

ESSAY

Musical Shakespeare

MD SHAFIQUIL ISLAM

"The man that hath no music in himself / Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds / Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils / The motions of his spirit are dull as night / And his affections dark as Erebus / Let no such men be trusted" (Merchant of Venice 5.1.83-88, Lorenzo to Jessica)

Shakespeare counsels us not to trust a man who does not love music because he is a villain and is capable of committing all heinous crimes.

Very little is known about Shakespeare's own opinion about anything for his mysterious silence about himself because he never speaks his own mind out except through the voices of his characters, be that Iago or Cleopatra. Shakespeare's characters surpass the philosophers in depth as well as reasoning when they speak of something physical or metaphysical. If we study him on the basis of one philosophical theme or topic like music, death, love, mortality or adversity, we get astounded by the variety of interpretation and cogent definition the characters come up with which outshine the philosophers or specialists themselves.

Music has been held high in the works of Shakespeare. A frustrated man or a successful man may equally hold music as the source of peace and tranquility. Our effort here is to enjoy the sweetest music in his works either indirectly by reading the lines that describe ecstatic power of music or by listening to some great lines from his songs.

Shakespeare's works replete with comments on music which are more touching, deep and musical than any music ever heard. That unheard melodies are sweeter than that of heard melodies is exquisitely exhibited in the lines on music in Shakespeare. It is not for nothing that Beethoven's Sonata is absolutely based on the Tempest.

Shakespeare's plays abound in songs too. The beginning lines of the songs like "Tomorrow is Saint Valentine's day" or "It was a lover and his lass" or "Under the green wood tree" or "O mistress mine! Where are you roaming?" or "Come away, death" or "Tell me where is fancy bred" and so on keep the listeners enchanted with their melodies. Here we also look beyond the usual songs and enjoy melodies in poetry in which music is otherwise unheard.

Cleopatra, Portia, Desdemona, Ophelia, Emilia, Richard II, Ferdinand, Orsino speak on music in the respective plays they are in and some lines in the sonnets are live music.

We begin with a definition of music "The true concord of well-tuned sounds" (Sonnet 8.5). Music with instruments matching each other is also sweet music "Mark how one string, sweet husband to another, / Strikes each in each by mutual ordering" (Sonnet 8.9-10).

Cleopatra, lovesick for Antony, appeals to her companions to soothe her burning heart with music "Give me some music, moody food / Of us that trade in love".

A man becomes a tyrant or an untrustworthy criminal with all vices if he does not know how to appreciate music, "The man that hath no music in himself, / Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, / Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils, / The motions of his spirit are dull as night, / And his affections dark as Erebus: / Let no such man be trusted" (The Merchant of Venice).

Music is also a panacea which takes a man in to ecstasy -- a state of divine bliss and it dispels all kinds of grief, worry and anxiety from human life. To create such divinely happy state, Shakespeare invokes the spirit of Orpheus with his instrument



William Shakespeare

Orpheus with his lute made trees, / And the mountains tops that freeze, / Bow themselves when he did sing.... / In sweet music is such art, / Killing care and grief of heart" (Henry VIII).

The fairy King Oberon, in A Midsummer Night's Dream, describes to mischievous boy Puck how he witnessed that on hearing the sweet music played upon by a mermaid sitting on the back of a Dolphin, the rough sea became quiet and stars shot out madly from the spheres "Once I sat upon a promontory, / And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back / Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath / That the rude sea grew civil at her song / And certain stars shot madly from their spheres / To hear the sea-maids music". In the same play, the fairy queen Titania finds the hypnotic power of music "Music ho, music, such as charmeth sleep!".

The effect of music can be so devastating on a lover that can tempt him to die

while listening to it. Orsino appeals to Curio in The Twelfth Night "If music be the food of love, play on, / Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting, / The appetite may sicken, and so die'. Orsino sensuously feels that music came to his ear like sweet sound "That breathes upon a bank of violets / Stealing and giving odour".

One of the saddest tragedies -- Othello has the undertone of music all over. Desdemona, sensing that she might not be able to refrain Othello from the green-eyed monster -- jealousy which might even bring her death like her mother's maid, she tells Emilia her mind "She had a song of 'willow', / An old thing it was, but it expressed her fortune / And she died singing it. That song tonight / Will not go from my mind". Tragic music hovers through this part of the play. Emilia after being stabbed by her husband Iago sings to Desdemona dead "I will play the swan / And die in music".

