

*Centre for Distance & Online Education*  
**UNIVERSITY OF JAMMU**  
**JAMMU**



**Ist Semester**  
**SESSION 2025 ONWARDS**

**M.A. ENGLISH**

**Course No. ENG - 121**

**Unit – I, II, III, IV, V, VI**

**Lesson Nos. 1-27**

**Course Coordinator :**  
**Prof. Anupama Vohra**

**Teacher Incharge :**  
**Dr. Jasleen Kaur**

## **M.A. ENGLISH - SEMESTER I**

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### **COURSE NO. ENG - 121**

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**Lesson Compilation :**

**Prof. Rakesh Lidiya**

Rajasthan Technical University, Kota, Rajasthan

**Proof Reading and Editing :**

**Dr. Jasleen Kaur**

**Dr. Jasleen Kaur**

Assistant Professor of English,  
CDOE

**Prof. Kshamata Choudhary**

HOD, English, Vardhman Mahavir Open University,  
Kota, Rajasthan

**Course Coordinator :**

**Prof. Anupama Vohra**

**Teacher Incharge :**

**Dr. Jasleen Kaur**

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# Welcome

Dear Learners,

Welcome to Centre for Distance and Online Education !

Now you are enrolled for PG English, a prestigious course, run by the Centre. In Semester I you have four papers each of 6 credits. The detailed syllabus of each course is given in the respective study material. You are advised to read the prescribed texts in detail and consult the library for additional material. This course, that is ENG-121 comprises of six Units. Unit-I is Literary and Intellectual background of Drama upto Jacobean age and Units II to VI have five plays. Those learners who have read literature at the undergraduate level have a fairly good idea about drama, prose, poetry, novel criticism, literary terms, genres etc. Those who come from non-literature background shall have to work hard to grasp the basics and cope with the detailed study of the prescribed texts in each course.

Kindly read *A New History of English Literature* written by Prof. B.S. Dahiya, Formerly Vice Chancellor, Kurushetra University, Kurushetra and published by Doaba House. It will give you a comprehensive overview of the history of English Literature. This shall help you not only in the preparation of semester end exam but also shall be beneficial for the preparation of NET/SET exams.

Do attend the PCP programmes though they are optional; the contact classes and counselling clarify many of your doubts, questions and queries. Do remember to submit the Internal Assessment Assignments (IAAs) in time because no late IAAs are accepted, and in case of non-submission of IAAs you are ineligible to sit in the term end examination.

Wish you good luck!

**Dr. Jasleen Kaur**  
Teacher Incharge  
PG English  
CDOE

**SYLLABUS AND COURSES OF STUDY IN  
THE SUBJECT OF ENGLISH UNDER NON-CBCS SCHEME (CDOE)**

**SEMESTER I**

**Course Code: ENG-121**

**Duration of Examination: 3 hrs.**

**Title of the Course: Drama-I**

**Total Marks: 100**

**Credits: 6**

**(a) Semester Examination - 70**

**(b) Sessional Assessment - 30**

**Syllabus for the examination to be held in Dec. 2025, 2026 & 2027.**

**Objective :** The purpose of the course is to acquaint the students with the growth and development of English drama from the Medieval to the Jacobean period from the literary and historical perspectives. The course introduces the students to the different kinds of drama. They will study the form and literary problems associated with the prescribed plays.

**Unit-I**      Literary and Intellectual background of drama up to the Jacobean Period.

**Unit II**      Christopher Marlowe : *Dr. Faustus*

**Unit-III**      William Shakespeare : *King Lear*

**Unit-IV**      Ben Jonson : *Volpone*

**Unit-V**      William Shakespeare : *The Tempest*

**Unit-VI**      John Webster : *The Duchess of Malfi*

**SEMESTER I**

**Course No. ENG-121**

**Title of the Course: Drama-I**

**Syllabus for the examination to be held in Dec. 2025, 2026, & 2027**

**M.M. = 30**

Internal Assessment Assignments carry 30% marks in each course. The format of the Internal Assessment Assignments is given below:

**ASSIGNMENT 1: Long Answer Questions**

Two questions: one each from Unit I and Unit II shall be given. And the learner has to attempt any one question in 450-500 words. (10 marks)

**ASSIGNMENT 2: Short Answer Questions**

Four questions: two each from Unit III and Unit IV shall be given. And the learner has to attempt two questions once each from Unit III and Unit IV in 100-150 words. (5x2=10)

**ASSIGNMENT 3: Very Short Answer Questions**

Four questions: two each from Unit V and Unit VI shall be given. And the learner has to attempt all the four questions in 40-50 words. (2.5x4=10)

## **MODE OF EXAMINATION**

**The paper will be divided into Sections A, B, and C.**

**M.M.=70**

### **Section A     Multiple Choice Questions**

**Q. No. 1** will be an objective type question covering the entire syllabus. Twelve objectives, two from each unit, with four options each will be set, and the candidate will be required to write the correct option and not specify by putting a tick mark (✓). Any ten out of twelve are to be attempted.

Each objective will be for one mark.

$(10 \times 1 = 10)$

### **Section B     Short Answer Questions**

**Q. No. 2** comprises short answer type questions covering the entire syllabus. Four questions will be set and each candidate will be required to attempt any two questions in about 80-100 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 5 marks.

$(5 \times 2 = 10)$

### **Section C     Long Answer Questions**

**Q. No. 3** comprises long answer type questions from the entire syllabus. Six questions, one from each unit, will be set and the candidate will be required to attempt any five questions in about 400-450 words.

Each answer will be evaluated for 10 marks.

$(5 \times 10 = 50)$

### ***Suggested Reading :***

- “Ben Jonson.” The British Library, 16 July 2018, [www.bl.uk/people/ben-jonson#](http://www.bl.uk/people/ben-jonson#).
- Barton, Anne. Ben Jonson: Dramatist. Cambridge UP, 2014.
- Bowers, Fredson. Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy, 1587-1642. Princeton UP, 1940.
- Bradley, Andrew Cecil. Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth. Macmillan, 1992.
- Charlton, H. B. Shakespearean Comedy. Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1984.
- Craig, D. H., editor. Ben Jonson: The Critical Heritage. Routledge, 1990.
- Fermor, Una Mary Ellis. The Jacobean Drama: An Interpretation. Routledge, 1936.
- Frank Kermode. William Shakespeare: The Final Plays. Longman Group, 1973.
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- Jonson, Ben. Every Man in His Humor, edited by E.H. Herford and Percy Simpson. Clarendon Press, 1927.
- Jonson, Ben. The Alchemist. Cambridge UP, 2016.
- “John Webster.” The British Library, 16 July 2018, [www.bl.uk/people/john-webster](http://www.bl.uk/people/john-webster)
- Kaufmann, R. J., editor. Elizabethan Drama: Modern Essays in Criticism. OUP, 1961.

- Knight, G. Wilson. *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy with Three New Essays*. Routledge, 1993.
- Kyd, Thomas. *The Spanish Tragedy*. Manchester UP, 1996.
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- Shakespeare, William. *An Oxford Anthology of Shakespeare*, edited by Stanley Wells. OUP, 1987.
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- The Works of William Shakespeare: in Ten Volumes, edited by Henry Arthur. NDL India, 12 June 2017, [ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/document/c012L3hnbUJNHzTdNCOEMxcWkybmhCY1FjZFBmV3hBdWjMzRGNm81ND0](http://ndl.iitkgp.ac.in/document/c012L3hnbUJNHzTdNCOEMxcWkybmhCY1FjZFBmV3hBdWjMzRGNm81ND0).
- Webster, John. *The White Devil*. Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2018.
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- Wilson, F. P. *Elizabethan and Jacobean*. Clarendon Press, 1945.

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**LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL  
BACKGROUND OF DRAMA UPTO THE JACOBEAN PERIOD**

**THEATRE IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

**STRUCTURE**

- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 1.3 Theatre in the Early Middle Ages
- 1.4 Theatre in the Middle and Late Medieval Period
- 1.5 European Theatre and Drama in the Middle Ages
- 1.6 Medieval Drama : An Introduction to Middle English Plays
- 1.7 Decline of Medieval Theatre
- 1.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 1.10 Multiple Choice Questions
- 1.11 Suggested Readings

**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

After the fall of the Roman Empire, small nomadic bands traveled around performing wherever there was an audience. They consisted of storytellers, jesters, jugglers and many other performers. Later, festivals cropped up where entertainers would show their talents. However, the powerful Catholic Church made headway during the Middle Ages to stamp out such performances and convert the entertainers.

Despite its insistence that acting and traveling performances were sinful, the Church was actually instrumental in reviving theatre in the Middle Ages. In one type of church service, called *The Hours*, Bible stories were dramatized. Music often would be incorporated into the dramatizations. The very first written-down liturgical drama or play is known as the *Regularis Concordia* by Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester. The majority of performances were held in monasteries at the beginning of the age. Religious drama was performed exclusively in churches until around 1200 when they were performed outside on occasion.

One of the most popular of the Bible stories that were dramatized was the story of Mary visiting Christ's tomb to discover Christ's resurrection. Jesus' crucifixion, however, was rarely dramatized. Other stories that were often dramatized were Daniel in the lion's den, Lazarus raised from the dead, and the conversion of St. Paul.

## 1.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Outline the key characteristics of medieval European theatre.
2. Identify different forms of medieval drama, including liturgical, morality, and mystery plays.
3. Explain the reasons for the decline of medieval drama.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the development and features of theatre during the late medieval period.
2. Distinguish between various types of medieval drama and their purposes.
3. Analyze factors that contributed to the decline of medieval theatrical traditions.

## 1.3 THEATRE IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

In the early Middle Ages, churches began to stage dramatized versions of important biblical events. The churches were faced with explaining a new religion to a majorly illiterate population, so these dramas visualized what would later be able to be read in the Bible. These productions also celebrated annual religious events. These productions evolved into liturgical dramas. The earliest known liturgical drama is the *Easter trope, Whom do you Seek*, which dates circa 925. Liturgical drama did not involve actors impersonating characters, but it did involve singing by two groups.

An important playwright in early Medieval times was Hrotsvit, a historian and aristocratic canoness from northern Germany in the 10th century. Hrotsvit wrote six plays which she modeled after Terence's comedies. Though Terence's comedies show ordinary human subjects and situations involving marriage, sex and love, Hrostvit put a moral and religious spin on Terence's plays in order to avoid criticism from the church.

She wrote a preface to her collection of plays which stated that her purpose for writing was to save Christians from the guilt that reading Classical Literature instilled in its readers. She is the first recorded female playwright. She is also wrote the first identified Western dramatic works of the post-classical era. Her works were first published in 1501 and had a large influence on religious drama of the sixteenth century.

Following Hrotsvit was another female playwright, Hildegard of Bingen. Hildegard's most famous work, *Ordo Virtutum*, is regarded as the first play set to music, or the first musical play. Her songs were collected into a symphony, *Symphonie armoniae celestium revelationum*, that was set to words from Hildegard's own hymns, sequences and responsories.

Secular Latin plays were an important aspect in the 12th century in England and in France. Other early Medieval performances included mimes, minstrels, storytellers and jugglers who traveled in search of employment. There is not much information available about specific performances of these entertainers.

#### **1.4 THEATRE IN THE MIDDLE AND LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD**

Liturgical dramas spread across Europe and Russia throughout the Middle Ages. Muslim-occupied Spain was the only area in which liturgical dramas were not present. However, though there is a large presence of surviving liturgical dramas, most churches only performed one or two per year. Some churches performed none at all.

An important milestone in the development of comedy was the *Feast of Fools*. The Feast of Fools was a festival in which the lower clergy were allowed to mock the higher clergy as well as church life. Comic plays and burlesque skits sometimes filtered into the events of the festival as well. True comedy did not exist until drama and the liturgy were separated, but the Feast of Fools undoubtedly had an effect on the incorporation of comedy into religious plays.

Religious plays began production outside of the church during the 12th century. The process began by merging shorter liturgical dramas into longer plays which were then performed by laymen rather than clergy. The plays were then accessible to more people which now included the working class. These plays were usually staged outdoors.

Plays in the Middle Medieval Period led to the growth of towns and formation of guilds. This also led to important changes politically and economically, and more significant changes in the late Medieval Period.

Plays were produced in over 120 different towns in the British Isles during the Middle Ages. These plays, most often Mystery plays, were written in large numbers. Some examples include the York plays (48 plays), Chester Plays (24) and Wakefield Plays (32). A large number of plays also survive from Germany and France. Common elements in these plays include devils and clowns.

Actors in plays in the late Middle Ages were usually laymen from the town's local population. Plays at this time were staged on wheeled platforms which were used to move scenery. These stages were called pageant wagon stages, and were convenient for location changes. Playhouses were not a common occurrence. Contrary to popular belief, both sexes performed in plays in some European countries in the late Middle Ages. However, in England plays were performed by all-male casts.

Professional actors became more prevalent towards the end of the Middle Ages throughout Europe. Both Richard III and Henry VII kept small acting troupes. These actors performed plays in a nobleman's residence. Mummers' plays were also important events.

#### **1.5 EUROPEAN THEATRE AND DRAMA IN THE MIDDLE AGES**

In the staging of liturgical drama there were many conventions used in the church. Small scenic structures called mansions were used to illustrate the surroundings of a play. Small plays had only one mansion, longer plays had two or more. Costumes for liturgical drama were church clothing to which real or symbolic accessories were added. Most of the lines of the drama were chanted in Latin rather than spoken.

It was late in Middle Ages when religious plays were performed outside the churches. This seemingly small step opened the door for many other more significant changes in medieval drama. With the formation of guilds, the growth of towns, and a decline in feudalism, theatre had great opportunities to flower. Between the years 1200 to 1350 vernacular plays took over the number one spot previously taken by liturgical plays.

Many plays were performed outdoors during the spring and summer months. Cycle plays also became popular. The cycle plays were composed of many short plays or episodes and could or could not be religious. Cycle plays could take a few hours or 25 or more days to perform. The cycle plays varied but usually all dealt with religious figures, biblical writings of the church and sermons of the church. The plays had little sense of chronology, and most of their authors were anonymous.

