

SYMBOLISM IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

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ABSTRACT

The role of symbolism in William Shakespeare's plays is to add depth, complexity, and multiple layers of meaning to the narratives. Through the use of symbols, Shakespeare explores universal themes, human emotions, and the complexities of the human condition. Symbols allow Shakespeare to convey complex emotions and themes in a condensed and evocative manner. For example, the imagery of blood in "Macbeth" represents guilt, violence, and the consequences of ambition. Symbolism, such as prophecies and dreams, is used to foreshadow future events and create anticipation in the audience. The supernatural elements in "Hamlet" and "Macbeth" foreshadow the tragic outcomes of the plays.

Keywords: nature; symbolism; Shakespeare; plays; tragic; supernatural; drama; costume.

INTRODUCTION

Symbolism plays a significant role in William Shakespeare's plays, contributing to their depth, complexity, and universal appeal. Shakespeare was a master of using symbolic elements to convey deeper meanings, emotions, and themes. Symbolism plays a central role in William Shakespeare's works by providing a means to explore profound themes, convey emotions, and engage the audience's imagination. His masterful use of symbols adds timeless richness to his plays, making them enduring and meaningful across generations and cultures. Shakespeare uses symbols to comment on the social and political structures of his time. The crown and throne in historical plays like "Richard II" and "Henry V" represent the divine right of kings and the complexities of monarchical rule. Symbols like cross-dressing and gender ambiguity challenge traditional gender roles in plays like "As You Like It" and "Twelfth Night," allowing Shakespeare to explore themes of identity and love. Symbolism contributes to the vivid and poetic imagery in Shakespeare's plays, enhancing the audience's experience and evoking powerful emotions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Elton (2000) : Symbolism allows Shakespeare to convey emotions, themes, and abstract ideas in a tangible and evocative manner. Through the use of symbols like flowers, storms, crowns, and masks, he enriches his plays with deeper meanings, providing insight into the characters' inner worlds and the underlying themes of the works.

Abdul-Majeed Janziz (1997) : Symbolism in Shakespeare's plays allows for an exploration of the human psyche, including desires, fears, guilt, and inner conflicts. Masks, disguises, and dreams are used to delve into characters' subconscious thoughts and emotions.

Liwei Zhu (2019): Symbolism adds dramatic tension and suspense to the plays. Irony, ambiguity, and foreshadowing engage the audience's imagination, making them active participants in interpreting the unfolding events.

Cynthia Whissell (2017): Symbolism in Shakespeare's plays is open to interpretation, fostering a culture of critical analysis and inviting discussions about the deeper meanings of the works. This enduring quality contributes to their ongoing relevance and popularity.

SYMBOLISM IN SHAKESPEARE WORKS

Nature and Weather:**

Shakespeare often uses natural elements like storms, darkness, and light to symbolize the emotional turmoil and inner conflicts experienced by characters. For example, in "King Lear," the raging storm mirrors the chaos in Lear's mind and his descent into madness. Nature and weather are frequently employed as powerful symbols in William Shakespeare's plays. They are used to convey various themes, emotions, and events, adding depth and atmosphere to the narratives. Nature and weather symbolism in Shakespeare's plays serve as powerful tools to evoke emotions, establish mood, and convey complex themes. These symbols connect the human experience with the natural world, making the plays resonate with audiences across different eras and cultures. Here are some ways in which nature and weather symbolism appear in Shakespeare's works:

1. Storms and Turbulent Weather: Storms often symbolize chaos, turmoil, and impending change. In "King Lear," the tempest on the heath mirrors the emotional turmoil experienced by the characters and reflects the disordered state of the kingdom. Similarly, the storm in "The Tempest" represents the inner conflict and emotional upheaval of the characters, as well as the transformative power of forgiveness.
2. Natural Elements and Human Nature: Shakespeare frequently uses natural elements to mirror human emotions and psychological states. For example, in "The Winter's Tale," the barren winter landscape symbolizes the emotional coldness and jealousy present in the characters' lives, while the eventual arrival of spring represents renewal and reconciliation.
3. Moon and Stars: Celestial bodies like the moon and stars are often associated with fate, destiny, and the supernatural in Shakespeare's plays. In "Julius Caesar," the imagery of the stars foreshadows the tragic events to come, highlighting the idea of fate guiding the characters' lives.
4. Gardens and Flowers: Gardens and flowers are used as symbols of fertility, love, and growth. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the enchanted forest and the flower love potion emphasize the unpredictable nature of love and the transformative power it possesses.
5. Animals and Nature's Response: Animals in Shakespeare's plays are sometimes used symbolically to represent various traits or ideas. For example, in "Macbeth," the owl and the falcon symbolize darkness and tyranny, respectively, while the unnatural events in nature, such as the disruption of the natural order, signify the moral disorder in the kingdom.

