



STUDY MATERIAL 5

Sub: ENGLISH 'B'

Class: XI

Topic : Comedy Of Errors

Date:07.07.2020

About The Author: William Shakespeare (26 April 1564 – 23 April 1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is often called England's national poet and the "Bard of Avon". His extant works, including some collaborations, consist of around 38 plays, 154 sonnets, two long narrative poems, and a few other verses, of which the authorship of some is uncertain. His plays have been translated into every major living language and are performed more often than those of any other playwright. Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories and these works remain regarded as some of the best work produced in these genres. He then wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, including *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*, considered some of the finest works in the English language. In his last phase, he wrote tragicomedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights. Shakespeare's plays remain highly popular today and are constantly studied, performed, and reinterpreted in diverse cultural and political contexts throughout the world.

Summary of the Play: AEgeon, a merchant of Syracuse, is condemned to death in Ephesus for violating the ban against travel between the two rival cities. As he is led to his execution, he tells the Ephesian Duke, Solinus, that he has come to Syracuse in search of his wife and one of his twin sons, who were separated from him 25 years ago in a shipwreck. The other twin, who grew up with Aegeon, is also traveling the world in search of the missing half of their family. (The twins, we learn, are identical, and each has an identical twin slave named Dromio.) The Duke is so moved by this story that he grants Aegeon a day to raise the thousand-mark ransom that would be necessary to save his life. Meanwhile, unknown to Aegeon, his son Antipholus of Syracuse (and Antipholus' slave Dromio) is also visiting Ephesus--where Antipholus' missing twin, known as Antipholus of Ephesus, is a prosperous citizen of the city. Adriana, Antipholus of Ephesus' wife, mistakes Antipholus of Syracuse for her husband and drags him home for dinner, leaving Dromio of Syracuse to stand guard at the door and admit no one. Shortly thereafter, Antipholus of Ephesus (with his slave Dromio of Ephesus) returns home and is refused entry to his own house. Meanwhile, Antipholus of Syracuse has fallen in love with Luciana, Adriana's sister, who is appalled at the behavior of the man she thinks is her brother-in-law. The confusion increases when a gold chain ordered by Antipholus Ephesus is given to Antipholus of Syracuse. Antipholus of Ephesus refuses to pay for the chain (unsurprisingly, since he never received it) and is arrested for debt. His wife, seeing his strange behavior, decides he has gone mad and orders him bound and held in a cellar room. Meanwhile, Antipholus of Syracuse and his slave decide to flee the city, which they believe to be enchanted, as soon as possible--only to be menaced by Adriana and the debt officer. They seek refuge in a nearby abbey. Adriana now begs the Duke to intervene and remove her "husband" from

the abbey into her custody. Her real husband, meanwhile, has broken loose and now comes to the Duke and levels charges against his wife. The situation is finally resolved by the Abbess, Emilia, who brings out the set of twins and reveals herself to be Aegeon's long-lost wife. Antipholus of Ephesus reconciles with Adriana; Aegeon is pardoned by the Duke and reunited with his spouse; Antipholus of Syracuse resumes his romantic pursuit of Luciana, and all ends happily with the two Dromios embracing.

Significance of the Title: In addition to the title, *The Comedy of Errors* has all the elements of a Shakespearean comedy – there's a conflict, some resolution, confusion is cleared up, families and lovers get reunited, and it's also funny. Still, *The Comedy of Errors* is often dismissed as a farce, which is defined as a short work (and this is actually Shakespeare's shortest) that is based on utterly unbelievable premises and solely designed to evoke laughter (as compared to bringing up deep, dramatic points or conflicts). The entire Aegeon subplot elevates the whole play above a farce, and even makes the work a tragicomedy (literally a mixture of comic and tragic elements). Aegeon's plight is serious, but it avoids being melodramatic because of Aegeon's beautiful speech during what should be his death scene, when he thinks this son doesn't recognize him. Aegeon's shadow falls over the whole play. His imminent execution has the special distinction of being the subject of the opening lines, and his release allows the whole resolution of the play to seem complete. His would-be tragedy puts the comic action of the play into perspective, balancing its light with darkness. His possible death allows Shakespeare to place something meaningful at stake in the play's resolution. This meaningful conclusion (as opposed to just a random one that occurs pell-mell) is more in line with Shakespeare's other comedies, and allows the work to conclude by threading together comic revelation with salvation from tragedy. Though it is one of many comedies Shakespeare wrote, *The Comedy of Errors* is Shakespeare's only play that has "comedy" explicitly in the title. Interestingly, the conceits of this play are so many and so improbable that it's often argued to be a farce rather than a true comedy. In a normal comedy, the plot and situations are usually a stretch, but rarely utterly unbelievable. A farce, on the other hand, is simply meant to inspire laughter, and its premises are completely absurd. The plot line for *The Comedy of Errors* revolves around two sets of identical twin boys, both born at the same hour, separated for more than two decades, and coincidentally meet at the same place, on the same day. To make the situation even more unbelievable, the site of the serendipitous reunion happens to be the same location of their missing mother and father (who have also been separated from each other). While *The Comedy of Errors* seems to have all the elements of a farce, Shakespeare asserts that it is a more serious play by deliberately putting "comedy" in the title. Shakespeare's insistence that it's actually a comic work demands that we read it with greater scrutiny. Like many of his comedies, deeper issues (death, loss, isolation, etc.) are addressed alongside the slapstick antics and hijinks of misunderstanding. Therefore, this play's title is simultaneously an admission and an invitation: Shakespeare knows he'd put together a silly piece, but he's also challenging the viewer or reader of the play to be looking out for deep issues and dangerous problems.

SHORT QUESTIONS & ANSWERS :

1.what was the law made at Ephesus against any merchant of Syracuse?