Around the end of the 14th century the church was controlling less and less of the production of plays, but it always kept an eye on the contents of plays and their presentation. Sometimes towns would put on shows, but often individuals would arrange a production. The church always reserved the right to approve or disapprove a script before it became a production.

Directors emerged to handle the sometimes large number of actors, special effects, and money that would be put into productions. Sometimes a committee of overseers was put together to stage productions. These overseers would have duties such as directing the erection of the stage, constructing seating for the audience, casting and rehearsing the actors, working with actors on refining roles, assigning people to take up money at the door, and addressing the audience at the beginning and end of the play.

Actors and the number needed changed for each play. For instance, the cycle plays needed as many as 300 actors. Most actors were found in the local area where directors would hold auditions. Most of the time the actors were boys or men, but in France women were occasionally allowed to act. Often an actor would have multiple roles in a show.

The morality play was a special play much like the cycle plays which centered around men's continuous struggle between good and evil. One of the most influential morality plays was *Romance of the Rose*. This play had characters such as Slander, Danger, and Fair Welcome. Another interesting morality play which was written in 1425 was the *Castle of Perseverance* which depicted mankind's progress from birth to death and showed the final judgment.

## **1.6 MEDIEVAL DRAMA : AN INTRODUCTION TO MIDDLE ENGLISH PLAYS**

### **FOLK PLAYS**

In England the folk-plays, throughout the Middle Ages and in remote spots down almost to the present time, sometimes took the form of energetic dances (Morris dances, they came to be called, through confusion with Moorish performances of the same general nature).

Others of them, however, exhibited in the midst of much rough-and-tumble fighting and buffoonery, a slight thread of dramatic action. Their characters gradually came to be a conventional set, partly famous figures of popular tradition, such as St. George, Robin Hood, Maid Marian, and the Green Dragon.

Other offshoots of the folk-play were the 'mummings' and 'disguisings,' collective names for many forms of processions, shows, and other entertainments, such as, among the upper classes, that precursor of the Elizabethan Mask in which a group of persons in disguise, invited or uninvited, attended a formal dancing party. In the later

part of the Middle Ages, also, there were the secular pageants, spectacular displays (rather different from those of the twentieth century) given on such occasions as when a king or other person of high rank made formal entry into a town. They consisted of an elaborate scenic background set up near the city gate or on the street, with figures from allegorical or traditional history who engaged in some pantomime or declamation, but with very little dramatic dialog, or none.

But all these forms, though they were not altogether without later influence, were very minor affairs, and the real drama of the Middle Ages grew up, without design and by the mere nature of things, from the regular services of the Church.

### **TROPES, LITURGICAL PLAYS, AND MYSTERY PLAYS.**

We must try in the first place to realize clearly the conditions under which the church service, the mass, was conducted during all the medieval centuries. We should picture to ourselves congregations of persons for the most part grossly ignorant, of unquestioning though very superficial faith, and of emotions easily aroused to fever heat. Of the Latin words of the service they understood nothing; and of the Bible story they had only a very general impression. It was necessary, therefore, that the service should be given a strongly spectacular and emotional character, and to this end no effort was spared. The great cathedrals and churches were much the finest buildings of the time, spacious with lofty pillars and shadowy recesses, rich in sculptured stone and in painted windows that cast on the walls and pavements soft and glowing patterns of many colours and shifting forms. The service itself was in great part musical, the confident notes of the full choir joining with the resonant organ-tones; and after all the rest the richly robed priests and ministrants passed along the aisles in stately processions enveloped in fragrant clouds of incense. That the eye if not the ear of the spectator, also, might catch some definite knowledge, the priests as they read the Bible stories sometimes displayed painted rolls which vividly pictured the principal events of the day's lesson.

Still, however, a lack was strongly felt, and at last, accidentally and slowly, began the process of dramatizing the services. First, inevitably, to be so treated was the central incident of Christian faith, the story of Christ's resurrection. The earliest steps were very simple. First, during the ceremonies on Good Friday, the day when Christ was crucified, the cross which stood all the year above the altar, bearing the Savior's figure, was taken down and laid beneath the altar, a dramatic symbol of the Death and Burial; and two days later, on 'the third day' of the Bible phraseology, that is on Easter Sunday, as the story of the Resurrection was chanted by the choir, the cross was uncovered and replaced, amid the rejoicings of the congregation. Next, and before the Norman Conquest, the Gospel dialog between the angel and the three Marys at the tomb of Christ came sometimes to be chanted by the choir in those responses which are called "tropes":

*Whom seek ye in the sepulcher, O Christians?*

*Jesus of Nazareth the crucified, O angel.*

*He is not here; he has arisen as he said. Go,  
announce that he has risen from the sepulcher.'*

After this a little dramatic action was introduced almost as a matter of course. One priest dressed in white robes sat, to represent the angel, by one of the square-built tombs near the junction of nave and transept, and three others, personating the Marys, advanced slowly towards him while they chanted their portion of the same

dialog. As the last momentous words of the angel died away a jubilant 'Te Deum' burst from, organ and choir, and every member of the congregation exulted, often with sobs, in the great triumph which brought salvation to every Christian soul.

Little by little, probably, as time passed, this Easter scene was further enlarged, in part by additions from the closing incidents of the Savior's life. A similar treatment, too, was being given to the Christmas scene, still more humanly beautiful, of his birth in the manger, and occasionally the two scenes might be taken from their regular places in the service, combined, and presented at any season of the year. Other Biblical scenes, as well, came to be enacted, and, further, there were added stories from Christian tradition, such as that of Antichrist, and, on their particular days, the lives of Christian saints. Thus far these compositions are called Liturgical Plays, because they formed, in general, a part of the church service (liturgy). But as some of them were united into extended groups and as the interest of the congregation deepened, the churches began to seem too small and inconvenient, the excited audiences forgot the proper reverence, and the performances were transferred to the churchyard, and then, when the gravestones proved troublesome, to the market place, the village-green, or any convenient field. By this time the people had ceased to be patient with the unintelligible Latin, and it was replaced at first, perhaps, and in part, by French, but finally by English; though probably verse was always retained as more appropriate than prose to the sacred subjects. Then, the religious spirit yielding inevitably in part to that of merrymaking, minstrels and mountebanks began to flock to the celebrations; and regular fairs, even, grew up about them. Gradually, too, the priests lost their hold even on the plays themselves; skilful actors from among the laymen began to take many of the parts; and at last in some towns the trade-guilds, or unions of the various handicrafts, which had secured control of the town governments, assumed entire charge.

These changes, very slowly creeping in, one by one, had come about in most places by the beginning of the fourteenth century. In 1311 a new impetus was given to the whole ceremony by the establishment of the late spring festival of Corpus Christi, a celebration of the doctrine of transubstantiation. On this occasion, or sometimes on some other festival, it became customary for the guilds to present an extended series of the plays, a series which together contained the essential substance of the Christian story, and therefore of the Christian faith. The Church generally still encouraged attendance, and not only did all the townspeople join wholeheartedly, but from all the country round the peasants flocked in. On one occasion the Pope promised the remission of a thousand days of purgatory to all persons who should be present at the Chester plays, and to this exemption the bishop of Chester added sixty days more.

The list of plays thus presented commonly included: The Fall of Lucifer; the Creation of the World and the Fall of Adam; Noah and the Flood; Abraham and Isaac and the promise of Christ's coming; a Procession of the Prophets, also foretelling Christ; the main events of the Gospel story, with some additions from Christian tradition; and the Day of Judgment. The longest cycle now known, that at York, contained, when fully developed, fifty plays, or perhaps even more. Generally each play was presented by a single guild (though sometimes two or three guilds or two or three plays might be combined), and sometimes, though not always, there was a special fitness in the assignment, as when the watermen gave the play of Noah's Ark or the bakers that of the Last Supper. In this connected form the plays are called the Mystery or Miracle Cycles. In many places, however, detached plays, or groups of plays smaller than the full cycles, continued to be presented at one season or another.

Each cycle as a whole, it will be seen, has a natural epic unity, centering about the majestic theme of the spiritual history and the final judgment of all Mankind. But unity both of material and of atmosphere suffers not

only from the diversity among the separate plays but also from the violent intrusion of the comedy and the farce which the coarse taste of the audience demanded. Sometimes, in the later period, altogether original and very realistic scenes from actual English life were added, like the very clever but very coarse parody on the *Nativity* play in the 'Towneley' cycle. More often comic treatment was given to the Bible scenes and characters themselves. Noah's wife, for example, came regularly to be presented as a shrew, who would not enter the ark until she had been beaten into submission; and Herod always appears as a blustering tyrant, whose fame still survives in a proverb of Shakespeare's coinage—'to out-Herod Herod.'

The manner of presentation of the cycles varied much in different towns. Sometimes the entire cycle was still given, like the detached plays, at a single spot, the market-place or some other central square; but often, to accommodate the great crowds, there were several 'stations' at convenient intervals. In the latter case each play might remain all day at a particular station and be continuously repeated as the crowd moved slowly by; but more often it was the spectators who remained, and the plays, mounted on movable stages, the 'pageant'-wagons, were drawn in turn by the guild-apprentices from one station to another. When the audience was stationary, the common people stood in the square on all sides of the stage, while persons of higher rank or greater means were seated on temporary wooden scaffolds or looked down from the windows of the adjacent houses.

In the construction of the 'pageant' all the little that was possible was done to meet the needs of the presentation. Below the main floor, or stage, was the curtained dressing-room of the actors; and when the play required, on one side was attached 'Hell-Mouth,' a great and horrible human head, whence issued flames and fiendish cries, often the fiends themselves, and into which lost sinners were violently hurled. On the stage the scenery was necessarily very simple. A small raised platform or pyramid might represent Heaven, where God the Father was seated, and from which as the action required the angels came down; a single tree might indicate the Garden of Eden; and a doorway an entire house. In partial compensation the costumes were often elaborate, with all the finery of the church wardrobe and much of those of the wealthy citizens. The expense accounts of the guilds, sometimes luckily preserved, furnish many picturesque and amusing items, such as these: 'Four pair of angels' wings, 2 shillings and 8 pence.' 'For mending of hell head, 6 pence.' 'Item, link for setting the world on fire.' Apparently women never acted; men and boys took the women's parts. All the plays of the cycle were commonly performed in a single day, beginning, at the first station, perhaps as early as five o'clock in the morning; but sometimes three days or even more were employed. To the guilds the giving of the plays was a very serious matter. Often each guild had a 'pageant-house' where it stored its 'properties,' and a pageant-master who trained the actors and imposed substantial fines on members remiss in cooperation.

We have said that the plays were always composed in verse. The stanza forms employed differ widely even within the same cycle, since the single plays were very diverse in both authorship and dates. The quality of the verse, generally mediocre at the outset, has often suffered much in transmission from generation to generation. In other respects also there are great contrasts; sometimes the feeling and power of a scene are admirable, revealing an author of real ability, sometimes there is only crude and wooden amateurishness. The medieval lack of historic sense gives to all the plays the setting of the authors' own times; Roman officers appear as feudal knights; and all the heathens (including the Jews) are Saracens, worshippers of 'Mahound' and 'Termagaunt'; while the good characters, however long they may really have lived before the Christian era, swear stoutly by St. John and St. Paul and the other medieval Christian divinities. The frank coarseness of the plays is often merely disgusting, and suggests how superficial, in most cases, was the medieval religious sense. With no thought of incongruity, too, these writers brought God the Father onto the stage in bodily form, and then, attempting in all

sincerity to show him reverence, gilded his face and put into his mouth long speeches of exceedingly tedious declamation. The whole emphasis, as generally in the religion of the times, was on the fear of hell rather than on the love of righteousness. Yet in spite of everything grotesque and inconsistent, the plays no doubt largely fulfilled their religious purpose and exercised on the whole an elevating influence. The humble submission of the boy Isaac to the will of God and of his earthly father, the yearning devotion of Mary the mother of Jesus, and the infinite love and pity of the tortured Christ himself, must have struck into even callous hearts for at least a little time some genuine consciousness of the beauty and power of the finer and higher life. A literary form which supplied much of the religious and artistic nourishment of half a continent for half a thousand years cannot be lightly regarded or dismissed.

## THE MORALITY PLAYS

The Mystery Plays seem to have reached their greatest popularity in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In the dawning light of the Renaissance and the modern spirit they gradually waned, though in exceptional places and in special revivals they did not altogether cease to be given until the seventeenth century. On the Continent of Europe, indeed, they still survive, after a fashion, in a single somewhat modernized form, the celebrated Passion Play of Oberammergau. In England by the end of the fifteenth century they had been for the most part replaced by a kindred species which had long been growing up beside them, namely the Morality Plays.

The Morality Play probably arose in part from the desire of religious writers to teach the principles of Christian living in a more direct and compact fashion than was possible through the Bible stories of the Mysteries. In its strict form the Morality Play was a dramatized moral allegory. It was in part an offshoot from the Mysteries, in some of which there had appeared among the actors abstract allegorical figures, either good or bad, such as The Seven Deadly Sins, Contemplation, and Raise-Slander. In the Moralities the majority of the characters are of this sort—though not to the exclusion of supernatural persons such as God and the Devil—and the hero is generally a type-figure standing for all Mankind. For the control of the hero the two definitely opposing groups of Virtues and Vices contend; the commonest type of Morality presents in brief glimpses the entire story of the hero's life, that is of the life of every man. It shows how he yields to temptation and lives for the most part in reckless sin, but at last in spite of all his flippancy and folly is saved by Perseverance and Repentance, pardoned through God's mercy, and assured of salvation.