6. Seasons: The changing of seasons can symbolize the passage of time, the cyclical nature of life, and the transience of human existence. In "As You Like It," the transition from winter to spring signifies a fresh start and new possibilities.
7. Water: Water is often associated with purification, cleansing, and emotional renewal. In "The Tempest," the sea symbolizes both danger and rebirth, as characters undergo transformative experiences on the island.
8. Calm Weather and Tranquillity: Conversely, moments of calm weather can represent peace, harmony, and resolution. In "The Merchant of Venice," the calm and serene moonlit night contrasts with the previous scenes of tension, signalling a temporary respite.

Flowers and Plants:

Flowers and plants are used symbolically to represent love, purity, and beauty. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the love potion is made from a flower, emphasizing the transformative power of love. Flowers and plants are frequently used as symbols in William Shakespeare's plays to represent various themes, emotions, and character traits. They provide rich and nuanced imagery that adds depth to the narratives and helps convey complex ideas. Shakespeare's use of flowers and plants as symbolism adds layers of meaning to his plays, inviting audiences to delve deeper into the characters' emotions and the overarching themes of his works. These floral images have become enduring symbols that continue to resonate with readers and theatregoers across generations. Here are some ways in which flowers and plants are used as symbolism in Shakespeare's works:

1. Love and Romance: Flowers are often associated with love, romance, and beauty. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the love-in-idleness flower (also known as the "Cupid's flower" or "love potion flower") plays a central role in the romantic entanglements of the characters, causing them to fall in love with the first creature they see upon waking. The flower's magical properties symbolize the unpredictable and transformative nature of love.
2. Death and Mourning: Certain flowers are used to symbolize death and mourning in Shakespeare's plays. For example, in "Hamlet," Ophelia distributes flowers to various characters, each representing different aspects of death and remembrance. The rosemary symbolizes remembrance, while the pansies (also called "thoughts") represent thoughts of or for the deceased.
3. Youth and Beauty: Flowers are often linked to youth, beauty, and transience. In "Sonnet 18," Shakespeare uses the image of a summer's day and compares it to a "lovely" and "eternal" rose, highlighting the fleeting nature of beauty.
4. Deception and Appearance vs. Reality: Flowers can serve as symbols of deception and disguise. In "Othello," Iago uses the image of the "rose" to describe Desdemona, suggesting she may appear beautiful on the surface but hides thorns of deceit.
5. Healing and Redemption: Certain plants and flowers are associated with healing and redemption. In "The Winter's Tale," the magical properties of Paulina's "painted" statue symbolize the possibility of redemption and forgiveness.
6. Betrayal and Poison: Poisonous plants and flowers can symbolize betrayal and treachery. In "Romeo and Juliet," Juliet's decision to take a potion made from various poisonous herbs to

feign death represents the extreme measures people may take when faced with impossible circumstances.

7. Innocence and Purity: White flowers, such as lilies, are often used as symbols of innocence and purity. In "The Winter's Tale," the innocent Perdita is associated with flowers and referred to as the "queen of curds and cream" and the "daffodil."
8. Growth and Rebirth: Flowers and plants are also used to symbolize growth, renewal, and the cyclical nature of life. In "As You Like It," the Forest of Arden represents a place of transformation and personal growth for the characters.

Clothing and Costumes:

Clothing and costumes are employed symbolically to denote social status, identity, and disguise. For instance, in "Twelfth Night," characters' cross-dressing leads to a series of misunderstandings and explores the fluidity of gender roles. Clothing and costumes are frequently used as powerful symbols in William Shakespeare's plays to represent a character's identity, social status, inner thoughts, and thematic elements. The way characters dress can convey subtle messages about their personalities and roles within the play. Shakespeare's use of clothing and costumes as symbolism provides insight into the characters and themes of his plays. The way characters dress can enhance the audience's understanding of the narrative and add layers of meaning to the overall performance. By employing clothing as a symbolic device, Shakespeare creates a rich tapestry of visual and thematic elements in his works. Here are some ways in which clothing and costumes serve as symbolism in Shakespeare's works:

