GOVERNMENT POLYTECHNIC COLLEGES
NEW SYLLABUS-STUDY MATERIALS

TRB - ENGLISH
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UNIT I – CHAUCER TO SHAKESPEARE

1. Shakespeare: The comedy of Errors

The comedy of Errors

Shakespeare

- William Shakespeare, the Bard of Avon “was not for an age but for all time”.
- He was born at Stratford-upon-Avon. (1564-1616)
- He was the son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden.
- His plays reveal his familiarity with Latin and French, ancient and modern History, philosophical speculation and continental fiction.
- Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway 8 years his senior.
- During the great plague (1592-93), when the theatres were closed, he wrote non-dramatic poems such as “Venus and Adonis” and ‘The Rape of Lucrece’.
- He was friendly with Earl of Southampton to whom he dedicated his poems and who had been identified as the noble youth addressed in ‘The sonnets’.
- When the theatres opened, he became a partner in Lord chamberlain’s dramatic company performing at ‘The Globe’ and “The black friars”.
- King James in 1603, the Lord Chamberlain’s company passed under royal patronage and became the King’s men.
- He died in 1616. Before his death he had written 37 plays and 154 sonnets. His 37 plays can be classified as comedies, tragedies, histories, Roman plays and the romances or the last plays.

Important comedies

Four great Tragedies:

The Roman plays
- The fool or the clown plays an integral part in his plays. To satisfy the illiterate groundlings he introduced comic characters in his plays. The fool puns on words therefore he is called a funmaker.
- Famous fools of Shakespeare are ‘Fester’ in ‘Twelfth night’, “Touch stone” in ‘As you like it’ and the ‘Fool’ in ‘King Lear’.

The women in tragedies can be divided into 2 categories. 1. Cardelia, Ophelias and Desdemona are innocent women, 2. Goneril Regan, Lady Macbeth and Cressida are wicked and Cruel.

*The Comedy of Errors* is one of William Shakespeare's early plays. It is his shortest and one of his most farcical comedies, with a major part of the humour coming from slapstick and mistaken identity, in addition to puns and word play. *The Comedy of Errors* (along with *The Tempest*) is one of only two of Shakespeare's plays to observe the Unity of Time (classical unities). It has been adapted for opera, stage, screen and musical theatre numerous times worldwide.

*The Comedy of Errors* tells the story of two sets of identical twins that were accidentally separated at birth (Shakespeare was father to one pair of twins). Antipholus of Syracuse and his servant, Dromio of Syracuse, arrive in Ephesus, which turns out to be the home of their twin brothers, Antipholus of Ephesus and his servant, Dromio of Ephesus. When the Syracusans encounter the friends and families of their twins, a series of wild mishaps based on mistaken identities lead to wrongful beatings, a near-seduction, the arrest of Antipholus of Ephesus, and false accusations of infidelity, theft, madness, and demonic possession.

**Character sketches**

- **Antipholus** – Duke of Ephesus
- Egeon – A merchant of Syracuse - father of the Antipholus twins
- Emilia – Antipholus' lost mother - wife to Egeon
- Antipholus of Ephesus and Antipholus of Syracuse – twin brothers, sons of Egeon and Emilia
- Dromio of Ephesus and Dromio of Syracuse – twin brothers, bondmen, each serving his respective Antipholus
- Adriana – wife of Antipholus of Ephesus
- Luciana – Adriana's sister
- Nell/Luce – kitchen wench/maid to Adriana
- Balthazar – a merchant
- Angelo – a goldsmith
- Courtesan
- First merchant – friend to Antipholus of Syracuse
- Second merchant – to whom Angelo is in debt
- Doctor Pinch – a conjuring schoolmaster
- Gaoler, Headsman, Officers, and other Attendants
Summary

Because of recent enmity, no Syracusan is allowed in Ephesus. A Syracusan merchant Egeon, searching for his wife and twin boys separated and lost at sea, has been found there and arrested. The Duke is sympathetic, so gives him a day to find a way paying his fine before the death penalty has to be carried out.

Antiopholus and servant Dromio of Syracuse (S) arrive in Ephesus, on their travels. They are instantly mistaken by the townsfolk to be Antiopholus and servant Dromio of Ephesus (E). Antiopholus (E) meets Dromio (S), who denies knowledge of money given to him earlier. Adriana, the wife of Antiopholus (E) sends Dromio (E) to find his master. They encounter Antiopholus and Dromio (S). Antiopholus (S) does not recognize Adriana, and Dromio (S) denies he received instructions from her. Adriana insists they both accompany her home, and they think they are going mad.

Antiopholus (E) meanwhile arrives home with merchant Balthazar and goldsmith Angelo, who is making a gold chain for Adriana. Dromio (S) and kitchen-maid Luce refuse to let them in, much to the annoyance of Dromio (E), so Antiopholus (E) goes to a tavern instead. Inside the house, Antiopholus (S) has fallen in love with Adriana’s sister Luciana, much to her amazement; and Dromio (S) is awed by a kitchen-maid who claims him as hers.