As compared with the usual type of Mystery plays the Moralities had for the writers this advantage, that they allowed some independence in the invention of the story; and how powerful they might be made in the hands of a really gifted author has been finely demonstrated in our own time by the stage-revival of the best of them, 'Everyman' (which is probably a translation from a Dutch original). In most cases, however, the spirit of medieval allegory proved fatal, the genuinely abstract characters are mostly shadowy and unreal, and the speeches of the Virtues are extreme examples of intolerable sanctimonious declamation. Against this tendency, on the other hand, the persistent instinct for realism provided a partial antidote; the Vices are often very lifelike rascals, abstract only in name. In these cases the whole plays become vivid studies in contemporary low life, largely human and interesting except for their prolixity and the coarseness which they inherited from the Mysteries and multiplied on their own account. During the Reformation period, in the early sixteenth century, the character of the Moralities, more strictly so called, underwent something of a change, and they were—sometimes made the vehicle for religious argument, especially by Protestants.

## THE INTERLUDES

Early in the sixteenth century, the Morality in its turn was largely superseded by another sort of play called the Interlude. But just as in the case of the Mystery and the Morality, the Interlude developed out of the Morality, and the two cannot always be distinguished, some single plays being distinctly described by the authors as 'Moral Interludes.' In the Interludes the realism of the Moralities became still more pronounced, so that the typical Interlude is nothing more than a coarse farce, with no pretense at religious or ethical meaning. The name Interlude denotes literally 'a play between,' but the meaning intended (between whom or what) is uncertain. The plays were given sometimes in the halls of nobles and gentlemen, either when banquets were in progress or on other festival occasions; sometimes before less select audiences in the town halls or on village greens. The actors were sometimes strolling companies of players, who might be minstrels 'or rustics, and were sometimes also retainers of the great nobles, allowed to practice their dramatic ability on tours about the country when they were not needed for their masters' entertainment. In the Interlude-Moralities and Interludes first appears The Vice, a rogue who sums up in himself all the Vices of the older Moralities and serves as the buffoon. One of his most popular exploits was to belabor the Devil about the stage with a wooden dagger, a habit which took a great hold on the popular imagination, as numerous references in later literature testify. Transformed by time, the Vice appears in the Elizabethan drama, and thereafter, as the clown.

### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. Medieval theatre began as part of \_\_\_ rituals and ceremonies.
2. \_\_\_ plays taught moral lessons through personified virtues and vices.
3. Mystery plays were based on stories from the \_\_\_.
4. One reason for the decline of medieval drama was the rise of \_\_\_ theatre during the Renaissance.

### Answers

1. religious
2. Morality
3. Bible
4. secular

## THE LATER INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIEVAL DRAMA

The various dramatic forms from the tenth century to the middle of the sixteenth at which we have thus hastily glanced—folk-plays, mumming and disguisings, secular pageants, Mystery plays, Moralities, and Interludes—have little but a historical importance. But besides demonstrating the persistence of the popular demand for drama, they exerted a permanent influence in that they formed certain stage traditions which were to modify or largely control the great drama of the Elizabethan period and to some extent of later times. Among these traditions were the disregard for unity, partly of action, but especially of time and place; the mingling of comedy with even the intense scenes of tragedy; the nearly complete lack of stage scenery, with a resultant willingness in the audience to make the largest possible imaginative assumptions; the presence of certain stock figures, such as the clown; and the presentation of women's parts by men and boys. The plays, therefore, must be reckoned with in dramatic history.

## 1.7 DECLINE OF MEDIEVAL THEATRE

A change in interests among popular culture, a change in patronage to the theater, and the establishment of playhouses signified the death of the theatre in the Middle Ages. The interest in religious plays was replaced by a renewed interest in Roman and Greek culture. Roman and Greek plays began to be performed, and plays that were written began to be influenced by Greek and Roman classics.

Changes in the theater were also caused by the support of nobility and monarchs. When the upper class began to support non-religious professional theater troupes, religious theater as a whole began to decline. The tastes of the nobility filtered down to the lower classes. The construction of permanent playhouses was also a contributing factor to the downfall of Medieval Theater.

Because players no longer had to rely on churches and inns for staging, more creative storytelling and staging options were now available. Productions now had a more professional quality and thus a wider audience appeal.

## 1.8 LET US SUM UP

Theatre in the Middle ages covered a wide variety of genres and subject matter. Some of the most popular genres of plays in the Middle Ages include morality plays, farces, masques and drama. Medieval drama began with religious and moral themed plays. An early prominent Medieval playwright was Hrotsvit of Gardesheim of the 10th century. Some other famous examples of Medieval plays include the N-Town plays, the morality play, Everyman, Hildegard of Bingen's play set to music, Ordo Virtutum. The early Medieval period provides few surviving records of Medieval plays due to the low literacy rate of the general population. The clergy was also opposed to some types of performance. Drama began to thrive in the late medieval period, and more records of performances and plays exist from this time.

## 1.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. What do you understand by Middle Ages?
2. Discuss the European theatre during the medieval period.
3. What are the chief characteristics of the drama of this period?
4. What are folk, mystery and miracle plays?
5. What are Tropes, Liturgical and Morality plays?
6. What are interludes?
7. How did the medieval theatre decline?

## 1.10 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In which London neighborhood was the Globe Theatre located during Shakespeare's time?
  - A) Westminster
  - B) Southwark
  - C) Covent Garden

D) Mayfair

2. What was the primary material used to construct the Globe Theatre?

- A) Stone
- B) Wood
- C) Brick
- D) Steel

3. Who was the famous actor and shareholder of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men) who performed in many of Shakespeare's plays?

- A) Richard Burbage
- B) Christopher Marlowe
- C) Ben Jonson
- D) Thomas Kyd

4. What was the name of the theater company Shakespeare was associated with for most of his career?

- A) The Lord's Men
- B) The King's Men
- C) The Globe Players
- D) The Royal Troupe

5. What was the purpose of the "tiring house" in a Shakespearean theater?

- A) A place for actors to rest during performances
- B) A costume storage area and backstage space
- C) The ticket booth where patrons purchased tickets
- D) The area where musicians played live music

6. In Shakespearean times, who played female roles on the stage?

- A) Women
- B) Boys or young men
- C) Elderly men
- D) Female impersonators

7. What was the "groundling" area in the Globe Theatre?

- A) The upper gallery for nobility
- B) The area for musicians and sound effects
- C) The courtyard where standing patrons watched the performance

D) The area where actors rested between scenes

8. During performances, what signaled the beginning of a play at the Globe Theatre?

- A) A trumpet fanfare
- B) The ringing of a bell
- C) The lighting of a torch
- D) The raising of a flag

9. What was the name of Shakespeare's famous indoor theater, located in Blackfriars?

- A) The Rose Theatre
- B) The Globe Theatre
- C) The Whitehall Palace Theatre
- D) The Blackfriars Theatre

10. Which of Shakespeare's plays features the line, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players"?

- A) Macbeth
- B) Romeo and Juliet
- C) As You Like It
- D) Othello

**Answers:** 1B, 2B, 3A, 4B, 5B, 6B, 7C, 8B, 9D, 10C.

### 1.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

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**LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL  
BACKGROUND OF DRAMA UPTO THE JACOBEAN PERIOD**

## ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

### **STRUCTURE**

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 2.3 The Historical Overview
- 2.4 The Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages
  - 2.4.1 Political Peace and Stability
  - 2.4.2 Social Development
  - 2.4.3 Religious Tolerance
  - 2.4.4 Sense and Feeling of Patriotism
  - 2.4.5 Discovery, Exploration and Expansion
  - 2.4.6 Influence of Foreign Fashions
  - 2.4.7 Contradictions and Set of Oppositions
- 2.5 Elizabethan Drama
  - 2.5.1 The University Wits
  - 2.5.2 Dramatic Activity of Shakespeare
  - 2.5.3 Other Playwrights
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 2.8 Multiple Choice Questions
- 2.9 Suggested Readings

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The focus of this lesson is on the Elizabethan and Jacobean Ages with special reference to Elizabethan drama.

## 2.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. **Explain** the key features and historical context of the English Renaissance, particularly during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.
2. **Identify** major playwrights of the era, including the University Wits, William Shakespeare, and their contributions to English drama.
3. **Analyze** the themes, styles, and characteristics of Elizabethan and Jacobean drama with reference to selected texts and authors.

### Outcomes

1. Describe the socio-political and cultural factors that influenced literature during the English Renaissance.
2. Compare the contributions of the University Wits and Shakespeare in shaping Elizabethan drama.
3. Recognize the differences between Elizabethan and Jacobean drama through examples of themes, tone, and dramatic structure.

## 2.3 THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The literary decline after Chaucer's death was due in considerable measure to political reasons. The dispute about the throne, which culminated in the War of Roses, dissipated the energy and resources of the country and finally destroyed in large measure the noble families. The art and literature depended on their patronage. The accession of Henry VII in 1485 brought about a period of quiet and recovery. Henry VII established a strong monarchy and restored social and political order. He curtailed the powers and privileges of barons and patronized the new rich class. The country resumed its power among European nations, and began through them to feel the stimulus of the Renaissance. Caxton's press, which was established in 1476 in London, was the earliest forerunner of Renaissance in England. Rickett remarks: The Renaissance had come with Caxton. It began in London with the publication of English masterpieces that awakened a sense of their national life in the minds of the people. King Henry VIII, who acceded to the throne of England in 1509, began an era of significant and purposeful changes. He ruled in the spirit of modern statecraft. He encouraged trade and manufacturers, and increased the wealth of the country. He hastened the decline of feudalism by allowing men of low birth to high positions. Thus the court became the field for the display of individual ambition. Men of talent and learning found honourable place in his court. During his reign, England contributed her part to the spread of the new civilization and new learning. Education was popularized. Cardinal's College and Christ Church College at Oxford were founded. The Reign of Henry VIII also expedited the Reformation which had begun in England nearly two centuries before with Wycliffe. The spirit of emancipation of conscience from priestly control was strengthened by the example of German and Swiss reformers. In 1534, Henry VII enforced political separation from Rome on the occasion of the annulment of his first marriage. It provided an opportunity for radical theological reforms. Hugh Latimer was a powerful spokesman of the spirit of Reformation. His writings represent a development of

popular English prose. The Reformation and various religious and political controversies gave rise to the writing of pamphlets, serious and satirical. The translation of the Bible by William Tyndale and Miles Coverdale is a significant development in English prose. During Henry's reign the court emerged as a great patron of learning, art and literature. The atmosphere of peace and calm which began to prevail after long turmoil and chaos paved the way for extraordinary development of literary activity. Edward VI ruled from 1547 to 1553. The reign of Queen Mary from 1553 to 1558 was marred by religious conflicts. She restored Roman Catholicism in England. Creative activity was arrested during her time but it was replenished with much greater vigour in the reign of Queen Elizabeth (1558 – 1603). The above historical overview is just an introduction to the socio-political and religious conditions leading to the golden period which is called the Age of Elizabeth. The English Renaissance covers a long span of time, which is divided for the sake of convenience into the following three periods: i) The Beginning of Renaissance (1516 – 1558). ii) The Flowering of Renaissance (1558 – 1603). It is actually called the Age of Elizabeth. iii) The Decline of Renaissance (1603 – 1625). It is also termed as the Jacobean Age. Let's see these literary periods through different perspectives.

## **2.4 THE ELIZABETHAN AND JACOBEAN AGES**

Both the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods in the history of English literature are also known as The Age of Shakespeare. This span of time is the golden age of literature. It extends from the accession of Elizabeth in 1558 to the death of James I in 1625. It was an era of peace, of economic prosperity, of stability, of liberty and of great explorations. It was an age of both contemplation and action. It was an era which was illustrious for the unprecedented development of art, literature and drama. John Milton calls England, during this age, as — a noble and puissant nation, rousing herself, like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks. Let's see the main characteristics of this age.

### **2.4.1 Political Peace and Stability**

Elizabeth brilliantly framed and followed the policy of balance and moderation both inside and outside the country. A working compromise was reached with Scotland. The rebellious northern barons were kept in check. She, therefore, could successfully establish peace in traditionally disturbed border areas. Under her able administration, the English national life rapidly and steadily progressed.

### **2.4.2 Social Development**

It was an age of great social contentment. The rapid rise of industrial towns gave employment to thousands. Increasing trade and commerce enriched England. The wealthy were taxed to support the poor. This created the atmosphere for literary activities.

### **2.4.3 Religious Tolerance**

It was an era of religious tolerance and peace. Upon her accession she found the whole nation divided against itself. The North was largely Catholic, and the South was strongly Protestant. Scotland followed the Reformation intensely. Ireland followed its old traditional religion. It was Elizabeth who made the Anglican Church a reality. Anglicanism was a kind of compromise between Catholicism and Protestantism. Both the Protestants and the Catholics accepted the Church. All Englishmen were influenced by the Queen's policy of religious tolerance

and were united in a magnificent national enthusiasm. The mind of man, now free from religious fears and persecutions, turned with a great creative impulse to other forms of activity. An atmosphere of all pervading religious peace gave great stimulus to literary activity.

#### **2.4.4 Sense and Feeling of Patriotism**

It was an age of patriotism. Queen Elizabeth loved England ardently and she made her court one of the most brilliant courts in Europe. The splendour of her court dazzled the eyes of the people. Her moderate policies did much to increase her popularity and prestige. Worship of the Virgin Queen became the order of the day. She was Spenser's Gloriana, Raleigh's Cynthia, and Shakespeare's — fair vestal throned by the West. Even the foreigners saw in her — a keen calculating intellect that baffled the ablest statesmen in Europe. Elizabeth inspired all her people with the unbounded patriotism which exults in Shakespeare and with the personal devotion which finds a voice in the *Faerie Queene*. Under her administration the English national life progressed faster not by slow historical and evolutionary process. English literature reached the highest point of literary development during her period.

#### **2.4.5 Discovery, Exploration and Expansion**

This is the most remarkable epoch for the expansion of both mental and geographical horizons. It was an age of great thought and great action. It was an age which appealed to the eye, the imagination and the intellect. New knowledge was pouring in from all directions. The great voyagers like Hawkins, Frobisher, Raleigh and Drake brought home both material and intellectual treasures from the East and the West. The spirit of adventure and exploration fired the imagination of writers. The spirit of action and adventure paved the way for the illustrious development of dramatic literature. Drama progresses in an era of action and not of speculation. It has rightly been called the age of the discovery of the new world and of man.