1. Social Status and Class: The clothing characters wear often reflects their social status and class. In plays like "Romeo and Juliet," the distinctions between the elaborate costumes of the nobility and the simple attire of the commoners highlight the social divide.
2. Disguise and Deception: Clothing can be used as a tool for disguise and deception, emphasizing the theme of appearances versus reality. Characters like Viola in "Twelfth Night" cross-dress to assume new identities, leading to humorous and dramatic situations.
3. Gender Roles and Identity: Cross-dressing and gender ambiguity are recurring themes in Shakespeare's plays. Characters like Rosalind in "As You Like It" and Portia in "The Merchant of Venice" disguise themselves as men, challenging traditional gender roles and exploring themes of identity and love.
4. Power and Authority: In historical plays like "Richard III," clothing is used to emphasize the display of power and authority. The regal attire of kings and queens symbolizes their dominance and legitimacy as rulers.
5. Character Transformation: Changes in clothing can signify character development and transformation. In "Macbeth," Lady Macbeth's descent into madness is symbolized by her sleepwalking and the way she obsessively tries to cleanse her hands, metaphorically trying to wash away her guilt.
6. Mortality and Death: In tragedies like "Hamlet," characters may wear mourning clothes or black attire to symbolize grief and death. The clothing choices can reinforce the play's themes of mortality and the inevitability of death.

7. Rebellion and Nonconformity: Unconventional clothing choices or specific styles can be used to portray characters who rebel against societal norms. For instance, the bohemian appearance of Ariel in "The Tempest" contrasts with the more traditional and formal attire of the other characters.
8. Rituals and Ceremonies: Special costumes may be used during rituals or ceremonies within the plays. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the fantastical costumes worn by the fairies during the wedding celebration add to the magical atmosphere of the play.

Rings and Jewellery:

Rings and jewellery often carry symbolic significance in Shakespeare's plays, representing love, loyalty, or deceit. In "The Merchant of Venice," the ring serves as a symbol of trust and faithfulness. Rings and jewellery are frequently used as symbols in William Shakespeare's plays to represent various themes, relationships, and emotional connections. These objects often carry significant meaning and serve as powerful literary devices to convey deeper messages. Through the use of rings and jewellery as symbols, Shakespeare adds depth and complexity to his characters and themes. These objects become more than mere props; they become meaningful artifacts that shape the characters' actions and motivations. Shakespeare's skilful integration of symbolism elevates his plays and allows for timeless themes to resonate with audiences across generations. Here are some ways in which rings and jewellery are used as symbolism in Shakespeare's works:

1. Love and Commitment: Rings are commonly used to symbolize love, fidelity, and commitment. In "Romeo and Juliet," the exchange of rings between Romeo and Juliet represents their pledge of eternal love. Similarly, in "The Merchant of Venice," Portia's ring symbolizes her love and loyalty to Bassanio.
2. Identity and Disguise: Rings can be used as tokens of identity or a means of disguise. In "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," Julia disguises herself as a boy and gives her ring to Proteus as a token of her affection. The ring serves as a symbol of her presence even when she's not physically present.
3. Authority and Power: In historical plays like "Richard II," the crown and other royal regalia, which can include rings, symbolize authority and power. The transfer or removal of such items may represent a shift in political power and legitimacy.
4. Friendship and Bonding: Rings can also symbolize friendship and unity among characters. In "The Tempest," the exchange of rings between Ferdinand and Miranda represents their love and bond as a couple.
5. Betrayal and Deception: Rings can be used to represent betrayal or deceit. In "Othello," the handkerchief, which is later mistaken for a ring, becomes a symbol of Desdemona's alleged infidelity, leading to tragic consequences.
6. Inheritance and Succession: In some plays, rings are used to symbolize inheritance and succession to power. In "Henry V," King Henry gives a ring to Fluellen, indicating his right to the French throne through inheritance.

7. Redemption and Forgiveness: In "The Winter's Tale," the return of the lost and symbolic "chased" Bohemian jewel represents redemption, forgiveness, and the restoration of relationships.
8. Pledges and Promises: Rings are often exchanged as tokens of promises or pledges. In "All's Well That Ends Well," Helena gives a ring to Bertram, which becomes a symbol of her love and determination to win his affection.