Shakespeare's poetic excellence can elevate his lines into great music. Caliban, an impeccable creation, half fish and half man, describes musical atmosphere of the magical island created with the wizardry of Prospero to Stephano and Trinculo "Be not afeared; the isle is full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not," Here Caliban's words onomatopoeically imitate the sounds they refer to "Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments / Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices".

Music is such stuff as if it were made of dreams in Shakespeare. It can play magical role to create a heavenly aura all around. It can also be so sweet that the shipwrecked, weeping prince Ferdinand who has supposedly lost his entire family by a shipwreck in the sea, gets consoled by Ariel's song "Where should this music be? In the air or the earth? / It sounds no more: and, sure, it waits upon / Some god on the island. Sitting on a bank, / Weeping again the king my father's wrack, / This music crept by me upon the waters, / Allaying both their fury and my passion / With its sweet air".

In a different situation, King Richard II, before being murdered in captivity in the Tower, finds music distasteful and intolerable "How sour sweet music is / When time is broke and no proportion kept! / So it is in the music of men's lives..... The music mads me. Let it sound no more".

Shakespeare was well versed in the musical milieu that prevailed in the Elizabethan theatre as music played vital role in the success of any play on the stage. More over his plays have songs which are great pieces of poetry on the one hand and fine pieces of music on the other.

Emilia, stabbed by her husband Iago, dies singing the swan song to the dead Desdemona, "I will play the swan / And die in music". Bottom, just being transformed into an ass, boasts of his good taste for music to Titania in A Midsummer Night's Dream "I have a reasonable good ear in music. Let's have the tongs and the bones." Shakespeare, more neutral than gods, will win the hearts of all the feminists in a moment with Balthasar's song in Much Ado About Nothing, "Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more, / Men were deceivers ever."

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SHORT STORY

Utsav --- The Party

AKHTERUZZAMAN ILYAS

Translation: MIR WALIUZZAMAN

Anwar Ali is supposed to be in one of his best moods at the moment. Only a couple of hours back, he was in the midst of a roaring party. He was invited to a *boubhat* (post wedding lunch or dinner given in honour of the bride). The host happened to be a rich friend celebrating his nuptials at his plush, well-appointed Dhanmandi residence. As usual, Anwar enjoyed the occasion, feasting his eyes on a good number of glitzy maids. Also, he had managed to make the acquaintance of a few of those rare starry-eyed starlets. The sweetly fragrant memories of the party should be soothing Anwar's otherwise vulnerable existence for at least a week now.

But as the saying goes, man proposes and God disposes. Anwar turned sore at once and sorry too, as he approached the entry to their alleyway. His annoyance seemed genuine; several factors combined to militate against the effusive mood he had attained that evening: heavy, condensed yellowish drain water reflected the dull light oozing down from the leaning lamp-post; clods of dog shit and vivid coils of human faeces lay entwined, lining the gutters on either side; and.... and.... these vermin.... the residents of this locale also did bug him quite a bit. The young Don Juans seemed tensely expectant over the prospect of watching the dames who should be returning home from the neighbouring cinema hall in about half an hour, when the second show will be over at midnight. On his left, the regular, compulsive gamblers were busy encroaching on the sidewalk. The mikes of Ahmadiya Hotel and Restaurant (actually a run-of-the-mill eatery-cum-tea shop) continue to blare and entertain the community, playing half a century old Hindi film songs again and again.... without respite. It's eleven fifteen only, which means that the hollering will not cease before a couple of hours more have gone by.

In Anwar's mind, this locality as well as its dingy environment juxtaposes itself with the posh, festive and illuminated Dhanmandi house and irritates him hopelessly. The comparisons are multi-faceted. The Dhanmandi roads look clean, give you a sense of crisp freshness; the wide streets are given smooth coats of tar on a regular basis. At night, they relax and bathe in the milky light shed by the graceful fluorescent lamps. Gazing at the endless space above, perhaps they feel and gauge the miseries of eternity... From inside those palatial residences, exotic and streamlined limousines glide out gently, noiselessly... beautiful women of native and foreign origins adorn the lush and perfumed upholstery within. Whither goest thou, beautiful? Quo vadis? ... must be floating towards another 'house of pleasure' effortlessly, habitually... one conjectures. All those star-studded sprawling mansions seem standing at ease, hands shoved in their pockets, keeping respectable distances from one another. One should be able to surmise that amply secured and overly escorted within the impenetrable walls of those cosy havens, impeccable paragons of beauty in the dozens lounge around, creating conversations in quaint lingo.... one of them may be stringing the *sitar* and at ease recreating the *raga Malkosh*.... Another elfin being might fancy leafing through the pages of a chic and debonair monthly, in the most unhurried and cultured manner.... maybe she awaits the arrival of a Muntassir, or an Ahrar, or Ishtiaque... And lo, the Don Juan is there! In the same languid manner, the young lady now prepares the necessary setting for receiving her paramour.... the *kinnari* voice of Kanika Banerjee evokes the memories of a moonlit night.... And the graceful pair discusses 'socialism' in articulated, subdued tones. And.... isn't it wonderful that despite their quite tight schedules, these fairyland creatures must find themselves a suitable slot again, to be alone for some moments intermittently and suffer the sweet estrangement due, most stoically? The pining loner then finds no better alternative than shutting herself in a deep, dark chamber.... wherein the gleaming pedestal fans circulate in spite of the room-coolers.... and the fairy lady listens to the soothing Duke Ellington for at least two hours without a break.... and gradually regains her composure. That's formula, mind it!