#### **2.4.6 Influence of Foreign Fashions**

Italy, the home of Renaissance, fascinated the Elizabethans. All liked to visit Italy and stay there for some time. People were not only fond of Italian books and literature, but also of Italian manners and morals. Consequently the literature of England was immensely enriched by imitating Italian classics.

#### **2.4.7 Contradictions and Set of Oppositions**

It was an age of great diversity and contradictions. It was an age of light and darkness, of reason and of unreason, of wisdom and of foolishness, of hope and of despair. The barbarity and backwardness, the ignorance and superstition of the Middle Ages still persisted. Disorder, violence, bloodshed and tavern brawls still prevailed. Highway robberies, as mentioned in Henry IV, Part I, were very common. The barbarity of the age is seen in such brutal sports as bear baiting, cock and bull fighting, to which numerous references are found in the plays of Shakespeare. Despite the advancement of science and learning, people still believed in superstitions, ghosts, witches, fairies, charms and omens of all sorts. In spite of great refinement and learning it was an age of easy morals. People did not care for high principles of morality and justice. Bribery and international delays of justice were common evils. Material advancement was by fair means or foul, the main aim of men in high places. Hardly anyone of the public men of this age had a perfectly open heart and very few had quite clean hands. In

spite of the ignorance and superstition, violence and brutality, easy morals and lax values, Elizabethan Age was an age in which men lived very much, thought intensely and wrote strongly.

The Essay, which Montaigne began in France, was a very popular prose form during this Age. It has been variously defined. An essay is a short composition more or less incomplete. It is like lyric in poetry. It may be written on any subject under the sun. The year 1597, when Bacon published his ten essays, marks the beginning of essay writing in English literature. Sir Francis Bacon— Bacon occupies a dominant place in English prose. He wrote varied type of prose. He is philosophical in *The Advancement of Learning*, historical in the *History of Henry VII*, and speculative in *New Atlantis*. Bacon occupies a permanent place in English prose due to his *Essays*, ten in number, which appeared in 1597. The second edition and the third edition raised the number to 38 and 58 respectively. They are on familiar subjects and they represent the meditations of trained and learned mind. They contain utilitarian wisdom and are written in lucid, clear and aphoristic style. Bacon began the vogue of essay writing in English. His essays introduced a new form of literature into English literature. He was the first English writer who employed a style that is conspicuous for lucidity, clarity, economy, precision, directness, masculinity and mathematical plainness. His images and figures of speech are simple and clearly illustrate the ideas that he wishes to communicate. Ben Jonson— Ben Jonson wrote aphoristic essays which are compiled in *The Timber of Discoveries* which was published posthumously about 1641. His essays are moral and critical. Jonson's style is noticeable for lucidity, terseness and strength. He treats a subject in a simple and plain manner. John Selden John Selden's *Table Talk* abounds in sharp, acid-natured aphorisms, exhibiting tough common sense and little imagination. As a practitioner of aphoristic essay he stands next to Bacon and Ben Jonson. He also wrote *The Titles of Honour* and *The History of Titles*.

## 2.5 ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

The period marks the real beginning of drama. It is the golden age of English drama. The renewed study of classical drama shaped English drama in its formative years. Seneca influenced the development of English tragedy, and Plautus and Terence directed the formation of comedy. The classical drama gave English drama its five acts, its set scenes and many other features. Regular English tragedy, comedy and historical play were successfully written during this period. Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553) is the first English comedy of the classical school, which is divided into acts and scenes. Gamar Gurton's *Needle* (1575), written by an unknown writer is another comedy in the classical style. The first complete tragedy of the Senecan type is *Gorboduc* (1562), which was written by Thomas Norton and Thomas Sackville. The example of *Gorboduc* was followed by Thomas Hughes in *The Misfortunes of Arthus* (1588) and George Gascoigne's *Jocasta* (1566). All these tragedies were influenced by Seneca both in style and treatment of theme. Another dramatic genre, which emerged during this period, is tragic-comedy, which mixes lamentable tragedy with pleasant mirth. Some memorable plays of this type are Whetstone's *Right Excellent and Famous History*, Preston's *A Lamentable Tragedy*, Richard Edward's *Demons and Rithias* and R.B.'s *Apius and Virginia*. Historical plays too were written during this period. Famous among the early historical plays are – *The Troublesome Reign of John, King of England* (1590), *Tragedy of Richard, the Third* (1590 – 94), *The Victories of Henry the Fifth* (1588) and *The Chroniete History of Lear* (1594).

### 2.5.1 The University Wits

Lyly, Peele, Greene, Lodge, Nashe, Kyd and Marlowe are known as the University Wits because they came either from Cambridge or from Oxford. They were romantic by nature and they represented the spirit of Renaissance. The great merit of the University Wits was that they came with their passion and poetry, and their academic training. They paved the way for the successive writers like Shakespeare to express his genius. The contribution of the University Wits to the development of drama needs to be highlighted: I. John Lyly: Lyly wrote eight comedies, of which the best are *Campaspe*, *Endymion*, *Gallathea*, *Midas* and *Love's Metamorphosis*. He wrote for the private theatres. His writing is replete with genuine romantic atmosphere, humour, fancy for romantic comedy, realism, classicism and romanticism. Lyly established prose as an expression of comedy. He deftly used prose to express light feelings of fun and laughter. He also used a suitable blank verse for the comedy. High comedy demands a nice sense of phrase, and Lyly is the first great phrase maker in English. He gave to English comedy a witty phraseology. He also made an important advance at successful comic portrayal. His characters are both types and individuals. Disguise as a devise was later popularized by Shakespeare in his plays especially in his comedies. The device of girl dressed as a boy is traced back to Lyly. The introduction of songs, symbolical of the mood owes its popularity to Lyly. II. George Peele: His work consists of *The Arraignment of Paris*, *The Battle of Alcazar*, *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe* and *The Old Wives' Tales*. He has left behind a pastoral, a romantic tragedy, a chronicle history and a romantic satire. He juxtaposes romance and reality in his plays. As a humorist he influenced Shakespeare. In *The Old Wives' Tales* he for the first time introduced the note of satire in English drama. III. Robert Greene: Greene wrote *The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon and Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. Greene was the first master of the art of plot construction in English drama. In his plays Greene has three distinct words mingled together – the world of magic, the world of aristocratic life, and the world of the country.

There is peculiar romantic humour and rare combination of realism and idealism in his plays. He is the first to draw romantic heroines. His heroines Margaret and Dorothea anticipate Shakespeare's Rosalind and Celia. IV. Thomas Kyd: Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, a Senecan tragedy, is an abiding contribution to the development of English tragedy. It is a well constructed play in which the dramatist has skillfully woven passion, pathos and fear until they reach a climax. Kyd succeeded in producing dialogue that is forceful and capable. He introduced the revenge motif into drama. He, thus, influenced Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*. The device of play within play, which Shakespeare employed in *Hamlet*, is used for the first time in *The Spanish Tragedy*. He also introduced the hesitating type of hero, suffering from bouts of madness, feigned or real, in the character of Hieronimo, who anticipates the character of Hamlet. V. Christopher Marlowe: Marlowe's famous plays *Tamburlaine, the Great, Dr. Faustus, Edward II and The Jew of Malta* give him a place of pre-eminence among the University Wits. Swinburne calls him — the first great poet, the father of English tragedy and the creator of blank verse. He is, indeed, the protagonist of tragic drama in English and the forerunner of Shakespeare and his fellows. Marlowe provided big heroic subjects that appealed to human imagination. He for the first time imparted individuality and dignity to the tragic hero. He also presented the tragic conflict between the good and evil forces in *Dr. Faustus*. He is the first tragic dramatist who used the device of Nemesis in an artistic and psychological manner. Marlowe for the first time made blank verse a powerful vehicle for the expression of varied human emotions. His blank verse, which Ben Jonson calls, — Marlowe's Mighty Line is noticeable for its splendour of diction, picturesqueness, vigour and energy, variety in pace and its responsiveness to the demands of varying emotions. Marlowe has been termed the father of English tragedy. He was in fact the first to feel that

romantic drama was the sole form in harmony with the temperament of the nation. He created authentic romantic tragedy in English and paved the way for the full blossoming of Shakespeare's dramatic genius.

### 2.5.2 Dramatic Activity of Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was not of an age but of all ages. He wrote 37 plays, which may be classified as tragedies, comedies, romances or tragic-comedies and historical plays. The period of Shakespeare's dramatic activity spans twenty four years (1588 – 1612) which is divided into the following four sub-periods: i) The First Period (1588 – 96): It is a period of early experimentation. During this period he wrote *Titus Andronicus*, *First Part of Henry VI*, *Love's Labour Lost*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II* and *Richard III* and *King John*. His early poems *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis* belong to this period. ii) The Second Period (1596 – 1600): Shakespeare wrote his great comedies and chronicled plays during this period. The works of this period are *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *The Twelfth Night*, *Henry IV, Part I & II*, and *Henry V*. iii) The Third Period (1601 – 08): It is a period of great tragedies *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Julius Caesar*, and of somber and better comedies *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure For Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*. iv) The Fourth Period (1608 – 1613) : Shakespeare's last period begins with *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Timon of Athens*, *Henry VII* and *Pericles*. What distinguishes Shakespeare's last period is the reawakening of his first love romance in *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*. Shakespearean Comedy Shakespeare brought perfection to the writing of romantic comedy. His comedies are classified into the following three categories. i) The Early Comedies: They are *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labour Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. The plays show signs of immaturity. The plots are less original, the characters are less finished and the style is also vigorous. The humour lacks the wide human sympathy of his mature comedies. ii) The Mature Comedies: Shakespeare's comic genius finds expression in *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*. These plays are full of love and romance, vigour and vitality, versatility of humour, humanity and well-portrayed characters. iii) The Somber Comedies: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida* belong to the period of great tragedies. These comedies have a serious and somber time. Characteristics of Shakespearean Comedy: Shakespearean comedy is pre-eminently romantic. His predecessors – Llyl, Greene and Peele influenced his art of writing comedy. The main characteristics of Shakespearean comedy are given below: i) Romance and Realism: Shakespearean comedy is romantic. The classical unities of time, place and action are not observed in it.

The settings are all imaginative. The action takes place in some remote far off place, and not in familiar surroundings. According to Raleigh, Shakespearean comedy is a — rainbow world of love in idleness. What distinguishes Shakespearean comedy is the fine and artistic blend of romance and realism. All his comedies are related to real life. There are contemporary figures and contemporary fashions in *Love's Labour Lost*. Bottom and his companions exist with fairies; Sir Toly Belch and Sir Andrew are companions of Viola and Olivia. Shakespeare's characters are real. His dramatic personages are ordinary human beings and incidents are such as occurring in every day life. The romantic main plot and the realistic sub plot are harmoniously put together in *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Charlton writes: — Shakespearean comedies are not satiric; they are poetic. They are not conservative, they are creative. ii) Love: Shakespearean comedy is essentially a comedy of love, which ends with the ringing of the marriage bells. Wooing distinguishes it from

classical comedy. The entire atmosphere is surcharged with love. Not only the hero and the heroine are in love but all are in love. The Shakespearean comedy ends not with the celebration of one marriage but with many marriages. Shakespeare has vividly exhibited carried manifestations of love in his comedies. In *As You Like It*, he has described the love at first sight between Orlando and Rosalind, thoughtful love between Celia and Oliver, pastoral love between Phebo and Silvius. The men and women who love truly have become superb representations of human nature. True love is spiritual. It is a union of minds and hearts. iii) Shakespeare's Heroines: Heroines in Shakespearean comedy play leading roles and surpass their male counterparts.

Ruskin's remark that — Shakespeare has only heroines and no heroes is certainly true to his comedies. Shakespeare's heroines Rosalind Portia, Viola, Beatrice etc. are endowed with wit, common sense, human feelings and noble qualities of head and heart. They are wise, winning and charming. They have beautiful feelings, thoughts and emotions. They radiate joy, peace and spirit of harmony. Male characters in Shakespearean comedy only play a second fiddle. His heroines know how to fulfil their desires and resolve crisis. All heroines in Shakespearean comedy are guided by infinitive insight. iv) Disguise: The use of dramatic device of disguise is common to all the comedies of Shakespeare. In *The Merchant of Venice* Jessica disguises herself in — the lovely garnish of a boy, and Portia and Nerissa likewise don masculine attire. This devise is also employed for instance, in *As You Like It* Rosalind and Celia become Ganymede and Aliena, and in *All's Well That Ends Well*. Helena passes off in bed as Diana. v) Humour: Humour is the soul of Shakespearean comedy. It arouses thoughtful laughter. It is full of humane and genial laughter. Shakespeare's wit lacks malice and his mockery has no bite. Brilliant wit mingles with kindly mirth and genial humour. Shakespeare's humour is many sided. He can arouse laughter from the mumblings of a drunkard and the intelligent repartees of leading women. The alert wit and bright good sense of Rosalind arouse exquisite pleasure. Her all pervasive spirit of mirth gains much from the presence of the Fool. Bottom and his companions, Feste, Sir Andrew, Sir Toby, Touchstone, Dogberry, Verges and Falstaff are Shakespeare's memorable fools, who not only create humour and laughter, but they also interlink the main and the subplots, and provide a running commentary on character and action. Falstaff is a superb comic character of Shakespeare. vi) Admixture of Tragic and Comic Elements: Shakespearean comedy differs from the classical comedy in the sense that in it the comic and the tragic elements are commingled. However, the tragic note does not dominate and the play ends on a note of joy. For example, *The Merchant of Venice* is pervaded by the tragic element from the signing of the bond to the end of the trial scene. Ultimately the play ends happily, as Antonio, whose life has been threatened by Shylock, feels happy at heart as his life has been saved. vii) Music and Song: Since music is the food of love. Shakespearean comedy is abundantly full of song and music. *The Twelfth Night* opens with a note of music which strikes the keynote of the play. Several romantic songs are scattered all over *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, *As You Like It* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. viii) The Role of Fortune: — The course of true love never runs smooth. Lovers have to face the hostilities of parents, friends or relatives; and consequently, there are much tears and sighs, before the final union takes place. But all these difficulties and complications are unexpectedly removed by the benign power of Fortune. Shakespearean comedy radiates the spirit of humanity and a broad vision of life. It is large-hearted in the conception, sympathetic in its tone and humanitarian in its idealism. Shakespeare created his own hallmark on the comedies in English drama. Shakespearean Tragedy, Shakespearean comedy is romantic and not classical. It observes the fundamental requirements of tragedy expounded by Aristotle in *The Poetics*.