Crown and Throne:

The crown and throne represent power, authority, and legitimacy. Shakespeare frequently explores the consequences of ambition and the corrupting nature of power, as seen in "Macbeth" and "Richard III." The crown and throne are powerful symbols in William Shakespeare's plays, representing themes related to power, authority, legitimacy, ambition, and the responsibilities that come with ruling. They are central elements in several of his historical and tragic plays, and their presence or absence often drives the plot and character motivations. Through the use of the crown and throne as symbols, Shakespeare explores the complexities of power, the struggles for authority, and the moral dilemmas faced by those who wield it. These symbols add depth and meaning to the characters and themes in his plays, making them enduring and relevant to audiences throughout history. Here are some ways in which the crown and throne serve as symbolism in Shakespeare's works:

1. Authority and Power: The crown and throne symbolize the highest form of authority in the land. In historical plays like "Richard II" and "Henry V," the crown represents the divine right to rule, and its possession grants the monarch absolute power and the ability to command the loyalty of their subjects.
2. Legitimacy and Succession: The crown and throne also represent the legitimate ruler or rightful heir. The question of legitimate succession is a key theme in "Richard II," as different characters vie for the throne and challenge the legitimacy of each other's claims.
3. Ambition and Betrayal: In plays like "Macbeth," the crown becomes a symbol of ambition and the desire for power. The quest for the crown drives Macbeth to commit heinous acts, leading to his downfall. The throne also becomes a focal point for betrayal and political intrigue as characters vie for power.
4. Responsibility and Burden: The crown and throne represent the burden and responsibility that come with ruling a nation. In "Henry IV, Part 2," King Henry IV reflects on the weight of the crown and the toll it takes on his health and conscience.
5. Corruption and Decay: The crown and throne can symbolize the corruption and decay of power. In "Hamlet," the usurped throne represents the corrupt state of Denmark, as Claudius gains power through immoral means.
6. Reconciliation and Redemption: The return or restoration of the crown and throne can symbolize reconciliation and redemption. In "Henry IV, Part 2," Prince Hal's acceptance of the crown marks a moment of maturity and growth as he becomes King Henry V.
7. Loss and Fragmentation: In "Henry VI," the loss and fragmentation of the crown symbolize the instability and chaos that arise during the Wars of the Roses.

8. Order and Stability: Conversely, the presence of a stable ruler on the throne represents order and stability in the kingdom. In "Henry V," King Henry's successful leadership brings unity and strength to England.

Dreams and Visions:

Dreams and visions are used to foreshadow events, convey characters' inner thoughts, or explore the boundary between reality and imagination. In "Hamlet," the ghost of Hamlet's father appears as a symbol of unrest and a call for revenge. Dreams and visions serve as potent symbolism in William Shakespeare's plays, providing insight into characters' inner thoughts, foreshadowing events, and exploring themes related to fate, illusion, and the supernatural. These dream sequences and visions add an element of mystery and ambiguity, inviting audiences to interpret their meanings. By incorporating dreams and visions as symbolism, Shakespeare enriches his plays with layers of meaning and encourages audiences to delve into the depths of human psychology and the mysterious workings of fate and the supernatural. These dream sequences and visions contribute to the enduring appeal and interpretive richness of his works. Here are some ways in which dreams and visions are used as symbolism in Shakespeare's works:

1. Foreshadowing and Prophecy: Dreams and visions are often used to foreshadow future events or convey prophecies. In "Julius Caesar," Calpurnia's dream of Caesar's assassination warns of impending danger, while Caesar's ghost appears to Brutus in a vision, foreshadowing his downfall.
2. Inner Conflict and Guilt: Characters' dreams and visions can reveal their inner conflicts, fears, and guilt. In "Macbeth," the witches' prophecies and the appearance of Banquo's ghost in Macbeth's vision expose his guilt and growing paranoia.
3. Disguise and Deception: Dreams and visions can be used as a tool for disguise and deception. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the dream-like confusion caused by Puck's magic creates a world of illusion and deception for the characters.
4. Love and Desire: Dreams can represent characters' romantic yearnings and desires. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the dream-induced love triangles reflect the chaotic nature of love and attraction.
5. Surreal and Supernatural Elements: Dreams and visions introduce surreal and supernatural elements into the narrative, blurring the lines between reality and imagination. In "The Tempest," Ariel's magical visions and illusions contribute to the otherworldly atmosphere of the play.
6. Exploration of the Unconscious Mind: Dreams and visions provide a means for exploring the characters' unconscious thoughts and emotions. In "Hamlet," the prince's famous "To be, or not to be" soliloquy delves into his inner turmoil and contemplation of life and death.
7. Resolution and Redemption: In some plays, dreams and visions can lead to resolution and redemption. In "The Winter's Tale," the statue of Hermione coming to life in a dream symbolizes redemption and the restoration of lost relationships.