And.... what would you find here? It's about midnight now.... look at those eight or nine dogs running about the length of this narrow lane! Please don't conclude that none of the Dhanmandi streets could possibly boast so many pariahs at a time. Well, they too have dogs.... no one is doubting that. But did you notice the difference? Why, a distinguished sample of the species was visible in a corner of

Anwar's friend's house through this evening, drawing unmixed admiration from everyone present there. Aha, how he poised himself! Proud of his unequivocal and long pedigree, the excellent, solemn dog was gravely wagging his tail, reminding Anwar of a scene from a Bangla film, where an old-timer aristocratic zamindar sat on a deck-chair on the first-floor balcony of his country house, swinging his folded upper leg leisurely and steeping his senses in the luxurious grandeur of the setting sun. Merely witnessing such spectacles does evoke a sense of deep reverence in a depraved soul, Anwar realized.

Now look at these sons (and daughters) of bitches here! All tykes and curs of the locality have crowded together their trunks totally devoid of hair and laden with ulcers. Unable to bark aloud, they feebly express their suppressed groans of distress and depravity caused by hunger, cold and pain perhaps.... a few of them having bloated like anything, as a result of feeding on any rubbish thrown around (there being no dearth of waste matter scattered everywhere), keep on staring blankly at nothing and syringe out squirts of foul smelling urine, wetting the stems of all the dilapidated lamp-posts they come across.

Anwar's own place, which seems to be a veritable bye-lane of the suffocating lane outside, feels equally dull, dampening, muggy and clammy. In the pale light of the forty-watt naked bulb, Anwar can see white and yellowish teeth impudently peeping out from the frame of the slightly opened thick lips of Saleha Begum, his wife; saliva still glistening in the corner of her mouth and rusticity.... sheer rusticity is

engraved across her visage.

"Hey, mother of Polly, where is my *lungi*?" Anwar calls out. Polly is their daughter and today is the 5th of October. During the initial days of every calendar month, Anwar addresses his wife by her name, Saleha, which he changes to Shelly when they go for a rickshaw ride together. But sheer remorse and annoyance compel him to breach the ritual today.

Only to avoid seeing the still sleepy and smiling face of Saleha, he turns about and changes into a *lungi*. Deeply aggrieved, Anwar says to himself, this stupid woman was a college-goer for sometime and.... she even did indulge in a little romantic affair before their marriage. Then how can she be so slovenly and insensible, after all? Clad in a sari, which shows nothing of her bosom or hips, she moves about doing her chores, looking like a side-pillow or a regular sack.

It's quite late already, isn't it? What's the time like, eh? Saleha enquired casually and sauntered out into the yard. Placing her not-too-dainty feet on two whole bricks placed apart, she will now squat in the bathroom and urinate profusely, discharging pints of waste water. Anwar hates the idea that women should be defecating and urinating so frequently, or spitting out lumps of spittle all around.... But what is there to do, after all? He shrugs off the distasteful thought of correcting such ugly and unbecoming attributes of women. Let her be.... let Saleha pee as much as she wants.... Let me revive the sweet memories of the evening.... Resting a hand on his

trousers laid on the clothes rack, and holding the yellow-stained underwear with the other, standing in the jostled space of his scanty room, the indulgent Anwar Ali once again concentrated his faculties in reliving the pleasant experience.

