calculated revenge and thwarted desire.
- Important features of the play include – use of the supernatural(the ghost of Hamlet’s murdered father), use of soliloquies, introduction of comic elements, use of the device of ‘a play within the play’.
- The play’s structure and depth of characterization have inspired much critical scrutiny.
- Various interpretations of *Hamlet* – Religious, Philosophical, Psychoanalytic , Feminist
 - Religious interpretations find the play alternately Catholic and Protestant.
 - Hamlet is often perceived as a philosophical character ,expounding ideas that are now described as relativist, existential (“to be or not to be”) and skeptical.
 - Psychoanalytic critics (Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan) have examined Hamlet’s unconscious desires.
 - Feminist critics (Carolyn Gold Heilbrun and Elaine Showalter) have attempted to re-evaluate and rehabilitate the often-maligned characters of Gertrude and Ophelia.
- Has been termed as “an artistic failure” by T.S.Eliot (according to whom *Hamlet* lacks an ‘objective correlative’ – Prince Hamlet is dominated by an emotion that is ‘in excess of the facts as they appear’)
- Has inspired many other writers from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Charles Dickens to James Joyce and Iris Murdoch.

The Gravediggers’ Scene :

- Act v Scene i of *Hamlet* is referred to as the Gravediggers' or the Graveyard Scene .
- The stage directions and prompts in this scene designated the gravediggers as 'clowns' .
- In Shakespeare's time the word 'clown' referred to a rustic or peasant , and did not mean that the person in question was funny or wore a costume.
- The gravediggers represent a humorous type commonly found in Shakespeare's plays – the clever commoner who gets the better of his social superior through wit and intellect.
- Though they are usually figures of merriment, in this scene the gravediggers assume a rather macabre tone , since their jests and jibes are all made in a cemetery , among bones of the dead.
- A scene supposedly meant to provide comic relief after the morbidity of the previous scene of Ophelia's death by drowning.
- The scene is only partially comic as it raises serious questions about death .
- In the churchyard , two gravediggers shovel out a grave (for Ophelia).
- They jest about their job because they have been in the profession for years together.
- Their witticism range from rhetorical questions to paradoxes, puns and sinister jokes .
- They argue whether Ophelia should be buried in the churchyard since her death looks like a suicide and, as per religious doctrines, she must not receive a Christian burial.
- Hamlet and Horatio enter at a distance and watch the gravediggers at work.
- Hamlet looks at wonder at the skulls they excavate to make room for the fresh grave and speculates darkly about what occupations the owners of these skulls served in life.
- One of the motifs developed in this scene is Hamlet's obsession with the physicality of death and the physical decomposition of the human body – this is most evident in Hamlet's preoccupations with the skull of Yorick , the court jester , as he envisions physical features such as lips and skin that have decomposed from the bone .
- Hamlet tells Horatio that as a child he knew Yorick and is appalled at the sight of his skull.
- Many of Hamlet's thoughts about death concern philosophical and spiritual consequences of dying – for instance, torment in the afterlife .
- Hamlet is also fascinated by the equalizing effect of death – great men and wretched beggars both end as dust .
- Hamlet satirically evokes the wasted lives of politicians , courtiers and other ranks of society summoning them to a dance of death .
- He imagines loam and dust from the decomposed corpses of Alexander and Julius Caesar being used to "stop a beer barrel" or patch up a wall.
- Hamlet's obsession with mortality and decomposition emphasizes the negative progress of man.
- Hamlet's solemn theorizing on death explodes in grief and rage when he sees it is Ophelia's body that is being laid to rest.

- Grief-stricken and outraged at Ophelia's death, Hamlet leaps into the grave and fights with Laertes (Ophelia's brother), saying that "*I lov'd Ophelia. Forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love / Make up my sum*".
- Hamlet's assault on Laertes offers a glimpse of what his true feelings for Ophelia might once have been.
- Weary of life and disillusioned by Ophelia's death, Hamlet reacts with gloomy resignation – his address to the corpse, "*I lov'd you ever. But it is no matter*" really means that "nothing matters".
- Gertrude and Claudius declare that Hamlet is mad.
- Hamlet storms off and Horatio follows.
- According to Jan Kott, the graveyard scene with the gravediggers' dialogue, rid of metaphysics. brutal and unequivocal, is magnificent.
- The gravediggers' conversation about Ophelia furthers an important theme in the play: the question of the moral legitimacy of suicide under theological law - By giving this serious subject a darkly, comic interpretation, Shakespeare essentially makes a grotesque parody of Hamlet's earlier "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, indicating the collapse of every lasting value in the play into uncertainty and absurdity.
- The scene is important dramatically as it marks a clear and notable development in the character of Hamlet- he appears controlled, speculative, philosophical, melancholy, wise Hamlet confronts, recognizes and accepts the condition of being human.

THE RECOGNITION SCENE FROM *THE TEMPEST*

Introduction to the play:

- Written probably in 1610-1611.
- One of the last plays that Shakespeare wrote alone.
- The story draws heavily on the tradition of the romance, a fictitious narrative set far away from ordinary life.
- Was originally listed as a comedy in the *First Folio* of Shakespeare's plays.
- Subsequent editors have chosen to put it in the group of 'late romances' – often simply called the 'romances', a group of William Shakespeare's last plays comprising *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* - which deal with faith and redemption and are variations on themes of rewarding virtue over vice.
- A tragi-comedy that deals with both tragic and comic elements.

