Banha University - Faculty of Education
English Department
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Drama
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Write elaborately on the following:

1) The sleep-walking scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Answer:

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The sleep-walking scene is not mentioned in Holinshed and it must therefore be looked upon as an original effort of Shakespeare's creative imagination. Lady Macbeth had none of the usual phenomena of sleep, but she did show with a startling degree of accuracy all the symptoms of hysterical

somnambulism. Somnambulism is not sleep, but a special mental state arising out of sleep through a definite mechanism. The sleep-walking scene is a perfectly logical outcome of the previous mental state. From the very mechanism of this mental state, such a development was inevitable. She is not the victim of a blind fate or destiny or punished by a moral law, but affected by a mental disease.

It is evident from the first words uttered by the Doctor in the sleep-walking scene, that Lady Macbeth had had several previous somnambulistic attacks. That we are dealing with a genuine somnambulism is shown by the description of the eyes being open and not shut. Now several complexes or groups of suppressed ideas of an emotional nature enter into this scene and are responsible for it. The acting out of these complexes themselves are based upon reminiscences of her past repressed experiences.

The first complex relates to the murder of Duncan as demonstrated in the continual washing of the hands, an act not seen earlier and here clearly brought out in the sleep-walking scene. This automatic act is a reminiscence of her earlier remark after the murder of Duncan, "A little water clears us of

this deed."

The second complex refers to the murder of Banquo, clearly shown in the words, "I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried; he cannot come out of his grave," thus demonstrating that she is no longer ignorant of this particular crime of her husband.

The third complex entering into the sleep-walking scene distinctly refers to the murder of Macduff's wife and children - "The Thane of Fife had a wife, where is she now?" Various other fragmentary reminiscences enter into this scene, such as Macbeth's terror at the banquet in the words, "You mar all with this starting," the striking of the clock before the murder of King Duncan, and the reading of the first letter from Macbeth announcing the witches' prophecy. Thus a vivid and condensed panorama of all her crimes passes before her. Like all reported cases of hysterical somnambulism, the episode is made up, not of one, but of all the abnormal fixed ideas and repressed complexes of the subject. The smell and sight of blood which she experiences, is one of those cases in which hallucinations developed out of subconscious fixed ideas which

had acquired a certain intensity, as in Macbeth's hallucination of the dagger. Since blood was the dominating note of the tragedy, it was evidence of Shakespeare's remarkable insight that the dominating hallucination of this scene should refer to blood. The analysis of this particular scene also discloses other important mental mechanisms.

There is a form of nervous disease known as a compulsion neurosis in which the subject has an almost continuous impulsion to either wash the hands or to repeat other actions almost indefinitely. As a rule, this compulsion appears meaningless and even foolish to the outside observer and it is only by an analysis of the condition, that we can understand its nature and true significance. The compulsion may arise from the idea that the hands are soiled or contaminated or there may be a genuine phobia of infection or contamination.

As an example, I had the opportunity to observe the case of a young girl who would wash her hands a number of times during the day. She could give no explanation for this impulsion. A psychoanalysis, however, disclosed the fact that the washing of the hands was due to ideas of religious absolution from certain imaginary sins and arose as an act of

defense against imaginary contamination. Now a similar group of symptoms is found in Lady Macbeth. In the sleep-walking scene the following dialogue occurs -

Doctor. What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.
Gentlewoman. It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing her hands: I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

Then later in the scene, Lady Macbeth speaks as follows, disclosing the complex which leads to this apparently meaningless action. "What, will these hands ne'er be clean? ... Here's the smell of the blood still: All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." Here the symptom develops through Lady Macbeth transferring an unpleasant group of memories or complexes, which have a strong personal and emotional significance, to an indifferent act or symptom. The act of washing the hands is a compromise for self-reproach and repressed experiences. The mechanism here is the same as in the compulsion neuroses, a proof of Shakespeare's remarkable insight into the workings of the

human mind. When the doctor later states, "This disease is beyond my practise," he expressed the attitude of the medical profession towards these psychoneurotic symptoms until the advent of modern psychopathology.

In the words, "Out damned spot - Out I say," the mechanism is that of an unconscious and automatic outburst. It is very doubtful if Lady Macbeth would have used these words if she were in her normal, waking condition. Thus the difference between the personality of Lady Macbeth in her somnambulistic and in the normal mental state, is a proof of the wide gap existing between these two types of consciousness.

Lady Macbeth may therefore be looked upon as possessing two personalities, which appear and disappear according to the oscillations of her mental level. In her normal, waking state, repression and an assumed bravery are marked. In the sleeping or somnambulistic state, the repression gives way to free expression and her innate cowardice becomes dominant. In her waking condition, she shows no fear of blood, but shrinks from it when in a state of somnambulism.

Her counsel to her husband while awake is that of an emotionless cruelty, while in somnambulism she shows pity and remorse. If one could believe in the womanliness of Lady Macbeth, then her sleeping personality must be interpreted as the true one, because removed from the inhibition and the censorship of voluntary repression.