Antiopholus (S) meets Angelo, who gives him the chain, proposing to return later for the money. Angelo, being himself pressed for a debt, later meets Antiopholus (E) and asks for his money. When Antiopholus (E) denies having had the chain, Angelo has him arrested until he pays the amount. Antiopholus (E) sends Dromio (S) to Adriana for the money, which she immediately sends.

Dromio (S) brings the money to Antiopholus (S). They meet a Courtezan with whom Antiopholus (E) had dined and who asks for the return of a ring Antiopholus (E) had taken, but Antiopholus (S) of course denies knowledge of it. Dromio (E) meets the arrested Antiopholus (S), who asks for the money to obtain his release, but Dromio (E) obviously does not have it. Adriana arrives with Dr Pinch, who tries to conjure the supposed madness out of Antiopholus (E). Both he and Dromio (E) resist and they are arrested and taken away. Adriana and the others then immediately meet Antiopholus (S) and Dromio (S) with swords drawn, and, confused by their sudden liberty, flee from them.

Angelo meets Antiopholus (S), sees the chain, and prepares to fight him. On the arrival of Adriana and the others, Antiopholus and Dormio (S) run into a priory for safety. The abbess Aemilia discusses his supposed madness with Adriana, but refuses to let her enter the priory. Adriana decides to complain to the Duke, who is nearby for Egeon’s execution, to get to see her supposed husband. Antiopholus (E) and Dromio (E) appear and also complain to the Duke.
Our comedy begins at the Ephesian marketplace, where Solinas, the Duke of Ephesus, is explaining why poor Egeon, a merchant of Syracuse, must die. (Yes, this is a comedy.)

Solinus says that merchants from Ephesus have been forbidden to enter Syracuse, and merchants from Syracuse have been forbidden to enter Ephesus. The punishment for disobeying? Death, of course. It's harsh, yes, but Solinas wants everyone to know that the Duke of Syracuse started it.

Of course, there’s a monetary loophole. Egeon can get out of the death sentence by paying a thousand marks. But Duke Solinus comments that Egeon doesn't appear to be worth even 100 marks. Way to kick him when he's down, Solinus.

To the Duke's surprise, Egeon says he finds the idea of death comforting. This piques Duke Solinus’s curiosity, so he asks how and why Egeon left Syracuse for Ephesus.

Egeon declares his grief to be unspeakable, and then immediately begins to talk about it. Egeon wants to clear up that he does not want to die because of some heinous crime he's committed. Rather, his death wish is kind of a natural result of grief, which he’s had a lot of in his life. He’ll even tell you about it, in great length and detail.

Egeon was born in Syracuse, and lived comfortably there with his wife. He made a lot of money traveling between Syracuse and Epidamium as a merchant. When his agent died, he had to stay in Epidamium and take care of business himself. Egeon’s wife, who was pregnant at the time, decided to join him.

Egeon’s wife soon gave birth to identical twin boys, who looked so similar that their names were their only distinguishing feature. As literary devices would have it, a poor woman staying at the very same inn, during the very same hour, happened to also give birth to identical twin boys. Because she was too poor to raise the babies, she sold her children to Egeon, who wanted to raise the boys as companions and attendants for his twin boys.

Egeon’s wife then started to nag him, saying they should all go home. But, as soon as the family got on the ship to head back to Syracuse, a terrible storm rolls in, threatening to kill everyone. The wife and babes wept, the sailors abandoned ship and ran off in Egeon’s lifeboat, and it seemed that nothing could save them.

Egeon’s wife, worried for the younger of the twins, tied him and one of the servant twins to a small spare mast. Egeon did the same with the other two older boys. Then, Egeon and his wife guarded either end of the mast, each with their respective pair of babies (one son and one
servant kid for each parent). When the storm started to calm, the family saw two ships approach—one from Corinth, the other from Epidaurus.

To make the situation even more of a logic puzzle, Egeon’s boat ran into a big rock. The boat was torn in two, separating the two parents (with their respective pair of separated twins). The wife and two babies were rescued by the Corinthian ship, while Egeon and his two boys were picked up by the other. Sadly, the ship that Egeon was in was slow, and headed for home instead of catching up with the ship from Corinth. Thus, Egeon never saw his wife, younger twin son, or his servant ever again.

Egeon explains to the Duke that when his son and servant turned eighteen, they got itchy to find their long lost twin brothers, and left Egeon alone. (Note that, thinking the other boys were gone, Egeon gave his son and the servant the names of their missing brothers, which will ensure some hilarity later on.)

Egeon’s son and servant have been gone for five summers, in which time Egeon has roamed around the farthest reaches of Asia trying to find both lost sets of boys. His travels finally brought him to Ephesus. He knows that he risks death by entering Ephesus, but would rather risk death than not look for the boys here. Thus he lost a wife and two sets of kids, but has acquired a loneliness that’s priceless.

The Duke basically says to him, "I can’t bend the rules, so you’re still sentenced to die." Still, he gives Egeon one day to try to raise the 1,000 marks for his bail by begging and borrowing from the folks of Ephesus. Duke Solinus then sends a fairly hopeless Egeon off with the jailer.