8. Symbolic Exploration of Themes: Dreams and visions often serve as a means for symbolic exploration of recurring themes in Shakespeare's works, such as the nature of reality, the power of the imagination, and the complexities of human emotions.

Masks and Disguises:

Masks and disguises are used to explore themes of deception, identity, and the difference between appearance and reality. In "Much Ado About Nothing," characters' disguises lead to misunderstandings and reveal the truth about their feelings. Masks and disguises are powerful symbols in William Shakespeare's plays, representing themes of deception, identity, appearance versus reality, and the complexities of human nature. These theatrical devices allow characters to adopt different personas and explore the fluidity of their identities. By using masks and disguises as symbolism, Shakespeare explores the complexities of human behavior and the ways in which individuals navigate social expectations and personal desires. These theatrical elements add intrigue, humor, and depth to the plays, making them enduring and relatable to audiences across time and cultures. Here are some ways in which masks and disguises serve as symbolism in Shakespeare's works:

1. Deception and Appearance vs. Reality: Masks and disguises are often used as tools for deception, highlighting the contrast between a character's true identity and the façade they present to the world. In "Twelfth Night," Viola's disguise as Cesario blurs gender boundaries and creates comic misunderstandings, emphasizing the idea that outward appearances can be misleading.
2. Exploration of Identity: Disguises in Shakespeare's plays offer characters the opportunity to explore different aspects of their identity. In "As You Like It," Rosalind disguises herself as Ganymede to better understand the man she loves and to freely express her emotions.
3. Social Critique: Masks and disguises can be used to critique societal norms and conventions. In "Much Ado About Nothing," Hero's false death and her subsequent disguise as a different woman serve as a social critique of the treatment of women and the consequences of rumors and gossip.
4. Freedom and Liberation: In some plays, masks and disguises provide characters with a sense of freedom and liberation. In "The Merchant of Venice," Portia's disguise as a male lawyer allows her to assert her intelligence and wit, which would not have been possible as a woman in a male-dominated society.
5. Irony and Dramatic Irony: Masks and disguises can create dramatic irony, where the audience is aware of the character's true identity while other characters remain unaware. This adds tension and depth to the narrative. For example, in "Othello," Iago's deceptive mask of loyalty and honesty conceals his true malicious intentions.
6. Crossing of Boundaries: Disguises often involve characters crossing social or gender boundaries, challenging traditional norms and expectations. In "Measure for Measure," Isabella's disguise as a nun during the final scene reflects her assertion of agency and her refusal to be controlled by men.

7. **Unity and Resolution:** In some comedies, the resolution of the plot is achieved through the revelation and removal of masks and disguises. This leads to a harmonious ending and the restoration of order. For instance, in "As You Like It," the multiple disguises are unveiled, leading to happy reunions and marriages.
8. **Self-Discovery and Growth:** Disguises can facilitate characters' journeys of self-discovery and personal growth. In "The Taming of the Shrew," Katherine's transformation through a disguise enables her to confront and overcome her own insecurities and anger.

Foreshadowing and Omens:

Symbols can foreshadow events and outcomes. In "Romeo and Juliet," the recurring image of stars and fate symbolizes the inevitable tragedy that awaits the young lovers. Foreshadowing and omens are significant forms of symbolism used by William Shakespeare in his plays to hint at future events, build tension, and underscore the themes of fate and destiny. These literary devices allow Shakespeare to create a sense of anticipation and add depth to the narrative. By incorporating foreshadowing and omens as symbolism, Shakespeare adds complexity and depth to his plays. These literary devices create anticipation, engage the audience's imagination, and reinforce the themes of fate, destiny, and the consequences of human actions. Here are some ways in which foreshadowing and omens serve as symbolism in Shakespeare's works:

1. **Premonitions of Tragedy:** Foreshadowing and omens often provide hints of impending tragedy. In "Macbeth," the witches' prophecies foreshadow Macbeth's downfall and the tragic events that follow. The image of a bloody dagger leads to the murder of King Duncan, foreshadowing the dark path Macbeth will take.
2. **Warning of Consequences:** Shakespeare uses foreshadowing and omens to warn characters of the potential consequences of their actions. In "Julius Caesar," the soothsayer's warning and Calpurnia's dream both foreshadow Caesar's assassination, but he disregards these omens to his own peril.
3. **Supernatural Elements:** Omens often involve supernatural elements, like ghosts, witches, or prophetic visions. In "Hamlet," the appearance of the ghost foreshadows the impending vengeance and turmoil that will be unleashed in the play.
4. **Symbolic Imagery:** Foreshadowing and omens may involve symbolic imagery that hints at the underlying themes. In "Othello," the handkerchief symbolizes fidelity and trust in Desdemona and Othello's relationship. Its loss and subsequent misinterpretation foreshadow the breakdown of trust and the tragic consequences.
5. **Metaphoric Warnings:** Shakespeare employs metaphoric language and imagery to foreshadow events. In "Romeo and Juliet," Romeo's dream before attending the Capulet ball foreshadows his untimely death and the tragic fate of the young lovers.
6. **Disruptions in Nature:** Omens in the form of disturbances in nature are often used to foreshadow impending chaos or disaster. In "Julius Caesar," the stormy weather and unusual natural occurrences are seen as omens of impending danger and political upheaval.

7. Motifs and Repeated Elements: Shakespeare uses recurring motifs and symbols throughout his plays as subtle foreshadowing devices. In "The Tempest," the motif of books and knowledge foreshadows Prospero's eventual restoration of power through his magical arts.
8. Dramatic Irony: Foreshadowing can create dramatic irony, where the audience is aware of something that the characters are not. For example, in "King Lear," the audience knows the true intentions of Goneril and Regan before King Lear does, adding tension and tragic irony to the unfolding events.

Social and Political Commentary:

Symbols can be used to critique societal norms and political structures. In "King Lear," the storm symbolizes the chaos and disorder that occurs when the natural order is disrupted. William Shakespeare often used symbolism in his plays to offer social and political commentary on the society and politics of his time. Through subtle and sometimes overt symbolism, he critiqued and explored various social issues, power dynamics, and political structures of the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras. Shakespeare's use of symbolism as social and political commentary adds depth and complexity to his plays, allowing them to resonate with audiences of different eras. By employing these literary devices, he offers insights into the human condition and the complexities of power and society that remain relevant to this day. Here are some ways in which social and political commentary is expressed through symbolism in Shakespeare's works:

1. The Crown and Throne: The crown and throne symbolize authority and power in Shakespeare's historical plays. They serve as a commentary on the divine right of kings and the legitimacy of rulership. In plays like "Richard II" and "Henry V," the struggles for the crown and the challenges to the monarch's authority reflect the complexities of monarchical rule.
2. Disguises and Deception: Masks and disguises are used to critique the duplicity and artifice prevalent in politics and social interactions. Characters in "Hamlet," "Twelfth Night," and "Measure for Measure" often wear disguises, highlighting the theme of appearance versus reality and the manipulative nature of politics.
3. Social Hierarchies: Social status and class distinctions are explored through symbolism in clothing and titles. In plays like "Romeo and Juliet" and "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the distinctions in clothing and language between nobles and commoners reflect the rigid social hierarchies of Shakespeare's time.
4. Gender Roles and Identity: Symbolism, such as cross-dressing and gender ambiguity, is used to critique societal norms and explore gender roles. Characters like Viola in "Twelfth Night" and Rosalind in "As You Like It" challenge traditional gender roles and question the expectations placed on men and women.
5. Nature and Disorder: Symbolism drawn from the natural world often serves as a commentary on the state of the political and social order. In "King Lear," the stormy weather and unnatural events in nature mirror the chaos and disorder in the kingdom, reflecting the consequences of a divided and unstable leadership.

6. Corruption and Decay: Shakespeare uses symbolism to criticize political corruption and moral decay. In "Macbeth," the imagery of blood and darkness represents the moral corruption of the characters and the breakdown of the social order.
7. Ambition and Power: Themes of ambition, power, and the pursuit of political gain are explored through symbols like crowns, daggers, and other regal imagery. In "Julius Caesar," the imagery of the crown and Caesar's ambition for power shed light on the dangers of unchecked ambition.
8. Justice and Law: The symbolism of courts, trials, and legal proceedings in plays like "The Merchant of Venice" and "Measure for Measure" explores the themes of justice, mercy, and the flaws in the legal system.