The main characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy are as follows: i) Tragic Hero: Shakespearean tragedy is pre-eminently the story of one person, the hero or the protagonist. It is, indeed, a tale of suffering and calamity

resulting in the death of the hero. It is concerned always with persons of high degree, often with Kings or princes or with leaders in the state like Coriolanus, Brutus and Antony. Shakespeare's tragic heroes are not only great men, they also suffer greatly, their calamity and suffering are exceptional. The sufferings and calamities of an ordinary man are not worthy of note, as they affect his own life. The story of the prince like Hamlet, or the King like Lear, or the generals like Macbeth or Othello has a greatness and dignity of its own. His fate affects the fate of a whole nation or empire. When he falls from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast of the powerlessness of man. His fall creates cathartic effects on the audience. Shakespeare's tragic hero is endowed with noble qualities of head and heart. He is built on a grand scale. For instance, Macbeth has — vaulting ambition, Hamlet noble inaction, Othello credulity and rashness in action, and Lear the folly and incapacity to judge human character. Owing to this — fatal flaw the hero falls from a state of prosperity and greatness into adversity and unhappiness, and ultimately dies. ii) Tragic Waste: In Shakespearean tragedy we find the element of tragic waste. All exceptional qualities of the protagonist are wasted. At the end of the tragedy, the Evil does not triumph. It is expelled but at the cost of much that is good and admirable. The fall of Macbeth does not only mean the death of evil in him, but also the waste of much that is essentially good and noble. In *Hamlet* and *King Lear* the good is also destroyed along with the evil. There is no tragedy in the expulsion of evil, the tragedy is that it involves the waste of good. iii) Fate and Character: The actions of the protagonist are of great importance as they lead to his death. What we do feel strongly as the tragedy advances to its close is that the calamities and catastrophe follow inevitably from the deeds of man, and that the main source of these deeds is character. But to call Shakespearean tragedy the story of human character is not the entire truth. Shakespeare's tragedies, as Nicoll points out are — tragedies of character and destiny.

### CYP - Check Your Progress

1. The English Renaissance was a cultural and artistic movement that began in the late \_\_\_\_ century.
2. The group of playwrights known as the "University Wits" included writers like Christopher Marlowe and \_\_\_\_ Nashe.
3. William Shakespeare wrote during the reigns of Queen Elizabeth I and King \_\_\_\_ I.
4. The Jacobean age is often marked by a shift towards darker and more \_\_\_\_ themes in drama.

### Answers

1. 16th
2. Thomas
3. James
4. violent / tragic

**Shakespeare's Historical Plays:** The historical plays were immensely popular in Elizabethan England. They reflected the spirit of the age. The people were intensely patriotic and were very proud of the achievements of their ancestors or the foreign fields. The newly awakened spirit of patriotism and nationalism enabled the people to take keen interest in the records of bygone struggle against foreign invasion and civil disunion. Shakespeare's historical plays span a period of 350 years of English history, from 1200 to 1550. His famous historical plays are *Henry VI, Parts I, II & III, Richard II, Richard III, King John, Henry IV, Parts I & II and Henry V*. Shakespeare's

historical plays are suffused with the spirit of patriotism. They show his love for authority and discipline. He considers law and authority necessary for civilized life, he fears disorder for it leads to chaos. Shakespeare's last plays known as dramatic romances form a class apart. His last four plays – *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* are neither comedies nor tragedies. All of them end happily but all fetch happiness to shore out of shipwreck and suffering. These last plays have a lot in common. It is appropriate to call them dramatic romances or tragic comedies. They contain incidents which are undoubtedly tragic but they end happily.

### 2.5.3. Other Playwrights

#### I. Ben Jonson and the Comedy of Humours

Ben Jonson was a classicist in Elizabethan England, which was romantic both in character and temper. Jonson was the first great neo-classic. Like Donne, he revolted against the artistic principles of his contemporaries, and he sought a measure for the uncontrolled, romantic exuberance of Elizabethan literature in the classical literature. In all branches of his writings, he is the conscious artist and reformer. To him the chief function of literature was to instruct and educate the audience and readers. All plays of Ben Jonson are neo-classic in spirit. They aim at reforming and instructing society and individuals. He is primarily a writer of the comedies of humour. His famous comedies are *The Case is Altered*, *Every Man in His Humour*, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, *Epicoene or The Silent Woman*, *The Alchemist*, *The Bartholomew Fair*, *The Devil is an Ass*, *The Light Heart*, *Humour Reconciled and A Tale of A Tub*. Ben Jonson also wrote two tragedies *Sejanus* and *Cataline*. Jonson propounded the theory of the comedy of humours. To him the purpose of the comedy is corrective and cathartic. The corrective and moral tone necessitated the presence of satire in his comedies.

The audience must laugh to some end and the play must deal with some folly and cure it by its ridiculous and comic presentation. To him a comedy was a — comical satire. He derived the idea of humours from medieval medical science. In the older physiology the four major humours corresponding with the four elements and possessing the qualities of moisture, dryness, heat and cold. These elements, in different combinations, formed in each body and declare his character. Variations in the relative strength of these humours showed the individual differences. The disturbance of the natural balance is dangerous and it results in different ailments of body. In order to restore the natural balance of the body many purgings, bleedings and other painful reductions were affected in medieval times. Ben Jonson used this term to include vices as well as follies, cruelty as well as jealousy. It was also used in the sense of mere caprice or trick of manner or peculiarity of chess. It also included vanity and affectation.

#### II. John Webster and the Revenge Tragedy

Webster's two tragedies *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* have earned for him an outstanding place in British drama. In subtlety of thought and reality of tragic passion he is second to Shakespeare. Both his tragedies are based on the revenge motif. In them he emerges as a painstaking artist who had refined the material and motives of the earlier tragedies of blood and gloom. He had converted melodrama into tragedy. He imparted moral vision, psychological subtlety and emotional depth to the tragedy of revenge and horror.

#### III. Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher

Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher combined to produce a great number of plays. Their typical comedies

are *A King and No King*, *The Knight of Burning Pestle* and *The Scornful Lady*. They wrote two tragedies – *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster*.

#### **IV. George Chapman**

George Chapman was a classicist like Jonson. His two comedies *All Fools' Day* and *Eastward Ho* are remarkable for Jonsonian humour. His historical plays dealing with nearly contemporary history are *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria*, *Charles, Duke of Byron* and *The Tragedy of Chabot*. V. Thomas Middleton: Thomas Middleton was one of the most original dramatists of his time. His light farcical comedies like *A Mad World My Masters* and *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* are remarkable for vivacity. His other memorable plays are *Women Beware Women*, *Changeling* and *The Witch*. *The Spanish Gypsy* is a romantic comedy which reminds us of *As You Like It*.

#### **2.6 LET US SUM UP**

In this unit we have studied the importance of English Renaissance which exercised a great impact on the development of English literature. We have taken an outline of the socio-political milieu of the Elizabethan and Jacobean age including the literary features of these ages. Further we studied different kinds of poetry like love poetry, patriotic poetry, philosophic poetry and satirical poetry to name few. You have also been introduced with the important poets of the age. The unit continues with the peculiarities of the Elizabethan prose and its various forms: essay, character writing, religious writing and prose romances. This prose writing projected the novel writing in the later ages. The final part of the unit focuses on the dramatic art developed by the Elizabethan playwrights. It includes the University Wits and their contributions to drama, and as to how they pave the way for Shakespeare. The unit extensively studies the dramatic activities of William Shakespeare and characteristics of his different kinds of drama like comedy, tragedy and historical plays.

#### **2.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. What are the characteristics of Elizabethan Age?
2. How does poetry reflect the spirit of Age in Elizabethan England? Discuss.
3. Write an account of the evolution of English poetry during the Age of Shakespeare.
4. What roles do Wyatt and Surrey play in the development of English poetry? Describe.
5. Give an account of Songs and Lyrics in Elizabethan Poetry.
6. Write a note on Elizabethan sonnets and sonneteers.
8. Discuss briefly the development of Elizabethan prose.
11. Discuss the development of drama during the Elizabethan Age.
12. Discuss the characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy.
13. What are the main characteristics of Shakespearean comedy? Discuss.
14. Write a note on the contemporary playwrights of Shakespeare and their contribution to development of drama.

15. Write Short Notes on the following:

- i. Character Writers in Elizabethan Period
- ii. Prose Romances
- iii. Love and Patriotic Poetry
- iv. Elizabethan Poets.
- v. Contemporary playwrights of Shakespeare
- vi. University Wits.

## 2.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Who is often regarded as the most famous playwright of Elizabethan drama?
  - A) Christopher Marlowe
  - B) Ben Jonson
  - C) William Shakespeare
  - D) Thomas Kyd
2. What type of theaters were commonly used for Elizabethan drama performances?
  - A) Indoor theaters
  - B) Circular theaters
  - C) Open-air amphitheaters
  - D) Small private theaters
3. Which Elizabethan playwright is known for his tragic works like *Doctor Faustus* and *Tamburlaine*?
  - A) Ben Jonson
  - B) Christopher Marlowe
  - C) Thomas Kyd
  - D) John Webster
4. The term “blank verse” in Elizabethan drama refers to:
  - A) Unrhymed lines of iambic pentameter
  - B) Rhymed couplets
  - C) Free verse with no specific meter
  - D) Sonnets written within plays
5. What was the name of the acting company that Shakespeare was associated with during his career?
  - A) The King’s Men
  - B) The Lord’s Men

- C) The Queen's Men
- D) The Globe Players

6. Which famous tragedy by Shakespeare features the character Othello?

- A) Macbeth
- B) Hamlet
- C) Othello
- D) Romeo and Juliet

7. Who was the monarch of England during most of the Elizabethan era?

- A) Queen Mary I
- B) King James I
- C) Queen Elizabeth I
- D) King Charles I

8. In Elizabethan drama, what was a “groundling”?

- A) A wealthy theatergoer who sat in the best seats
- B) An actor who performed on the ground level of the stage
- C) An audience member who stood in the pit in front of the stage
- D) A theater critic of the time

9. Which Elizabethan playwright is known for his comedies, including “The Alchemist” and “Volpone”?

- A) Christopher Marlowe
- B) Thomas Middleton
- C) Ben Jonson
- D) Thomas Kyd

10. What was the name of the famous open-air theater associated with many Elizabethan productions, including Shakespeare's plays?

- A) The Rose Theatre
- B) The Blackfriars Theatre
- C) The Whitehall Palace Theatre
- D) The Globe Theatre

**Answers:** 1C, 2C, 3B, 4A, 5A, 6C, 7C, 8C, 9C, 10D.

## 2.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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**LITERARY AND INTELLECTUAL  
BACKGROUND OF DRAMA UPTO THE JACOBEAN PERIOD**

## **THRESHOLD FOR SHAKESPEAREAN THEATRE**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 3.3 The Theatre and the Stagecrafts of the Elizabethan Era
- 3.4 The Elizabethan Theatre
- 3.5 The Shakespearean Theatre
- 3.6 Drama during the Reign of James I
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 Examination Oriented Question
- 3.9 Multiple Choice Questions
- 3.10 Suggested Readings

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This lesson introduces Elizabethan theatre with special reference to Shakespearean theatre.

#### **3.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

##### **Objectives**

Learners will:

1. Identify key features of Elizabethan stagecraft, theatre architecture, and performance practices.
2. Understand the role of public and private theatres in the Elizabethan and early Jacobean periods.
3. Recognize the social and cultural significance of theatre during this era.

##### **Outcomes**

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the structure and functions of Elizabethan playhouses like The Globe and The Swan.
2. Explain the conventions of stagecraft, including costumes, props, and actor-audience dynamics.
3. Analyze how political and cultural conditions influenced theatrical development.

### **3.3 THE THEATRE AND THE STAGE CRAFTS OF THE ELIZABETHAN ERA**

In England the influence of the Italian Renaissance was weaker, but the theatre of the Elizabethan Age was all the stronger for it. Apart from the rediscovery of classical culture, the 16th century in England was a time for developing a new sense of national identity, necessitated by the establishment of a national church. Furthermore, because the English were more suspicious of Rome and the Latin tradition, there was less imitation of classical dramatic forms and an almost complete disregard for the rules that bound the theatre in France and Italy. England built on its own foundations by adapting the strong native tradition of medieval religious drama to serve a more secular purpose. When some of the continental innovations were blended with this cruder indigenous strain, a rich synthesis was produced. Consequently, the theatre that emerged was resonant, varied, and in touch with all segments of society. It included the high seriousness of morality plays, the sweep of chronicle histories, the fantasy of romantic comedies, and the irreverent fun of the interludes. At the same time, the theatre had to contend with severe restrictions. The suppression of the festival of Corpus Christi in 1548 as a means of reinforcing the Protestant Church marked the rapid decline of morality plays and mystery cycles. Their forced descent into satirical propaganda mocking the Catholic faith polarized the audience and led to riots. By 1590, playwrights were prohibited from dramatizing religious issues and they had to resort and confine to history, mythology, allegory, or allusion in order to say anything about contemporary society. Violations and flouting these restrictions meant imprisonment. Nevertheless, playwrights managed to argue highly explosive political topics.

In Shakespeare's histories, for instance, the subject of kingship is thoroughly examined in all its implications: both the rightful but incompetent sovereign and the usurping but strong monarch are scrutinized. It was the most daring undertaking during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). The situation for actors was not helped by the hostile attitude of the City of London authorities. The authorities regarded theatre as an immoral pastime to be discouraged rather than tolerated. Professional companies, however, were invited to perform at court from the beginning of the 16th century and public performances took place wherever a suitable space could be found—in large rooms of inns, in halls, or in quiet innyards enclosed on all sides with a temporary platform stage. Around the stage, the audience could gather while others looked out from the windows above. But such makeshift conditions only retarded the development of the drama and kept it on an amateurish level.

