



Different thematic perceptions in Shakespearean Comedies

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.

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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. Greater 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 colouring is one of the characteristics of supreme art; it brings the relief along with pain; it furnishes the reconciliation along with the conflict. 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.

The Shakespeare's comedies have stood the test of time. Today, Shakespeare comedy plays like the Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, A Mid Summer Night's Dream and The Two Gentlemen of Verona continue to enthrall and entertain audience worldwide but these plays are not comedies in the modern sense of the word. Indeed, the comedy of Shakespeare's time was very different to our modern comedy. The style and key characteristics of a Shakespearean comedy are not as distinct as the other Shakespearean genres and classification of the Shakespeare comedy plays is therefore difficult.

When studying Shakespearean comedy, we will notice that there are several traits that are common to all of Bard's comedies works. It is important to note that the term "comedy" didn't quite have the same meaning to Elizabethan audience as it does today. While there is certainly quite a bit of humour to be found in Shakespeare's comedies, "comedy" generally referred to a light hearted play with a happy ending, as opposed to his more dramatic tragedies and historical dramas.

The comedies of William Shakespeare are All's Well That Ends Well, As You Like It, The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, The Merchant of Venice, A

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Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Winter's Tale and Measure for Measure. Some of these works are truly funny from beginning to end, while others, like The Merchant of Venice, have a very serious tone or strong dramatic moments.

Whether it takes the form of mixed up twins or a clever disguise, mistaken identity was one of Shakespeare's favorite and most used plot devices. Gender mix ups were also quite popular. Shakespeare quite often had characters masquerading as the opposite sex, leading to many misunderstandings and comical situations. During Shakespeare's life time, men frequently played all the roles in a play, which added another dimension to the comedy.

Shakespearean comedy always involves multiple plot lines, cleverly intertwined to keep the audience guessing. These unexpected twists are always straightened out in a happy ending.

Shakespeare, like many classical writers, relied heavily on stock characters for his plays. You'll notice several that keep appearing in The Bard's works: the young couple, the fool, the clever servant, the drunk, etc. These stock characters were instantly recognizable stereotypes to Elizabethan audiences. All Shakespearean comedies end happily. Most often, this happy ending involves marriage or pending marriage. Love always wins out in the end.

Conventions assist us in understanding literary works belonging to a particular genre; they help to categorize them and illuminate their common features. Genres set up certain expectations because of their shared characteristics. For example, you know to expect specific features when reading or viewing a western (good guys and bad guys; shoot outs or duels), a detective thriller (false clues that lead in the wrong direction; ingenious solution to a mystery), science fiction (humans and aliens; futuristic technology; special effects). One's judgment of a given work is affected in part by how it meets or fails to meet generic expectations. An artist may deliberately manipulate or play with conventions, parodying or transcending the limits of a literary genre: Monty Python's Holy Grail parodies Arthurian romances; Blazing Saddles parodies Westerns; the Pyramus and Thisbe Play in A Midsummer Night's Dream parodies Shakespeare's own Romeo and Juliet. The Purple Rose of Cairo transcends sentimental romance by raising questions about the boundaries of art, reality and fantasy; Hamlet transcends previous Renaissance revenge tragedy.

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.

Nor, on the other hand, ought it to transgress the limits of sanity a madman is not a comic character. Reason must be present in the individual, though his end is absurd. A rational man acting irrationally is the incongruity which calls forth the laugh is the contradiction upon which comedy reposes. There must be, in the end, a restoration from delusion, and often a punishment, both of which are precluded by the notion of insanity. Many readers feel that Don Quixote is too much of a lunatic. In general, therefore, the comic individual must not be a criminal, nor must he be a madman.

In comedy of situation, therefore, a person is placed in circumstances over which he has little or no control, and is made to pursue absurd and nugatory objects without any direct fault of his own. His deception is brought about through the senses; his mistake arises from false appearances which hover around him in general, that which is phantom seems reality. He now follows up his delusions as ends; he meets and collides with others, who have similar ends, or with others who have rational ends, or with others who have rational ends. The result is an infinite complication of mistakes and deceptions, which is the peculiar nature of comedy of situation, or, as is more commonly called from its intricacy, comedy of intrigue.

The special forms of this sensuous deception ought also to be classified. In the first place, things may be disguised. The natural and artificial objects which ordinarily surround a man may be so changed that he imagines himself a different person, or in a strange world; sudden transition into a new country, or into a new condition of life, may be made to appear actual, though wholly unreal. Christopher Sly, the drunken thinker, who being suddenly surrounded by the luxury of a palace, comes to consider himself a lord, is an example. But this phase is quite subsidiary it is a mere setting for other and greater effects.