- The play explores several themes including magic, betrayal, revenge, family, forgiveness and reconciliation.
- Chief characters of the play include – Prospero (the rightful Duke of Milan), Miranda (daughter to Prospero), Ariel (an airy spirit, in service to Prospero), Caliban (a servant of Prospero and a savage monster), Alonso (king of Naples), Ferdinand (Alonso's son), Antonio (Prospero's brother, the usurping Duke of Milan), Sebastian (Alonso's brother), Gonzalo (an honest old counsellor)
- The play opens with the scene of a ship at sea caught in a powerful storm.
- The terrified passengers include Alonso, Ferdinand, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo and others.
- They are thrown on a remote island.
- The storm is a magical creation of Prospero – a part of his plan to deal with his old enemies.
- Prospero, by the power of his magic, seeks to set things right and plots to reverse what was done to him twelve years ago and regain his office.
- Prospero was the Duke of Milan before his dukedom was usurped and taken from him by his own brother, Antonio, aided by Alonso, the king of Naples. Twelve years ago he and his young daughter, Miranda, were left to die on a raft at sea. They survived because of Gonzalo's timely help who left them supplies and Prospero's books, which are the source of his magical powers.
- Divine providence brought Prospero and Miranda to a remote island.
- Except for the opening scene, rest of the story is set on this remote island where Prospero now lives with his daughter, Miranda, and his two servants – Caliban, a savage monster figure (whom Prospero rules sternly) and Ariel, an airy spirit.
- The play is full of spectacular action, music, songs, magical spirits and transformations.
- There is a kind of mini-play, called a masque, performed by magical actors who take on the roles of Roman goddesses.
- Has been put to varied interpretations :
 - Some argue that the play shows the triumph of art (represented by Prospero, aided by Ariel) over nature (Caliban).
 - Others have interpreted the play in terms of a debate on the merits of civilization versus a life closely tied to the natural world.
 - Modern day productions present *The Tempest* as an anti-colonialist tale, an allegory of Europeans colonizing foreign lands – Caliban is reminiscent of the native populations in the new world, a long-time resident of the island who is exploited by the European newcomers.
 - Feminist interpretations consider the play in terms of gender roles – how the concept of gender is constructed and presented by the text and explore the supporting consciousness and ideologies, with an awareness of imbalances and injustices.

- Some see *The Tempest* as a fable of art and creation , with Prospero representing Shakespeare and Prospero's renunciation of magic signaling Shakespeare's farewell to the stage.

The Recognition Scene :

- Act v Scene i of *The Tempest* is referred to as the Recognition scene.
- A long scene that makes up the entire fifth Act of the play.
- A scene in which all the characters of the play are brought on stage together for the first time.
- The scene opens with Ariel revealing to Prospero that Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio (currently imprisoned in a grove by Prospero's order) are remorseful, worried and desperate. Gonzalo is grief-stricken and cries constantly..
- Prospero's heart softens towards his old enemies- he asks Ariel to go and release the men and resolves to have pity on them.
- Prospero's only purpose had been to make the sinners realize and repent for their misdeeds: "*the rarer action is /in virtue than in vengeance ; they being penitent/ The sole drift of my purpose doth extend / Not a frown further.*"
- Now alone on stage , Prospero delivers his famous soliloquy in which he addresses all the spirits of the island who are under his command describing how, with their help, he has performed many awe-inspiring feats and declaring that after performing his last task he will break his staff and drown his magic book at sea.
- Ariel now enters with Alonso and his companions who have been charmed and obediently stand in a circle.
- The three sinners - Alonso, Sebastian and Antonio are made to realize their sin which they had committed twelve years ago in driving Prospero and his little daughter, Miranda, out of Milan and exposing them to the dangers of the sea and the sky.
- All the three sinners are made to feel ashamed of their misdeeds.
- Prospero thanks Gonzalo for his loyalty.
- He now sends Ariel to his cell to fetch the clothes he once wore as the Duke of Milan.
- Prospero puts on these garments , releases the men from their spell and assures them that he is no phantom but the original Duke of Milan.
- Prospero promises to grant freedom to his helper-spirit , Ariel, whom he now sends to fetch the boatswain and the mariners from the wrecked ship..
- In an unparalleled gesture, Prospero forgives his enemies.
- He forgives Antonio but demands that he should return his dukedom.

- To Alonso , who is mourning the loss of his son , Prospero draws aside a curtain revealing behind it Ferdinand and Miranda playing a game of chess.
- Alonso is ecstatic at the discovery of his son, Ferdinand.
- The sight of so many human beings impresses Miranda who says the rapturous lines :
“O,wonder!/ How many goodly creatures are there here!/How beauteous mankind is!O brave new world,/That has such people in’t!”
- Alonso embraces his son, Ferdinand, and his would be daughter-in-law, Miranda and begs her forgiveness for his treachery.
- Prospero silences Alonso’s apologies insisting that the reconciliation is complete.
- Prospero sends Ariel to fetch Caliban , Trinculo and Stephano.
- He invites his guests to spend the night with him in his cell where he will tell them of his life and adventures during the past twelve years.
- He announces that, on the following day, they would all sail for Naples , where the ceremony of the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda would be duly performed.
- Afterwards, Prospero would go to Milan to take charge of his duties as the Duke.
- The last duty that Prospero gives to Ariel before setting him free is to make sure their trip home is made on “calm seas” with “auspicious gales”.
- The other characters exit and Prospero delivers the epilogue.
- The Recognition scene marks the denouement of the play and brings the action to a conclusion.
- It is mainly written in verse but contains a few lines of prose as well, spoken by the comic characters .
- It also contains the song that Ariel sings in joyous anticipation of his freedom.
- The scene focuses on the theme of repentance and forgiveness.
- Highlights the motif of fulfillment – everyone gets his heart’s desire – Prospero gets his dukedom and a son-in-law (Ferdinand) , Alonso gets his son and a daughter-in-law (Miranda), Ariel gets his freedom and Caliban , after the entire party leaves, gets the possession of the island.
- Prospero’s renunciation of magic signals Shakespeare’s farewell to the stage.

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