### **3.4 THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE**

These conditions were considerably improved during Elizabeth's reign by the legitimizing in 1574 of regular weekday performances and the building of the first playhouse in 1576 by James Burbage. The new theatre called simply the Theatre was erected in London immediately outside the City boundary. Other theatres followed, including The Curtain, The Rose, The Swan, and The Globe, where most of Shakespeare's plays were first staged. Just as the Spanish playhouse reproduced the features of the corrale it had grown out of, so the Elizabethan playhouse followed the pattern of the improvised innyard theatre. It was an enclosed circular structure containing two or three galleries with benches or stools and had an unroofed space in the middle where spectators could stand on three sides of the raised platform stage. Behind the stage was a wall with curtained doors and, above this was actors' and musicians' gallery. Large number of people could be accommodated, and the price was kept low at between one penny and sixpence. This type of stage allowed for fluid movement and considerable intimacy between actors and audience, while its lack of scenery placed the emphasis firmly on the actor interpreting the playwright's words. Such sheer simplicity presented a superb challenge for the writer: the quality of both language and acting had to be good enough to hold the attention of the spectators and make them use their

imaginaries. This challenge was quickly taken up by a generation of playwrights who could carry forward the established dramatic forms and test the possibilities of the new stage. Christopher Marlowe was the major innovator who developed a vigorous style of tragedy that was refined by his contemporary. William Shakespeare began writing for the theatre about 1590. At this time, professional companies operated under the patronage of a member of the nobility. In Shakespeare's company, the Chamberlain's Men, the actors owned their playhouse, prompt books, costumes, and properties, and they shared in the profits. Other companies paid rent to the patron and received salaries from him. There were very few rehearsals for a new play, and because the texts were not immediately printed (to avoid pirating by rival companies) each actor was usually given only his own lines, with the relevant cues, in manuscript form. No women appeared on the Elizabethan stage. The female roles were taken either by boy actors or, in the case of older women, by adult male comedians. As in Italy, all the actors had to be able to sing and dance and often to make their own music. The great actors of the day were Richard Burbage, who worked in Shakespeare's company, and Edward Alleyn, who was mainly associated with Ben Jonson.

In spite of the fact that theatres like the Globe played to a cross section of London's populace, audiences seem to have been attentive and well behaved. An alternative to the outdoor public playhouse was the private indoor theatre. The first of these was an abandoned monastery near St. Paul's Cathedral. It was converted in 1576 by Richard Farrant and renamed the Blackfriars Theatre. Others included The Cockpit, The Salisbury Court, and the Whitefriars. Initially these theatres were closer to the Spanish model, with the bare stage across one end, an inner stage at the back, benches in front for the audience, and galleries all around. Later, they made use of more elaborate scenery and featured the Italian-style proscenium arch. Because of the reduced size of the audience, higher prices had to be charged, which excluded all except the wealthier and learned segment of the public. This in turn affected the style of writing. These private theatres were mostly used by boy companies that presented a more refined and artificial type of drama. One of their chief dramatists was John Lly, though Ben Jonson wrote many of his plays for them. Growing rivalry between the boy and adult companies, exacerbated by hostility from the increasingly powerful Puritan movement, resulted in James I imposing even tighter controls and exercising heavy censorship on the theatre when he came to the throne in 1603.

#### **CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks**

1. The \_\_\_ Theatre, associated with Shakespeare, was one of the most famous playhouses of the Elizabethan era.
2. Elizabethan theatres were usually \_\_\_-air and had a thrust stage.
3. Male actors often played \_\_\_ roles in Elizabethan drama.
4. The reign of King \_\_\_ I marked a continuation of theatrical culture with growing court patronage.

#### **Answers**

1. Globe
2. open
3. female
4. James

### **3.5 THE SHAKESPEAREAN THEATRE**

Before Shakespeare's time and during his boyhood, troupes of actors performed wherever they could in halls, courts, courtyards, and any other open spaces available. However, in 1574, when Shakespeare was ten

years old, the Common Council passed a law requiring plays and theatres in London to be licensed. In 1576, actor and future Lord Chamberlain's Man, James Burbage, built the first permanent theater, called "The Theatre", outside London city walls. After this many more theatres were established, including the Globe Theatre. Elizabethan theatres were generally built after the design of the original Theatre. Built of wood, these theatres comprised three tiers of seats in a circular shape, with a stage area on one side of the circle.

The audience's seats and part of the stage were roofed, but much of the main stage and the area in front of the stage in the center of the circle were open to the elements. About 1,500 audience members could pay extra money to sit in the covered seating areas, while about 800 "groundlings" paid less money to stand in this open area before the stage. The stage itself was divided into three levels: a main stage area with doors at the rear and a curtained area in the back for "discovery scenes"; an upper, canopied area called "heaven" for balcony scenes; and an area under the stage called "hell," accessed by a trap door in the stage. There were dressing rooms located behind the stage, but no curtain in the front of the stage, which meant that scenes had to flow into each other, and "dead bodies" had to be dragged off. Performances took place during the day, using natural light from the open center of the theater. Since there could be no dramatic lighting and there was very little scenery or props, audiences relied on the actors' lines and stage directions to supply the time of day and year, the weather, location, and mood of the scenes. Shakespeare's plays masterfully supply this information. For example, in *Hamlet* the audience learns within the first twenty lines of dialogue where the scene takes place ("Have you had quiet guard?"), what time of day it is ("Tis now strook twelf"), what the weather is like ("Tis bitter cold"), and what mood the characters are in ("and I am sick at heart"). One important difference between plays written in Shakespeare's time and those written today is that Elizabethan plays were published after their performances, sometimes even after their authors' deaths. Those plays were in many ways a record of what happened on stage during these performances rather than directions for what should happen. Actors were allowed to suggest changes to scenes and dialogue and had much more freedom with their parts than actors today. Shakespeare's plays are no exception. In *Hamlet*, for instance, much of the plot revolves around the fact that Hamlet writes his own scene to be added to a play in order to ensnare his murderous father. Shakespeare's plays were published in various forms and with a wide variety of accuracy during his time. The discrepancies between versions of his plays from one publication to the next make it difficult for editors to put together authoritative editions of his works. Plays could be published in large anthologies called Folios (the First Folio of Shakespeare's plays contains 36 plays) or smaller Quartos. Folios were so named because of the way their paper was folded in half to make chunks of two pages each which were sewn together to make a large volume. Quartos were smaller, cheaper books containing only one play. Their paper was folded twice, making four pages. In general, the First Folio is of better quality than the quartos. Therefore, plays that are printed in the First Folio are much easier for editors to compile.

Although Shakespeare's language and classical references seem archaic to some modern readers, they were commonplace to his audiences. His viewers came from all classes, and his plays appealed to all kinds of sensibilities, from "highbrow" accounts of kings and queens of old to the "lowbrow" blunderings of clowns and servants. Even his most tragic plays include clown characters for comic relief and to comment on the events of the play. Audiences would have been familiar with his numerous references to classical mythology and literature, since these stories were staples of the Elizabethan knowledge base. While Shakespeare's plays appealed to all levels of society and included familiar story lines and themes. They also expanded his audiences' vocabularies. Many phrases and words that we use today, like "amazement," "in my mind's eye," and "the milk of human kindness" have been coined by Shakespeare. His plays contain a greater variety and number of words than almost any other work in the English language. This indicates that he was quick to innovate. He had a huge vocabulary, and was interested in using new phrases and words.

### **3.6 DRAMA DURING THE REIGN OF JAMES I**

Although the Italian influence gradually became stronger in the early part of the 17th century, the English theatre was by then established and confident enough to take over foreign ideas without losing any of its individuality. Jonson became increasingly preoccupied with the dramatic unities, while other writers of the Jacobean period such as John Webster, Thomas Middleton, and John Ford favoured a more definite separation of comedy and tragedy than had been the case in Elizabethan drama. They were given to sensationalism in their revenge plays, finding inspiration in the darker moods of Seneca and often setting them in Italy. Meanwhile, at court the pastoral was finding new popularity, partly because it provided opportunities for spectacular scenery, and with it came the revival of the masque. The masque is a sumptuous allegorical entertainment combining poetry, music, dance, scenery, and extravagant costumes. As court poet, Ben Jonson collaborated with the architect and designer Inigo Jones to produce some of the finest examples of the masque. Having spent a few years in Italy, Jones was greatly influenced by the Italian painted scenery and its use of machinery. On his return to England he did much to bring scenic design up to date and introduced many innovations. Members of the court had thorough training in dancing, fencing, singing, instrumental music, and courtly ceremonial. They were therefore well prepared to perform in the masques, even to take solo parts and to appear in the chorus. Masques became even more elaborate under Charles I. In 1634 Jonson, however, angrily withdrew his contribution when he saw that the visual elements were completely overtaking the dramatic content. When the Civil War broke out in 1642, the Puritans closed all the theatres and forbade dramatic performances of any kind. This created an almost complete break in the acting tradition for 18 years until the Restoration of Charles II. Thereafter the theatre flourished once again though on quite different lines.

### **3.7 LET US SUM UP**

The unit covers the background information about the Elizabethan theatres including the theatres during the reigns of James I. The condition of theatres before and after Shakespeare has been discussed. It also speaks of the stages, scripts, sources of the plays and the audience.

### **3.8 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTION**

1. Give an account of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatres.

### **3.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. In which London neighborhood was the Globe Theatre located during Shakespeare's time?
  - A) Westminster
  - B) Southwark
  - C) Covent Garden
  - D) Mayfair
2. What was the primary material used to construct the Globe Theatre?
  - A) Stone
  - B) Wood

- C) Brick
- D) Steel

3. Who was the famous actor and shareholder of the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men) who performed in many of Shakespeare's plays?

- A) Richard Burbage
- B) Christopher Marlowe
- C) Ben Jonson
- D) Thomas Kyd

4. What was the name of the theater company Shakespeare was associated with for most of his career?

- A) The Lord's Men
- B) The King's Men
- C) The Globe Players
- D) The Royal Troupe

5. What was the purpose of the "tiring house" in a Shakespearean theater?

- A) A place for actors to rest during performances
- B) A costume storage area and backstage space
- C) The ticket booth where patrons purchased tickets
- D) The area where musicians played live music

6. In Shakespearean times, who played female roles on the stage?

- A) Women
- B) Boys or young men
- C) Elderly men
- D) Female impersonators

7. What was the "groundling" area in the Globe Theatre?

- A) The upper gallery for nobility
- B) The area for musicians and sound effects
- C) The courtyard where standing patrons watched the performance
- D) The area where actors rested between scenes

8. During performances, what signaled the beginning of a play at the Globe Theatre?

- A trumpet fanfare
- The ringing of a bell
- The lighting of a torch
- The raising of a flag

9. What was the name of Shakespeare's famous indoor theater, located in Blackfriars?

- The Rose Theatre
- The Globe Theatre
- The Whitehall Palace Theatre
- The Blackfriars Theatre

10. Which of Shakespeare's plays features the line, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players"?

- Macbeth
- Romeo and Juliet
- As You Like It
- Othello

**Answers:** 1B, 2B, 3A, 4B, 5B, 6B, 7C, 8B, 9D, 10C.

### 3.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## **JACOBEAN DRAMA**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 4.3 Historical Background
- 4.4 National Life from 1603-1660
- 4.5 Ben Jonson
- 4.6 Other Dramatists
- 4.7 Reasons for decadence in Jacobean Drama
- 4.8 Let's Sum up
- 4.9 Self-Assessment Questions
- 4.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 4.11 Suggested Readings

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The Jacobean era was the period in English and Scottish history that coincides with the reign of James VI of Scotland who also inherited the crown of England in 1603 as James I. The Jacobean era succeeds the Elizabethan era and precedes the Caroline era. The term “Jacobean” is often used for the distinctive styles of Jacobean architecture, visual arts, decorative arts, and literature which characterized that period.

#### **4.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

##### **Objectives**

Learners will:

1. Understand the historical and political backdrop of the Jacobean age.
2. Identify the major contributions of Ben Jonson to Jacobean drama.
3. Explore reasons for the perceived decline or decadence in drama during this period.

## Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Summarize key historical events and cultural shifts under James I's reign.
2. Evaluate Ben Jonson's influence through his satirical and classical approach to drama.
3. Explain factors leading to the decline of Jacobean theatre, including censorship, moral shifts, and audience changes.

### 4.3 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Around the turn of sixteenth century, Shakespeare's drama fell into neglect, and as he had eclipsed Llyl, and other, he got eclipsed by Ben Johnson and his contemporaries. In other words, the Elizabethan drama of Shakespeare gave way to the Jacobean drama of Johnson. Beside Johnson, John Marston (1575-1634), Thomas Middleton (1570-1627), George Chapman (1559-1634), Francis Beaumont (1584-1616), John Fletcher (1579-1625) and John Webster, were the other dramatists of the age. As tragedy during the age went back to Seneca, so went comedy back to the Plautus.

The contemporaries of Shakespeare like, Beaumont and Fletcher, forgetting the deep meaning of life, strove for effect by increasing the sensationalism of their plays; Webster revelled in tragedies of blood and thunder; Massinger and Ford made another step downward, producing evil and licentious scenes for their own sake, making characters and situations more immoral till, notwithstanding these dramatists' ability, the stage had become insincere, frivolous and bad. James Shirley was, in Lamb's phrase, "the last of a great race" after which the decline of the drama was apparent.

With the exception of Ben Jonson, all these dramatists neglected the simple fact that man in his deepest nature is a moral being, and that only a play which satisfies the whole nature of man by showing the triumph of the moral law can over wholly satisfy an audience or a people.

Jacobean drama (the drama of the age of James I 1603-25) was a decadent form of the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. It was inevitable, says, Long, that drama should decline after Shakespeare, for the simple reason that there was no other great enough to fill his place. The dramatists of the Jacobean age can be divided into two classes-

(i) The dramatists of the old school-Dekker Heywood, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, and (ii) The satiric group-Chapman, Jonson, Marston, Middleton, and Tourneur.