Thus Shakespeare, with most remarkable insight, has made the sleep-walking scene exactly conform to all the characteristics of a pathological somnambulism - that is - the subject sees and hears everything, there is a regularity of development, as the subject repeats the same words and gestures as in the original experience and finally, on a return to the normal personality after the attack is over, there is no memory for the attack, in other words, amnesia has taken place. Lady Macbeth's actions during the sleepwalking scene are very complicated, show a clear memory of her past repressed experiences, in fact, they are an exact reproduction and rehearsal of these experiences. Finally, she shows an amount of reasoning and association which would be impossible during the annihilation of consciousness during sleep and which only could have taken place when

consciousness was very active.

Thus somnambulism is not sleep, but an abnormal mental state, distinct from the ordinary mental state of the subject. Somnambulism may be defined as a mental state in which the subject possesses particular memories and does particular acts, but of which there is no memory on return to the normal state of consciousness. The amnesia of somnambulism is of the same nature as all hysterical amnesias, - the subject is incapable of attaching to his normal personality the memories of the somnambulistic attack.

2) Show how to make sense of Shakespeare's English?

Probably the number one complaint about reading Shakespeare is that it doesn't always read like "normal" English. It's a natural and legitimate accusation. Shakespeare wrote for an audience over 400 years ago. Think about how word meanings and expressions change over a relatively short time; four centuries bring with them a lot of alterations. For instance, the history of literary

English is the history of invasions, with Celtic supplanted by Anglo-Saxon, which was usurped by Norman French (and accentuated with Latin). All of these influences combined to create first Old English, then Middle English, and finally Early Modern English—the language of Shakespeare. And if you compare Shakespeare's works to the Middle English of Chaucer, you can appreciate just how much closer Shakespeare's English is to our contemporary usage.

The Elizabethan era was a particularly volatile growth spurt in the English language. The Renaissance and England's emerging status as a sea power exposed the language to an ever-increasing range of cultures and languages. At the same time, there was no real standardization in English. Formal dictionaries and grammar textbooks simply did not exist, and "proper" education focused much more on classical Latin than on colloquial English. Despite this neglect—or perhaps because of it—English by the reign of Elizabeth had a certain flexibility to it, of which Shakespeare took full advantage.

So how can a reader today bridge that gap between then and now? There are four critical areas to address: word usage, grammar, wordplay, and versification. Once you understand these fundamental concepts, Shakespeare becomes a lot more accessible.

Word Usage

First and foremost, there have been numerous vocabulary changes in English since Shakespeare was writing. While many words are still recognizable today, others have shifted in their meaning or dropped altogether from usage. For example, when was the last time you heard anyone use words such as *bodkin* (a piercing tool), *contumely* (verbal abuse), or *fardel* (a bundle)? There are also conventions such as the informal *thou* versus the formal *you*; think of this the same way that *tú* and *usted* are used in Spanish, or *du* and *sie* in German. Often the context in which a word is used will help you determine its meaning. A Shakespeare edition with good footnotes will help you, as well as a good dictionary. The main thing is to be aware that even a familiar word from today may be used with a different meaning in Shakespeare's works.

Grammar

This is where the flexibility of Shakespeare's English is often most apparent. Parts of speech are frequently switched, such as nouns or adjectives becoming verbs. Verbs and subjects don't always agree. Words are often omitted in phrases. Word endings such as -ly are inconsistently applied. Shakespeare uses double negatives in spots and phrases such as "most unkindest" with regularity. Even sentence construction can be tricky, with inversions of the basic subject-verb-object order. Whereas we would say, "John caught the ball," Shakespeare might render the same statement with the same meaning as "John the ball caught," or "The ball John caught." As a

result, it's important to recognize which part of speech a given word actually represents in a given line.

Wordplay

Some of the most difficult passages of Shakespeare occur when the Bard is purposely playing with language. Metaphors and similes abound in poetic comparisons that can make some passages more complex or difficult to understand. And apparently, Elizabethan audiences loved puns,because Shakespeare wrote them into his plays by the dozens. In a similar vein, many words are used with intentional double meanings. This is especially prevalent in the numerous sexual innuendoes that appear in the works. Malapropisms are another device Shakespeare often uses for comic effect. So not only does the contemporary reader have to interpret surface meanings that may have changed, but also account for the subtext of Elizabethan humor. One key is to look for lines with homonyms or repeated words; those are some of the most common giveaways.

Versification

One issue often overlooked is that Shakespeare's plays were written as dramatic literature—meant to be performed and heard aloud, not silently read. That distinction is accentuated where Shakespeare writes in verse. Verse allowed Shakespeare to write lines with a poetic rhythm crafted for the stage. Typically, he wrote in *iambic pentameter*, which is a fancy way of saying ten-syllable lines that alternate unstressed and stressed syllables (although the pattern varies widely within speeches to avoid sounding monotonous). Shakespeare's verse is written either in pairs of rhymed line endings (*couplets*), or unrhymed lines (*blank verse*). Keep in mind that verse and poetic license sometimes force Shakespeare into phrasing that can seem foreign at first glance. Verse is easy to spot by its different margins and capitalization of the first word in each line—keep an eye out for it, and know that you may have to pay more attention to these passages to get at their meaning.