The second, and chief, instrumentality of comedy of situation is the mistake in personality, or, as it is sometimes called mistaken identity. One person is taken for another; thus two persons lose their relations to the society around them, and this society around them, and this society loses its relation to them. The effect is wonderful. The whole world seems to be converted into a dream into fairyland; the natural order of things is turned upside down; the ordinary mediations of life are perverted or destroyed. A man with a strong head, it is true, may preserve his equilibrium in the confusion; such a one, however, is not a comic character.

The mistakes of identity are produced mainly in two ways by natural resemblance and by disguise. The first is an accident, and lies outside of the knowledge of the individuals who happen to be like one another. They are, therefore, the unconscious victims of an external influence; they are involved in a confusion of which nobody knows

the origin. But disguise is intentional at least on the part of one person, namely, he who has disguised himself. All the other characters of the play may be victimized by the mask, and take the appearance for the reality; or a part of them may be in the secret, and enjoy the sport with the audience.

One individual, however, is not deceived is free; has a conscious purpose of his own, which he is realizing. Disguise has a thousand shapes; it is the most common artifice, not merely of comedy, but of the drama generally. It may run through a whole play and constitute the main point of interest, or it may be employed for a subordinate object in a single scene. Its manifold forms show the originality of the writer of comedy. Here is his province the creation of novel disguise and situations. They all, however, have the one common characteristic deception through a false appearance.

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Shakespeare's King Lear : A Play full of Metaphysical Perceptions

Shakespeare is the great exponent in the field of drama. He is much interested to present the reality of human existence through the journey of his tragic protagonists. In his grim tragedies Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello and King Lear, he portrays his tragic heroes in the context of metaphysical existence. Life encompasses within the limits of metaphysical reality of human existence as it happens with Macbeth, Hamlet Othello, and King Lear.

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On the surface to examine metaphysical elements such as wit, conceit, far fetched images, simile, metaphor and sublimity of thought in Shakespearean tragedies, appears to be a mild joke but a close postmortem of the Shakespearean sonnets as well as his tragedies reveals that metaphysical elements much earlier than the metaphysical poets finds a glorious expression in Shakespearean works and thus it becomes hardly a laughing stock for the readers as well as for the research scholars in this field. In order to derive Shakespearean metaphysical elements an extensive and intensive depth of study of Shakespeare's tragedies such as King Lear, Othello, Hamlet, Macbeth, Troilus and Cressida, Richard II, etc is required. These plays are full of wit, irony and humour. The heading of the play King Lear in itself is the greatest example of the greatest metaphor which finds a recurring expression in the poems of the metaphysical poets such as John Donne, Marvell, Vaughan, and Crashaw. Truly speaking, Shakespeare in the real sense of the term and in the context of the meaning explained in Concise Oxford Dictionary and Advanced Learner's Dictionary is more metaphysical than the master mind of the metaphysical school of poetry. The heading of the play King Lear is twisted with an irony and metaphor. Shakespeare's expression in King Lear :

"Nothing will come of nothing, Speak again" ⁽¹⁾

This Lear's speech is similar to the witty and metaphysical expression of John Donne's expression in 'The Canonization' and 'Song' :

*"For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love,
Or chide my palsie, or my gout,
My five gray haïres, or ruin'd fortune flout....."* ⁽²⁾

Donne make's a close resemblance of this kind of expression in the poem 'The Sun Rising'

"Busy old fool, unruly Sunne...

Thou sunne art half as happy as mee" ⁽³⁾

Donne's love poems are full of metaphysical queries and intellectual thought like Shakespeare's Hamlet:

"I will tell you why; so shall my

Anticipation prevent your discovery,

.....Man delights not me - no, nor woman neither,

Though by your smiling you seem to say so." ⁽⁴⁾

And Miranda's expression in the play 'The Tempest'

"I do not know

One of my sex ; no woman's face remember,

Save, from my glass, mine own; nor have I seen

More that I may call men than you, good friend..." ⁽⁵⁾

Much earlier than the birth of John Donne, Shakespeare made an exploration of metaphysical theme and metaphysical elements into his plays, sonnets etc. for instance in 'The Tempest' in Act V Scene I Shakespeare expresses through his character Miranda.

Mira. "O, wonder !

How many goodly creatures are there here !

How beauteous mankind is ! O brave new world,

That has such people in't !" " ⁽⁶⁾

Miranda's expression at different intervals of the play foreshadows John Donne to tread on. Miranda's expression is not alone ideal and metaphysical but it is pregnant with empirical study of human world and celestial thought, which is similar like Lear's expression in the play King Lear:

"It may be so, my lord.

Hear, nature, hear; dear goddess, hear!

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.....*To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child! Away, away!* (7)

Lear's above speech is a manifestation of Shakespeare's faith in divine, which is similar to the vision of metaphysical thinkers as well as metaphysical poets. Marvel's expression in the poem 'The Garden' is equally manifestation of the poets love for nature as well in the identity of divine force hidden in the form of nature.