Thomas Dekker is known for *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, a humorous comedy of plane working people. Thomas Heywood produced a large number of plays but only a few are known now. The best are *A Woman Killed With Kindness*, *The Four Maid Of The West*, a melodrama of the popular kind. John Webster is ranked with Shakespeare for his power of expression. He was largely attracted by the blood and thunder plays began by Marlowe. His two best known plays are *The White Devil* and *The Dutchess of Malfi*. The latter made him stand with the greatest masters of English tragedy. Beaumont and Fletcher were good friends, living and working together. The former supplied the judgement and solid work of the play, while Fletcher furnished the sentiment and the lyric poetry. Of their joint plays the two best known are *Philaster* and *The Maid's Tragedy*.

Jonson is known for his “comedy of humours” and his comedies are intensely realistic. *Everyman In His Humour* aims at ridiculing (characteristic whim) of the city. His three best known comedies are *Volpone or The Fox, The Alchemist, And Epicene Or The Silent Woman*. Jonson also wrote two great tragedies *Sajanus* and *Catiline* on classical lines. Middleton is known for his two plays *Changeling* and *Women Beware Women*. In poetry and diction they rank with Shakespeare’s plays but hurt the moral sense. Chapman was a reflective and didactic poet rather than a dramatist. He completed Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* and collaborated with Jonson and Marston in *Edward Ho!*. Marston’s plays are bitter and misanthropic in expression. Tourneur wrote highly sensational tragedies dealing with the life of Italy. His two plays *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and *The Atheist’s Tragedy* are gloomy melodramas. Massinger, Ford and Shirley marked the end of Elizabethans drama. Their works show a deliberate turning away from the light ideas of their own art. In fact, after Shakespeare’s death the theatres were nothing but the breeders of lies and immortality.

Being academic and learned, Jonson, along with his contemporaries, made scathing attack on popular taste, upon the romantic conventions, and upon the licentious clown, and fashioned a learned comedy with satirical thrust and classical plotting. Adhering to the Horatian view, the Jacobean comedy satirized contemporary behaviours and represented vice. Thus, whereas for Elizabethans imitations were an act of creation and interpretations, for the Jacobeans it became an act of reproduction, the domestic comedy replaced the romantic comedy. Johnson’s *Volpone, Or The Fox* (1605); Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (1600) and *The Honest Whore* (1604); Heywood’s *A Woman Willed With Kindness* (1603); Marston’s *The Malcontent* (1604); Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl* (1611); Chapman’s *May-Day* (1611) and; Fletcher’s *The Scornful Lady* (1610), all reveal the domestic themes with the immediate desire of reforming the morals and manners of the middle classes.

#### 4.4 NATIONAL LIFE FROM 1603-1660

We have already observed that, as Shakespeare’s career suggests, there was no abrupt change in either life or literature at the death of Queen Elizabeth in 1603; and in fact the Elizabethan period of literature is often made to include the reign of James I, 1603-1625 (the Jacobean period, or even, especially in the case of the drama, that of Charles I, 1625-1649 (the Caroline period).

Certainly, the drama of all three reigns forms a continuously developing whole, and, should be discussed as such. None the less the spirit of the first half of the seventeenth century came gradually to be widely different from that of the preceding fifty years, and before going on to Shakespeare’s successors we must stop to indicate briefly wherein the difference consists and for this purpose to speak of the determining events of the period. Before the end of Elizabeth’s reign, indeed, there had been a perceptible change; as the queen grew old and morose the national life seemed also to lose its youth and freshness.

Her successor and distant cousin, James of Scotland (James I of England), was a bigoted pedant, and under his rule the perennial court corruption reached its peak. The national Church, instead of protesting, steadily identified itself more closely with the Court party, and its ruling officials, on the whole, grew more and more worldly and intolerant. Little by little the nation found itself divided into two great factions; on the one hand the Cavaliers, the party of the Court, the nobles, and the Church, who continued to be largely dominated by the Renaissance zest for beauty and, especially, pleasure; and on the other hand the Puritans, comprising the bulk of the middle classes, controlled by the religious principles of the Reformation, often, in their opposition to Cavalier frivolity, stern and narrow, and more and more inclined to separate themselves from the English Church in denominations of their own. The breach steadily widened until in 1642, under the arbitrary rule of Charles I, the

Civil War broke out. In three years the Puritan Parliament was victorious, and in 1649 the extreme minority of the Puritans, supported by the army, took the unprecedented step of putting King Charles to death, and declared England a Commonwealth. But in four years more the Parliamentary government, bigoted and inefficient, made itself impossible, and then for five years, until his death, Oliver Cromwell strongly ruled England as Protector. Another year and a half of chaos confirmed the nation in a natural reaction, and in 1660 the unworthy Stuart race was restored in the person of the base and frivolous Charles II. The general influence of the forces which produced these events shows clearly in the changing tone of the drama, the work of those dramatists who were Shakespeare's later contemporaries and successors.

The reason why most of the dramatists, with the exception of Johnson, are forgotten today is that their plays are dated, being period pieces. With its greater reliance on prose rather than poetry, with rather than humour, dialogue rather than action, reason rather than imagination, the Jacobean comedy not only neglected the Elizabethan comedy but also adumbrated the restoration comedy and the neoclassical drama of the age of Pope and Johnson.

#### 4.5 BEN JONSON

The second place among the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists is universally assigned to Ben Jonson, who both in temperament and in artistic theories and practice presents a complete contrast to Shakespeare. Jonson, the posthumous son of an impoverished gentleman-clergyman, was born in London in 1573. At Westminster School he received a permanent bent toward classical studies from the headmaster, William Camden, who was one of the greatest scholars of the time. Forced into the uncongenial trade of his stepfather, a master-bricklayer, he soon deserted it to enlist among the English soldiers who were helping the Dutch to fight their Spanish oppressors. Here he exhibited some of his dominating traits by challenging a champion from the other army and killing him in classical fashion in single combat between the lines. By about the age of twenty he was back in London and married to a wife whom he later described as being virtuous but a shrew, and who at one time found it more agreeable to live apart from him. He became an actor (at which profession he failed) and a writer of plays. About 1598 he displayed his distinguishing realistic style in the comedy *Every Man in His Humour*, which was acted by Shakespeare's company, it is said through Shakespeare's friendly influence. At about the same time the burly Jonson killed another actor in a duel and escaped capital punishment only through 'benefit of clergy' (the exemption still allowed to educated men).

The plays which Jonson produced during the following years were chiefly satirical attacks on other dramatists, especially Marston and Dekker, who retorted in kind. Thus, there developed a fierce actors' quarrel, referred to in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in which the children's companies had some active but now uncertain part. Before it was over most of the dramatists had taken sides against Jonson, whose arrogant and violent self-assertiveness put him at odds, sooner or later, with nearly everyone with whom he had much to do. In 1603 he made peace, only to become involved in other, still more, serious difficulties. Shortly after the accession of King James, Jonson, Chapman, and Marston brought out a comedy, *Eastward Hoe*, in which they offended the king by satirical flings at the needy Scotsmen to whom James was freely awarding Court positions. They were imprisoned and for a while, according to the barbarous procedure of the time, were in danger of losing their ears and noses. At a banquet celebrating their release, Jonson reports, his old mother produced a paper of poison which, if necessary, she had intended to administer to him to save him from this disgrace, and of which, she said, to show that she was no churl, she would herself first have drunk.

Just before this incident, in 1603, Jonson had turned to tragedy and written *Sejanus*, which marks the beginning of his most important decade. He followed up *Sejanus* after several years with the less excellent *Catiline*, but his most significant dramatic works, on the whole, are his four great satirical comedies. *Volpone*, or the Fox, assails gross vice; *Epicoene, the Silent Woman*, ridicules various sorts of absurd persons; *The Alchemist* castigates quackery and its foolish encouragers; and *Bartholomew Fair* is a coarse but overwhelming broadside at Puritan hypocrisy. Strange as it seems in the author of these masterpieces of frank realism, Jonson at the same time was showing himself the most gifted writer of the Court masks, which now arrived at the last period of their evolution, were reaching the extreme of spectacular elaborateness. Early in James' reign, therefore, Jonson was made Court Poet, and during the next thirty years he produced about forty masks, devoting to them much attention and care, and quarrelling violently with Inigo Jones, the Court architect, who contrived the stage settings. During this period Jonson was under the patronage of various nobles, and he also reigned as dictator at the club of literary men which Sir Walter Raleigh had founded at the Mermaid Tavern (so called, like other inns, from its sign). A well-known poetical letter of the dramatist Francis Beaumont to Jonson celebrates the club meetings; and equally well known is a description given in the next generation from hearsay and inference by the antiquary Thomas Fuller: "Many were the wit-combats betwixt Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, which two I behold like a [Spanish great galleon and an English man-of-war: Master Jonson, like the former, was built far higher in learning; solid, but slow in his performances; Shakespeare, with the English man-of-war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all tides, tack about and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention.

The last dozen years of Jonson's life were unhappy. Though he had a pension from the Court, he was sometimes in financial straits; and for a time he lost his position as Court Poet. He resumed the writing of regular plays, but his style no longer pleased the public; and he often suffered much from sickness. Nevertheless, at the Devil Tavern he collected about him a circle of younger admirers, some of them among the oncoming poets, who were proud to be known as 'Sons of Ben', and who largely accepted as authoritative his opinions on literary matters. Thus, his life, which ended in 1637, did not altogether go out in gloom. On the plain stone which alone, for a long time, marked his grave in Westminster Abbey an unknown admirer inscribed the famous epitaph, O rare Ben Jonson.

As a man Jonson, pugnacious, capricious, ill-mannered, sometimes surly, intemperate in drink and in other respects, is an object for only very qualified admiration; and as a writer he cannot properly be said to possess that indefinable thing, genius, which is essential to the truest greatness. But both as man and as writer he manifested great force; and in both drama and poetry he stands for several distinct literary principles and attainments highly important both in themselves and for their subsequent influence.

Most conspicuous in his dramas is his realism, often, as we have said, extremely coarse, and a direct reflection of his intellect, which was as strongly masculine as his body and altogether lacking, where the regular drama was concerned, in fineness of sentiment or poetic feeling. He early assumed an attitude of pronounced opposition to the Elizabethan romantic plays, which seemed to him not only lawless in artistic structure but unreal and trifling in atmosphere and substance. (That he was not, however, as has sometimes been said, personally hostile to Shakespeare is clear, among other things, from his poetic tributes in the folio edition of Shakespeare and from his direct statement elsewhere that he loved Shakespeare almost to idolatry.) Jonson's purpose was to present life as he believed it to be; he was thoroughly acquainted with its worst side; and he refused to conceal anything that appeared to him significant. His plays, therefore, have very much that is flatly offensive to the taste which seeks in literature, prevailingly, for idealism and beauty; but they are, nevertheless, generally speaking, powerful portrayals of actual life.

Jonson's purpose, however, was never unworthy; rather, it was distinctly to uphold morality. His frankest plays, as we have indicated, are attacks on vice and folly, and sometimes, it is said, had important reformatory influence on contemporary manners. He held, indeed, that in the drama, even in comedy, the function of teaching was as important as that of giving pleasure. His attitude toward his audiences was that of a learned schoolmaster, whose ideas they should accept with deferential respect; and when they did not approve his plays he was outspoken in indignant contempt.

Jonson's self-satisfaction and his critical sense of intellectual superiority to the generality of mankind also a marked and disagreeable lack of sympathy in his portrayal of both life and character. The world of his dramas is mostly made up of knaves, scoundrels, hypocrites, fools, and dupes; and it includes among its really important characters very few excellent men and not a single really good woman. Jonson viewed his fellow-men, in the mass, with complete scorn, which it was one of his moral and artistic principles not to disguise. His characteristic comedies all belong, further, to the particular type which he himself originated, namely, the 'Comedy of Humors.' The meaning of this, term can be understood only by some explanation of the history of the word 'Humor'. According to medieval physiology there were four chief liquids in the human body, namely blood, phlegm, bile, and black bile, and an excess of any of them produced an undue predominance of the corresponding quality; thus, an excess of phlegm made a person phlegmatic, or dull; or an excess of black bile, melancholy. In the Elizabethan idiom, therefore, 'humor' came to mean a mood, and then any exaggerated quality or marked peculiarity in a person. Aiming in these plays to flail the follies of his time, he makes his chief characters, in spite of his realistic purpose, extreme and distorted humors, each, in spite of individual traits, the embodiment of someone abstract vice—cowardice, sensualism, hypocrisy, or what not. Too often, also, the unreality is increased because Jonson takes the characters from the stock figures of Latin comedy rather than from genuine English life.

In opposition to the free Elizabethan romantic structure, Jonson stood for and deliberately intended to revive the classical style; though with characteristic good sense he declared that not all the classical practices were applicable to English plays. He generally observed unity not only of action but also of time (a single day) and place, sometimes with serious resultant loss of probability. In his tragedies, *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, he excluded comic material; for the most part he kept scenes of death and violence off the stage; and he very carefully and slowly constructed plays which have nothing, indeed, of the poetic greatness of Sophocles or Euripides. He carried his scholarship, however, to the point of pedantry, not only in the illustrative extracts from Latin authors with which in the printed edition he filled the lower half of his pages, but in the plays themselves in the scrupulous exactitude of his rendering of the details of Roman life. The plays reconstruct the ancient world with much more minute accuracy than do Shakespeare's; the student should consider for himself whether they succeed better in reproducing its human reality, making it a living part of the reader's mental and spiritual possessions.

Jonson's style in his plays, especially the blank verse of his tragedies, exhibits the same general characteristics. It is strong, compact, and sometimes powerful, but it entirely lacks imaginative poetic beauty—it is really only rhythmical prose, though sometimes suffused with passion. The surprising skill which Jonson, author of such plays, showed in devising the court masks, daintily unsubstantial creations of moral allegory, classical myth, and Teutonic folklore, is rendered less surprising, perhaps, by the lack in the masks of any very great lyric quality. There is no lyric quality at all in the greater part of his non-dramatic verse, though there is an occasional delightful exception, as in the famous "Drink to me only with thine eyes." But of his non-dramatic verse we shall speak in the next chapter.