Nature and the Supernatural:

Shakespeare often employs natural elements and supernatural occurrences as symbols to enhance the themes and atmosphere of his plays. For example, in "The Tempest," the island and its magical elements symbolize the untamed nature of humanity and the power of forgiveness. Nature and the supernatural serve as rich symbolism in William Shakespeare's plays, allowing him to explore themes of human nature, fate, the unknown, and the mystical. By using these elements symbolically, Shakespeare deepens the narratives and evokes a sense of wonder and mystery. Through the use of nature and the supernatural as symbolism, Shakespeare creates a sense of depth and complexity in his plays. These elements allow him to explore the human psyche, the dynamics of power, and the mysteries of existence, making his works timeless and captivating to audiences across generations. Here are some ways in which nature and the supernatural are employed as symbolism in his works:

1. Nature as a Reflection of Human Emotions: Shakespeare often uses natural elements to mirror characters' emotions and psychological states. Storms, calm seas, and changing weather represent the emotional turmoil and inner conflicts experienced by the characters. For example, in "King Lear," the storm on the heath symbolizes the chaos in Lear's mind and the disruption of the natural order.
2. Supernatural Beings: Witches, ghosts, fairies, and spirits appear in Shakespeare's plays to represent the mystical and otherworldly. In "Macbeth," the witches symbolize the forces of darkness and the potential for evil within human nature. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the fairies create a magical and dreamlike atmosphere, exploring themes of love and illusion.
3. Dreams and Visions: Dreams and visions are used to symbolize the subconscious, premonitions, and the power of the supernatural. Characters receive prophetic visions or have significant dreams that foreshadow events to come. For instance, in "Julius Caesar," Calpurnia's dream warns of impending danger, and in "Hamlet," the ghost's appearance sets the course for the play's tragic events.
4. Nature as a Moral Order: Shakespeare often employs the symbolism of nature to convey moral and ethical principles. For example, in "As You Like It," the pastoral setting of the Forest of Arden represents a return to a more natural and virtuous way of life.
5. Humanity's Relationship with Nature: Nature serves as a backdrop to explore humanity's relationship with the natural world. In "The Tempest," the island setting and its magical

elements represent the untamed nature of humanity and the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

6. **Supernatural Intervention:** The supernatural is used as a means of intervention and resolution. In "The Winter's Tale," the statue of Hermione coming to life serves as a supernatural resolution and symbolizes redemption and reconciliation.
7. **Symbolic Animals:** Animals are sometimes used symbolically to represent certain traits or ideas. In "Othello," the handkerchief, embroidered with a strawberry, becomes a symbol of fidelity and trust, which later becomes central to the plot's conflict.
8. **The Unexplained and the Unknown:** The supernatural elements in Shakespeare's plays symbolize the mysteries of life, fate, and the unknown. They add an element of wonder and awe, encouraging the audience to contemplate the human condition and the limits of human knowledge.

Prophecies and Dreams:

Symbols in the form of prophecies or dreams are frequently used to create intrigue and drive the plot forward. In "Julius Caesar," the Soothsayer's warning and Brutus's dream are symbolic of the impending danger and tragedy. Prophecies and dreams are powerful forms of symbolism in William Shakespeare's plays, often used to foreshadow events, explore the human psyche, and convey deeper themes related to fate, destiny, and the supernatural. These literary devices create an air of mystery and uncertainty, inviting audiences to reflect on the complexities of human existence. Through the use of prophecies and dreams as symbolism, Shakespeare delves into the complexities of human nature, the mysteries of fate, and the interplay between the conscious and unconscious mind. These elements contribute to the enduring appeal and interpretive richness of his works. Some ways in which prophecies and dreams are used as symbolism in Shakespeare's works:

1. **Foreshadowing and Premonitions:** Prophecies and dreams are frequently used to foreshadow future events and hint at the unfolding plot. In "Macbeth," the witches' prophecies set the tragic events into motion, while Macbeth's visions of the ghostly dagger and Banquo's ghost foreshadow his descent into madness and destruction.
2. **Exploration of Fate and Destiny:** Prophecies and dreams are used to explore the themes of fate and destiny. In "Julius Caesar," the soothsayer's warning and Calpurnia's dream underscore the idea of an inevitable destiny, despite the characters' efforts to alter the course of events.
3. **Ambiguity and Interpretation:** Shakespeare often uses prophecies and dreams in an ambiguous manner, leaving room for interpretation. This ambiguity adds depth to the characters' motivations and allows for multiple layers of meaning. For instance, in "Hamlet," the appearance of the ghost creates uncertainty about its true intentions.
4. **Inner Conflicts and Guilt:** Dreams can serve as a window into characters' inner conflicts, fears, and guilt. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream," the characters' dreams reveal their subconscious desires and emotional turmoil.
5. **The Supernatural and the Unknown:** Prophecies and dreams provide a connection to the supernatural and the unknown, enhancing the sense of wonder and mystery in the plays. In

"The Tempest," the magical elements and prophetic visions underscore the mystical atmosphere of the island.