The title of the play King Lear is hardly a happy one; unless it is taken merely to refer to his residence in time there is nothing primitive about Shakespeare. His work acts its best; it is well polished and cultivated masterly. He was heir to the great European tradition of literature and philosophy which, having inherited, he laid out for his own purposes and for ours. He established his chosen dialect as the base of literary English and he improved almost beyond recognition. He was not the first English dramatist to use syllabic verse but he was the first to develop the potentialities, especially in rhymed couplet. The way Shakespearean characters express their views are similar to the mode of expression of metaphysical poets as well as metaphysical thinkers.

The speech of Cordelia which is in form of aside makes an expression of metaphysical strain. The speech runs as follow:

“Cordelia : what shall Cordelia do? Love and be silent” (8)

So, Cordelia's personality is torn between two opposite forces, emotion and intellect. Further Cordelia's aside:

*Cordelia: then poor Cordelia and yet not so;
Since, I am sure, my love's more ponderous than
my tongue.*

Cor: nothing my lord. (9)

In the above speech, Cordelia's passion terminates into thought and her thought terminates into passion, which is the greatest textual evidence of Shakespeare to be a metaphysical poet and a metaphysical dramatist.

Dr. Johnson's comment that in metaphysical poetry heterogeneous ideas are yoked together by violence, finds a wonderful expression in the talk between Lear and his three daughters, especially of Cordelia. No doubt Shakespeare, the great painter of human life and of human event, reciprocates about the love between Cordelia and her father, which is neither platonic nor metaphysical but it is universal in the worldly life.

The debate between Cordelia and Lear exhibits not only intellectual but also explores metaphysical theme. Shakespeare has not confined himself to homogeneous ideas rather he has made an intellectual dance of heterogeneous ideas. Cordelia's love for her father is as candid as the water of the Ganges; she does not have any liking for the materialistic world. It is obvious that human love on the plain level gets divided after marriage. Marriage

is a turning tides in conjugal as well as in the worldly life. Cordelia being the youngest one is sincere and loyal to her father. She does not know how to coin sycophant words in order to grab the maximum share of her father's inheritance:

*Cord : Haply, when I shall wed, that lord
Whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half of my love with him, half my care and duty
Sure, I shall never marry like my sisters,
To love my father all.* (10)

The kind of love, Shakespeare views with the help of the episode of Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan is universal. The path of honesty is not full of Roses rather it is full of thorns. To tide over the falsehood is a herculean task. The suffering of Cordelia and King Lear is identical with truth. Simultaneously it reflects that the reward of honesty, loyalty and sincerity is not immediate gain, but its reward is humiliation, starvation and premature death. No doubt Cordelia's suffering and King Lear's suffering emerges eternal reality, like Keats' Hyperion and Shelley's Prometheus. Thus, Lear's character becomes a living example of a tyrant and idealist into this world.

Kent for the welfare of the state of Lear pleads Lear with the help of his wit like Greek philosopher Plato and Indian philosopher like Chanakya. He argues with Lear in a metaphysical and philosophical way to guard Lear, the king, and his kingdom. Kent's advice to Lear is not simply the advice of a statesman but it is also witty in its expression. Wit lies in the discourse of Kent. Kent's speech propounds political ideology in itself which runs as follow:

*“Kent: Let it fall rather, though the fork invade
The region of my heart.
Be Kent unmannerly when Lear is mad.
What wouldst thou do, old man?
Think'st thou that duty shall have dread to speak
When power of flattery Bows? To plainness honour's
bound*

When majesty falls to folly. Reserve thy state;” (11)

Here Kent's speech is identical with western political thought of C.L.Wayper, Plato and Hegel.

Shakespeare identifies suffering, love, etc. In human existence with truth because truth is God and God is truth. Even, Mahatma Gandhi has quoted in his essay “Woes of third class passengers” “the face of truth is hidden behind the golden veil of Maya, says the Upanishads.” (12)

Lear is making ceaseless effort to search his identity. Consciousness of Hamlet, Lear, Cordelia, Kent, forms its warp and woof for the search of existence. No doubt Lear is more sinned against than sinning like Shylock in 'The Merchant of Venice,' but the fact has remain that suffering purges the soul of Cordelia. Like Greek Aeschylus “Prometheus Bound,” suffering does not alone purify the soul of Lear but it brings out eternal truth on the surface which is identical with external reality. Does this view not find expression in Lear's speech?

“Does any here know me? This is not Lear.

***Does Lear walk thus? Speak thus? Where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
Are lethargied.- Ha! Waking? 'Tis not so.-
Who is it that can tell me who I am?
"Who can tell me, who I am" (13)***

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