Ans: The law stated that if a merchant of Syracuse was seen in Ephesus, he would be put to death unless he paid a thousand marks for the ransom of his life.

2. Why was Aegeon brought before the duke?

Ans: Aegeon was brought before the duke of Ephesus either to pay the fine of a thousand marks or to receive the death sentence.

3. What was strange of Aegeon's two sons?

Ans: Aegeon's two sons were identical twins and it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. The two boys had the same name too i.e. Antipholus.

4. Who rescued Aegeon's wife, eldest son and eldest slave from the sea?

Ans: A boat of fishermen from Corinth had rescued Aegeon's wife, his elder son and Dromio Elder from the sea.

5. How did Antipholus of Syracuse avoid the danger that had befallen on his father, Aegeon?

Ans: On reaching Ephesus Antipholus had met a friend who had advised him to pass for a merchant of Epidamnum and thus he could avoid the danger that had befallen on his father.

6. What did the fishermen do to Elder Antipholus and Elder Dromio after rescuing them from the sea?

Ans: After rescuing Elder Antipholus and Elder Dromio the fishermen had taken them away from Aegeon's wife and had sold the two boys to duke Menaphon.

7. How did Antipholus of Syracuse treat his slave Dromio?

Ans: Antipholus of Syracuse allowed his slave Dromio freedom of speech which was unusual between masters and their servants.

8. Why did Adriana get angry?

Ans: Adriana got angry when she heard from Dromio that her husband had said that he had no wife.

9. Why had the servants refuse to open the door when Elder Antipholous had returned home?

Ans: The servants had refused to open the door when Elder Antipholous had returned home to dinner because their mistress Adriana had ordered not to allow anyone inside the house.

10. What did Antipholous of Syracuse order Dromio?

Ans: Antipholous of Syracuse had ordered Dromio to get things on board the ship to leave that place (Ephesus) immediately.

11. What did Adriana order her servants?

Ans: Adriana ordered her servants to bind her husband, the master of the house and take him to a dark room till the doctor was called to cure his madness.

12. What did a servant report to Adriana?

Ans: A servant reported to Adriana that Antipholous and Dromio had broken loose from captivity as they were seen roaming in the next street.

13. What did Luciana say to her sister Adriana when Lady abbess was scolding her?

Ans: When Lady abbess was scolding Adriana, Luciana asked her sister why she was putting up with those rebukes without answering them.

14. Why did Antipholus of Ephesus deny of having known Aegeon?

Ans: Antipholus of Ephesus denied of having known Aegeon because he had never seen his father since the storm at sea that had separated them in his infancy.

15. How did Aegeon's wife become Lady abbess?

Ans: When the fishermen from Corinth took her son and the slave boy away from her by force, she entered a nunnery and due to her wise and virtuous disposition she was raised to the status of Lady abbess of that convent.

TEXTUAL WORDS AND THEIR MEANINGS:

WORDS	MEANINGS
1.Ransom	1.a sum of money demanded or paid for the release of someone who is held captive.
2. Mark	2. the basic unit of money; a type of currency.
3. Oblige	3. perform a service or favour for.
4. Contriving	4. scheming.
5. Alter	5. change.
6. Bewitched	6. under a magic spell.
7. Sorcerers	7. magicians.
8. Allegation	8. accusation.
9. Perplexed	9. confused.
10. Brawls	10. noisy fight.

DESCRIPTIVE & ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1.Why did Aegeon go out of Syracuse 18 years after the shipwreck? How did he reach Ephesus?

Ans: Aegeon of Syracuse was compelled by circumstances to go out of his state. After the shipwreck he was separated from his wife, his elder son and the elder slave. Aegeon's younger son also called Antipholus like his elder son, upon being 18 years insisted on searching and finding his mother and brother. He even wanted Dromio , the younger slave to join the search as his brother too was to be found out. Aegeon much against his will permitted the two to venture out of the state to look for their brothers and of course , his wife. However, after 7 years , when his son did not return ,he went out as far as Greece and through the bounds of Asia finally to Ephesus. The duke on hearing the story was amazed and moved. Acknowledging the seriousness of the situation, he gave him one day to try to pay the fine either by begging or borrowing money from someone.

2. What was the experience of Antipholus Younger and Dromio Younger in the house of Adriana?

Ans: Adriana was a rich lady of Ephesus who was married to Elder Antipholus, an officer in the army of the duke. The duke was once saved by Elder Antipholus once and as a reward his marriage to Adriana took place.

The Comedy of Errors or rather the story of mistaken identity begins here. Antipholus Younger sent Dromio Younger away and mused on his lonely dispossession and fruitless search for his mother and brother. When Dromio Elder came in ; Antipholus Younger mistook him for Dromio Younger asked him about his money. Dromio Elder too mistook Antipholus Younger to be the elder brother and said that he had been told by his mistress Adriana to fetch Antipholus for dinner. The conflicting talks soon confused Antipholus Younger, who having no wife got angry very rightly and asked Dromio Elder to return the money. The misunderstanding of each other prompted Dromio Elder to flee the place and report to Adriana of his master's reluctance to join dinner. The whole sequence of events takes Antipholus Younger and Dromio Younger aback. Antipholus meets Luciana and feels drawn to her. Dromio Younger too had a similar confusion and embarrassing experience considering the cook maid's claim on him.

3. How did Aegeon acquire the custody of the twin Dromio brothers?

Ans: Aegeon's wife had given birth to two boys who were exactly alike in appearance after reaching Epidamnum. At the same time , a poor woman who was also staying there also gave birth to twins who were very similar in appearance too. As their parents were extremely poor, Aegeon bought the twin boys to attend upon his twin sons.

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