6. Manipulation and Deception: Prophecies and dreams can be used as tools of manipulation and deception by characters. In "Othello," Iago uses manipulation and deceit, including planting false dreams and visions, to serve his malicious intentions.
7. Symbolic Imagery: Prophecies and dreams often involve symbolic imagery that reflects the underlying themes and emotions of the characters. In "Romeo and Juliet," Romeo's dream before attending the Capulet ball is symbolic of his sense of foreboding and the impending tragedy.
8. Resolution and Closure: In some cases, prophecies and dreams play a role in the resolution of the plot and the characters' journeys. In "The Winter's Tale," the prophetic visions and dreams lead to the reunion and reconciliation of the characters.

Irony and Ambiguity:

Symbols can introduce irony and ambiguity into the narrative, encouraging deeper analysis and interpretation. The skull in "Hamlet" is a symbol of mortality and a reminder of human frailty, adding depth to the play's contemplation of life and death. Irony and ambiguity are powerful forms of symbolism frequently employed by William Shakespeare in his plays to add depth, complexity, and intrigue to the narratives. By using these literary devices, Shakespeare challenges traditional interpretations and allows for multiple layers of meaning. Through the use of irony and ambiguity as symbolism, Shakespeare challenges conventional interpretations and invites audiences to engage with the moral dilemmas, psychological depths, and uncertainties of his characters and their stories. These literary devices contribute to the timeless appeal and enduring fascination of his works. Some ways in which irony and ambiguity are used as symbolism in his works:

1. Dramatic Irony: Shakespeare often employs dramatic irony, where the audience knows something that the characters do not. This creates tension and adds depth to the audience's understanding of the plot. For instance, in "Romeo and Juliet," the audience is aware of Juliet's plan to fake her death, but Romeo is not, leading to tragic consequences.
2. Situational Irony: Situational irony occurs when the outcome of a situation is different from what is expected. In "Othello," Desdemona's handkerchief, which is a symbol of fidelity and love, becomes the very item that leads to her downfall due to its misinterpretation.
3. Verbal Irony: Verbal irony is when a character says something that conveys a different meaning from what is actually intended. In "Hamlet," for example, Hamlet's use of sarcasm and wordplay adds depth to his complex character and serves as a commentary on the duplicity of the court.
4. Ambiguous Endings: Some of Shakespeare's plays have ambiguous or open-ended conclusions, leaving the interpretation of the final outcome to the audience. In "The Tempest," the ending, with Prospero's epilogue and the breaking of his staff, leaves room for various interpretations of his intentions and the resolution of the story.

5. Moral Ambiguity: Shakespeare often explores the complexities of human morality and presents characters with ambiguous moral choices. In "The Merchant of Venice," Shylock's demand for a pound of flesh raises moral questions about justice, revenge, and mercy.
6. Dual Meanings: Shakespeare frequently uses language and wordplay to create dual meanings and puns, which add layers of meaning and humor to the dialogue. In "Much Ado About Nothing," the title itself is an example of wordplay, as "nothing" can be interpreted as both "noting" (observing) and "naught" (nothingness).
7. Misdirection and Deception: Ambiguity and misdirection are often used as tools of deception in Shakespeare's plays. In "Twelfth Night," Viola's cross-dressing creates ambiguity and humorous misunderstandings among the characters.
8. Exploration of Human Nature: Irony and ambiguity serve as a lens through which Shakespeare explores the complexities and contradictions of human nature. Characters like Iago in "Othello" or the Fool in "King Lear" use irony to reveal hidden truths and insights about the human condition.

CONCLUSION

Shakespeare often used symbols that were familiar to his contemporary audience to evoke specific cultural and historical associations, enriching the layers of meaning within the plays. In conclusion, symbolism is a potent literary device used by William Shakespeare to enrich his plays with depth, complexity, and universal significance. His masterful incorporation of symbols continues to captivate audiences and scholars alike, making his works timeless and ever-relevant in the study of literature and human nature. Symbolism enriches Shakespeare's plays by adding layers of meaning, making them relevant and resonant across different cultures and time periods. The use of symbols allows the audience to engage on both a surface level with the plot and characters, as well as on a deeper, more contemplative level, pondering the universal themes and human nature that Shakespeare masterfully explores.

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