

Othello, asks Emilia to put her wedding sheets on the bed, and she asks Emilia to bury her in these sheets should she die first. The last time we see Desdemona before she awakens to find Othello standing over her with murder in his eyes, she sings a song she learned from her mother's maid: —She was in love; and he proved mad / And did forsake her. She had a song of willow. / . . . / And she died singing it. That song tonight / Will not go from my mind|| (IV.iii.27–30). Like the audience, Desdemona seems able only to watch as her husband is driven insane with jealousy. Though she maintains to the end that she is —guiltless,|| Desdemona also forgives her husband (V.ii.133). Her forgiveness of Othello may help the audience to forgive him as well. Desdemona is a lady of spirit and intelligence. For all the claims of military straightforwardness of some other characters, Desdemona is the most direct and honest speaker in the play. Her speeches are not as lengthy as those of the men, but with Desdemona, every word counts. For Desdemona, Othello is the hero of many exciting and dangerous adventures. In Cyprus, in charge of her own household, Desdemona continues to fulfil her duties, receiving petitioners as the commander's wife and being hostess at official receptions. Her marriage has brought her position and happiness, so much so that she finds it unbearable to think that her husband has turned against her. This numbness lasts until she sees that he actually intends to kill her; then she puts up a brave and spirited defense, insisting on her innocence. In despair at losing his love, she still defends him from the consequences of his actions, but without his love, she cannot live.

Like Desdemona, Shakuntala is the sweetest, most graceful, most innocent and the most pathetic of the heroines of Kalidas Abhijnana Shakuntala is Kalidasa's greatest creation. This literary masterpiece has been translated into several languages around the world. The story of Shakuntala appears in the 'Adiparva' chapter of the epic Mahabharata. King Dushyanta, while on a gaming expedition (safari), and arrives at the hermitage of sage Kanva. The latter was away and his adopted daughter Shakuntala looks after the distinguished guest's needs. Dushyanta, immediately on seeing her, is struck by her beauty and offers to marry her. Shakuntala lays down a condition that the king should promise to hand over the kingdom to the son born to her and Dushyanta agrees. They marry and spend some happy days, after which the king returns to the capital. Shakuntala, in course of time, gives birth to a son who is named Sarvadamanā. Six years pass and still Dushyanta does not send for his spouse and son. Sage Kanva voluntarily decides to send Shakuntala to the palace. When she arrives at Dushyanta's abode, he refuses to recognize her. Shakuntala is grief-stricken. Then amidst her lament a heavenly voice commands Dushyanta: "He is your son. Accept him." The king then takes him in and the boy later comes to be renowned as Bharata. Kalidasa weaves a great play basing on this Mahabharata theme. The first meeting of Dushyanta and Shakuntala is a lively, 'colorful sequence in the play. Dushyanta, in the course of his hunting expedition arrives at Kanva's hermitage and there in the garden he sees Shakuntala engaged in watering the plants along with her maids. Mesmerized by her beauty, he desires to marry her while Shakuntala also is deeply impressed by the sight of the royal dignitary. They then marry in the 'Gandharva' style. The king returns to the capital while Shakuntala, left behind does not directly ask for the king's promise to make her son, the prince to succeed him. It is supposed to be understood. After the king returns, sage Durvasa comes to call on sage Kanva. The latter was away and Shakuntala was so lost in her thoughts of king Dushyanta that the sage's words: "I, a guest, have come" fell on her deaf ears. The sage is enraged and always quick to anger, curses her: "May the person about whom you are thinking forget you!" Later, he relents and says: "When he sees an object, which he has given you and recognizes it, he will remember you." Unfortunately, Shakuntala loses the ring given by Dushyanta who just forgets her. Kanva sends Shakuntala, now pregnant, to the court of Dushyanta along with his disciples. (Mahabharata pictures her child, about six now, who is very active.) Kalidasa portrays the farewell of sage Kanva to Shakuntala very touchingly. The whole ashram is plunged in sorrow. Kanva, Shakuntala's maids, all shed tears at departure; even the trees, plants, and birds bow down with grief. Upon her arrival, king Dushyanta cannot recognize Shakuntala. He even thinks it improper to eye a damsel who is stranger to him. He could not believe that this woman is his wife. The ring is lost on the way and Shakuntala, overcome with grief after being rejected by Dushyanta, collapses and is then carried away by a divine light. After a few days, the ring is found in the stomach of a fish and Dushyanta, upon seeing it, remembers everything. He feels sad that he rejected Shakuntala. Later, on his way back from Heaven where he had gone to assist Indra on an errand, he visits the hermitage of Mareecha. There he sees a boy daringly attempting to bare the jaws of a lion's cub. On inquiry, he learns that he is none other than his own son Sarvadamanā. Dushyanta and his son are happily united. At the end of the play, one feels sad at the sufferings of Shakuntala and we are at a loss as to whether we should blame Dushyanta or the 'Divine Power' for these happenings. In the last act, we see Shakuntala wrapped in a very ordinary saree, but she is a picture of grace and dignity. Though young in age, she speaks but a few words in a profound sense. She is a real Tapaswini (one who wants to sacrifice life for eternal salvation). One wonder at the manner in which she has transformed herself from a pleasure-seeking young