But no whole image or association related to those *bou-bhat* festivities can he recollect to speak of those luscious dames he's been pining for since. The wedding celebrations look like a distant, hazy picture.... and then, the brightly illuminated ensemble of images breaks into pieces and wink at him sheepishly. Maybe he would be better off if he hadn't attended the party at all, Anwar reflects wearily. Has he ever been that chummy with Qayyum? No.... never. He would never have known about Qayyum's marriage, if they had not met perchance near the stadium the other day. The two had studied together in the same college for a couple of years and belonged to the same students' organization. In those days, they had worked together in organizing a students' strike and so happened to interact a bit closely. And that's that. Qayyum was a rich father's socialist son and a brilliant student too. It was only natural that all his classmates would love to rub shoulders with him. No one would miss Anwar if he had chosen not to join the celebrating crowd this evening. Of course, he met some of his college pals there.

After ten long years, he met Hafeez at the party. They used to vie with one another to be more intimate with Qayyum, he remembers. And wasn't it strange that the dormant green-eyed monster started hissing as he sighted Hafeez after a decade? Hafeez had been a little too unaffected in his manners and speech when he first came to their college. As a student, he was enthusiastic about raising subscriptions and publishing souvenirs commemorating the 21st February language martyrs. Now he teaches Bangla in a local college. As before, he has been fulfilling his obligation towards the martyrs.... But he talks too much.... a perennial prattler.... Anwar recalls. At the party, made-up faces of lovely women were popping up before him, only to be drifting away a moment later in another direction. But Hafeez chattered on and on and on.... "I usually avoid frequenting such gaudy, glitzy places and parties, you know, Anwar. I'm a professor. Most of my leisure hours are spent in studies. I can't stand frivolities. Do you get my point? I left politics as soon as my studentship ended. I've almost stopped writing also; but the media folks, you know, will never let you rest in peace. So I still have to compose lyrics for them, only lyrics for your edification, mind it."

One of Anwar Ali's hands was still lying on his trousers and the other was seizing the soft, damp underwear in its paw.... Lata Mungeshkar's recorded voice overflowed from the direction of Ahmadiya Restaurant and another record kept on playing the autobiography of the lyricist-professor Hafeezur Rahman incessantly. Anwar looks on his left, on his right.... where are the enchanting dames gone to? He must make good use of his time here.... so many glamour queens don't fool around everywhere or, everyday.... hurry, hurry.... Anwar chases himself. He had found himself the most strategic nook for the purpose.... that is, the green grass-carpeted sprawling lawn, beset with deck chairs. Many had settled there; some were lounging around. The policemen hired specially for the occasion were facilitating parking of vehicles outside; guests were pouring in.... Qayyum and his father stood at the reception, welcoming the perfumed women and men giggling about anything and everything.... a few of the women were seen crossing the lawn and approaching the inner left wing of the house. Anwar could see everything clearly from his vantage-point. In a corner, under the illuminated *krishnachurha*, a handful of distinguished men and women were busily dissecting the Bangalee cultural practices and socialism. Anwar, too, wanted to join their discussion; the females of that exclusive species of the Sunday communists managed to carry themselves so elegantly everywhere.... They dressed so simply but effectively,.... spoke so sweetly and driving the point home.... Their voice and manner of speech were perfectly imitated by other clever females of various age ranges, starting from 14-15 to 39-40 years, to suit different occasions, as required. Anwar felt so anxious and eager to go near that group and listen to the *original* stuff being delivered by the genuine people. But despite his being so fidgety, Anwar didn't venture to do so, because he couldn't spot anyone familiar in the milieu there.

(TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

POETRY

The pearl in the oyster

SYED BADRUL AHSAN

She sings, she becomes the song, she wafts in melody . . . and she rises, in sure degrees, to tell me she is Melody.

She is my song, she is the melody I play on the strings Of my soul.

She is my soul, the keeper of its rhythms, the harbour Of its wildest dreams and its purest songs.

She is the purity which touches me even as the skies Pour sparks of passion on the earth.

She is the water that bathes my heated emotions, water Which springs from the primeval core of Creation.

She laughs, the echo of which stretches from the Ends of the world to the farthest reaches of the universe.

In my world of monsoon winds, she becomes my Universe . . . she is the ripple in the pond of experience.

There are the ripples she causes in the witching hours Of the night, the fire she ignites in the woods of My field of romance.

She is a fireball in whose heat I burn, over and over . . . her spasms of energy shoot themselves into me

And I know then how ardent shines my love for her.

The drooping stars in the western sky tell me she loves Me. She calls and I rush home to her heart . . . to fold her in my arms,

To ask her where she has been all these ages.

A brilliance explodes on her lips.

I dream of the lunar moment when my lips Will graze hers, will press into her sensuality . . . To let her know We belong to each other.

She is the pearl Nestling in the oyster in me.