Last, and not least: Jonson's revolt from romanticism to classicism initiated, chiefly in non-dramatic verse, the movement for restraint and regularity, which, making slow headway during the next half century, was to issue in the triumphant pseudo-classicism of the generations of Dryden and Pope. Thus, notable in himself, he was significant also as one of the moving forces of a great literary revolution.

#### **CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks**

1. The Jacobean era began with the accession of \_\_\_ I to the English throne.
2. Ben Jonson was known for his satirical comedies and use of classical \_\_\_ structure.
3. Jacobean drama is often darker and more \_\_\_ in tone than Elizabethan drama.
4. The decline of Jacobean theatre was partly due to growing \_\_\_ and moral conservatism.

#### **Answers**

1. James	2. dramatic	3. violent	4. censorship
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#### **4.6 THE OTHER DRAMATISTS**

From the many other dramatists of this highly dramatic period, some of whom in their own day enjoyed a reputation fully equal to that of Shakespeare and Jonson, we may merely select a few for brief mention. For not only does their light now pale hopelessly in the presence of Shakespeare, but in many cases their violations of taste and moral restraint pass the limits of present-day tolerance. Most of them, like Shakespeare, produced both comedies and tragedies, prevailingly romantic but with elements of realism; most of them wrote more often in collaboration than did Shakespeare; they all shared the Elizabethan vigorously creative interest in life; but none of them attained either Shakespeare's wisdom, his power, or his mastery of poetic beauty. One of the most learned of the group was George Chapman, whose verse has a Jonsonian solidity not unaccompanied with Jonsonian ponderousness. He won fame also in non-dramatic poetry, especially by vigorous but rather clumsy verse translations of the 'Iliad' and 'Odyssey.' Another highly individual figure is that of Thomas Dekker, who seems to have been one of the completest embodiments of irrepressible Elizabethan cheerfulness, though this was joined in him with an irresponsibility which kept him commonly floundering in debt or confined in debtor's prison. His *Shoemaker's Holiday* (1600), still occasionally chosen by amateur companies for reproduction, gives a rough-and-ready but (apart from its coarseness) charming romanticized picture of the life of London apprentices and whole-hearted citizens.

Thomas Heywood, a sort of journalist before the days of newspapers, produced an enormous amount of work in various literary forms; in the drama he claimed to have had 'an entire hand, or at least a main finger' in no less than two hundred and twenty plays. Inevitably, therefore, he is careless and slipshod, but some of his portrayals of sturdy English men and women and of romantic adventure are of refreshing naturalness and breeziness. Thomas Middleton, also a very prolific writer, often deals, like Jonson and Heywood, with sordid material. John Marston, as well, has too little delicacy or reserve; he also wrote catch-as-catch-can non-dramatic satires.

The sanity of Shakespeare's plays, continuing and indeed increasing toward the end of his career, disguises for modern learners the tendency to decline in the drama which set in at about the time of King James' accession.

Not later than the end of the first decade of the century the dramatists as a class exhibit not only a decrease of originality in plot and characterization, but also a lowering of moral tone, which results largely from the closer identification of the drama with the Court party. There is a lack of seriousness of purpose, an increasing tendency to return, in more morbid spirit, to the sensationalism of the 1580's, and an anxious straining to attract and please the audiences by almost any means. These tendencies appear in the plays of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, whose reputations are indissolubly linked together in one of the most famous literary partnerships of all time. Beaumont, however, was short-lived, and much the greater part of the fifty and more plays ultimately published under their joint names really belong to Fletcher alone or to Fletcher and other collaborators. The scholarship of our day agrees with the opinion of their contemporaries in assigning to Beaumont the greater share of judgment and intellectual power and to Fletcher the greater share of spontaneity and fancy.

Fletcher's style is very individual. It is peculiarly sweet; but its unmistakable mark is his constant tendency to break down the blank verse line by the use of extra syllables, both within the line and at the end. The lyrics which he scatters through his plays are beautifully smooth and musical. The plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, as a group, are sentimentally romantic, often in an extravagant degree, though their charm often conceals the extravagance as well as the lack of true characterization. They are notable often for their portrayal of the loyal devotion of both men and women to king, lover, or friend. One of the best of them is *Philaster*, or *Love Lies Bleeding*, while Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* is the most pleasing example in English of the artificial pastoral drama in the Italian and Spanish style.

The Elizabethan tendency to sensational horror finds its greatest artistic expression in two plays of John Webster, *The White Devil*, or *Vitoria Corombona*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*. Here the corrupt and brutal life of the Italian nobility of the Renaissance is presented with terrible frankness, but with an overwhelming sense for passion, tragedy, and pathos. The most moving pathos permeates some of the plays of John Ford (of the time of Charles I), for example, *The Broken Heart*; but they are abnormal and unhealthy. Philip Massinger, a pupil and collaborator of Fletcher, was of thoughtful spirit, and apparently a sincere moralist at heart, in spite of much concession in his plays to the contrary demands of the time. His famous comedy, *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, a satire on greed and cruelty, is one of the new plays of the period, aside from Shakespeare's, which are still occasionally acted. The last dramatist of the whole great line was James Shirley, who survived the Commonwealth and the Restoration and died of exposure at the Fire of London in 1666. In his romantic comedies and comedies of manners Shirley vividly reflects the thoughtless life of the Court of Charles I and of the well-to-do contemporary London citizens and shows how surprisingly far that life had progressed toward the reckless frivolity and abandonment which after the interval of Puritan rule were to run riot in the Restoration period.

The great Elizabethan dramatic impulse had thus become deeply degenerate, and nothing could be more fitting than that it should be brought to a definite end. When the war broke out in 1642 one of the first acts of Parliament, now at last free to work its will on the enemies of Puritanism, was to decree that whereas public sports do not well agree with public calamities, nor public stage-plays with the seasons of humiliation, all dramatic performances should cease. This law, fatal, of course, to the writing as well as the acting of plays, was enforced with only slightly relaxing rigor until very shortly before the Restoration of Charles II in 1660.

Doubtless to the Puritans it seemed that their long fight against the theatre had ended in permanent triumph; but this was only one of many respects in which the Puritans were to learn that human nature cannot be forced into permanent conformity with any rigidly over-severe standard, on however high ideals it may be based.

#### 4.7 REASONS FOR DECADENCE IN JACOBEAN DRAMA

The Change of Patrons: One of the reasons for the decadence in Jacobean drama was its loss of national spirit and patronage. In the age of Elizabeth, drama was truly national, as it was patronised alike by the queen, the nobles the courtiers, and groundlings. But in the age of James I, it lost contact with common people and came to be patronised by, to quote Hardin Craig, “the courtly classes, their hangers-on, and the socially irresponsible parts of the population.” Consequently, to quote the same critic “the stage spoke not to all men, but to men with somewhat specialized interests”. Dramatists had to cater to the somewhat decadent courtly taste with tales of intrigue, cruelty, and immorality couched in a high-flown, “polished” style.

Marked Foreign Influence: The drama of the age of James shows, unlike that of the age of Elizabeth, a very marked foreign influence, for more ill than good. In this connection Hardin Craig observes: “The older dramatists and their audiences had been satisfied with such intrigue as was afforded by the Italian short story. Their patriotism had sent them to Holinshed, who had rifled Geoffrey of Monmouth... But in the new age foreign influences of increased potency made themselves felt. Dramatists borrowed the declamatory themes and exaggerated sentiments of Spanish drama, and discovered new ranges of intrigue, crime, and licentiousness in Italy and Italian subjects. Specifically, they revived the drama of revenge and, driving it to the extreme, converted it into a drama of horror.”

Plot-construction: In spite of the overall inferiority of Jacobean dramatists to Elizabethan dramatists, some credit must be given to them for their gift of plot-construction. Elizabethan dramatists, including Shakespeare, did not show any skill at architectonics. Moreover, they were generally too lazy to invent plots for themselves and were content to borrow them rather too frequently. It does not mean, however, that they were plagiarists pure and simple. Shakespeare borrowed the plots of most of his plays, but by virtue of his imagination, dramatic skill, poetic gift, and psychological insight transformed them into altogether new entities. But the fact remains that he was a borrower. “The Jacobean dramatists”, observes Hardin Craig, “seem for the first time to have begun to invent plots to suit their own tastes and ends.” This is particularly true of the comic dramatists like Marston and Ben Jonson. Secondly, Jacobean dramatists show a greater skill in the construction and development of their plots. In many of them the various threads of the action are carefully interwoven into a wonderful harmony of texture seldom to be met with in Elizabethan plays. Jonson, Middleton, and Fletcher were particularly endowed with the gift of plot-construction. Ben Jonson’s *Alchemist* is, according to Coleridge, one of the three literary works of the world (the two others being Sophocles’ *Oedipus the King* and Fielding’s novel *Tom Jones*) which have perfectly constructed plots. But what applies to the above-named dramatists does not apply to all Jacobean dramatists. Many of them, such as Dekker, are egregious offenders in this respect. As Jenet Spens points out in Elizabethan Drama, “the lack of connexion between plot and sub-plot was one of the most marked vices of the post-Shakespearean dramatists, and Dekker happens to offer the most absurd instance of it. There is unity in Dekker’s better plays, but it is the unity of the novel rather than that of the drama.”

**New Experiments:** In addition to their overall better plot-construction Jacobean dramatists may be credited with setting up some new patterns of drama. It was they who gave us the following kinds of drama, till then unattempted, or indifferently attempted, in England:

- (i) Domestic drama : such as Heywood’s *A Woman Killed with Kindness*.
- (ii) Drama glorifying a particular profession such as Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* (which came, however, in 1599).

- (iii) Drama showing the life and manners of the people of London: such as many of Ben Jonson's comedies.
- (iv) Drama dealing with social problems, mostly prostitution: such as Dekker's *The Honest Whore*. This kind of drama later came to be practised by no less a distinguished dramatist than George Bernard Shaw.

**Moral Laxity:** After giving Jacobean drama its due, let us discuss some elements of decadence which appear in it. One of these elements is its moral laxity. As we have already said, Jacobean drama was patronised mostly by the courtly classes which were known for their lack of moral discipline. James I himself was, to use the words of Hardin Craig, "a moralist without character." The same is true of most of the dramatists of his age. Some of them made fairly sincere attempts to preach morality, and none of them commended, or even condoned, sin or vice. But that does not absolve them of the charge of showing an almost morbid interest in sexual immorality even though for the purpose of condemning it. Play after play was written on the theme of immoral love- *The White Devil*, *A Woman Killed with Kindness*, and *The Duchess of Malfi* are all tragedies of illicit love. *A King and No King* is a tragedy of incestuous love. Later, in the Caroline age, Ford produced his very shocking play *It is Pity She Is a Whore* in which he openly dealt with the incestuous passion of a brother and sister which ends in disaster for both. Prostitutes appeared as heroines in many a play, such as Dekker's *The Honest Whore* and Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan*. Abject debauchees figured prominently in numerous plays. It was only Heywood and Webster who abstained from licentious themes. Heywood looked to the past and, in the words of Irvin Ribner in his Jacobean Tragedy, "doggedly continued to assert the moral values of an earlier age in a new world in which they no longer had great meaning." As regards Webster, the same critic observes that his plays "are an agonised search for moral order in the uncertain and chaotic world of Jacobean scepticism."

**Gloom and Pessimism:** This scepticism led the Jacobean age to spiritual vacuity and despair. The courtiers, in particular, became voluptuous cynics. But this voluptuousness was not without the agonising sense of melancholy arising chiefly from the prospect of human mortality without any Christian consolation regarding the future. Themes of death, time, and mutability engaged the attention of most writers and the tragedies of the Jacobean period, too, are exhibitive of what Ribner calls a "spirit of negation and disillusion, despair and spiritual no-confidence." Shakespearean tragedy does give rise to the feelings of pity and fear, and even awe, but it does not create any pessimistic feeling. There are death and destruction no doubt, but the human spirit rises phoenix-like from the pyre with a new, resplendent glory. But this kind of reassuring feeling is absent from Jacobean tragedy. All that happens in it is quite earthly, lacking the spiritual dimension of Hamlet, and still less, the much vaster, cosmic dimension of Lear. The scepticism, gloom, despair, and pessimism of the age are thus reflected by its tragedy also.

**Melodramatic Sensationalism:** The English have always had, in spite of the long line of critics from Sidney to Dryden to Addison to Dr. Johnson, a taste for crude and melodramatic sensationalism generally of the kind of physical violence and bloodshed. Even Elizabethan dramatists including Shakespeare could not do without catering to the popular taste by introducing into their tragedies a large number of murders and scenes of violence. They might have been partly influenced by the tradition of Senecan revenge tragedy, but the popular taste for "blood and thunder" was also a dictating factor. Considered from the point of view of story alone, such plays as Marlowe's *Tamburlaine* and *The Jew of Malta*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* are all melodramas. But their melodramatic nature does not force itself on the eye or the ear, thanks to the rare poetic power which sustains them in a higher region. But the same is not true of the Jacobean melodramatic tragedies. With the departure or decay of the poetic power they have not much left to recommend themselves to us. Most of the tragedies of the age only succeed in covering the stage in the last act with a virtual rivulet of blood so revolting to the refined eye.

**Sentimentalism:** On the other side of the scale to this artless and unthinking bloodshed was the Jacobean tendency towards sentimentalism. To quote Allardyce Nicoll, “there is apparent in the audience of the seventeenth century an increasing love of pathos and of what may be called sentimentalism.” The pathos sought to be created by Jacobean dramatists is generally of the artificial kind. But some plays, such as Heywood’s *Woman Killed with Kindness*, contain some really pathetic scenes. The death scene of the duchess in Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* is one of the superb examples of pathos in the whole range of English literature. But such scenes are more of the nature of an exception than a rule. The pathos of Lear’s or Cordelia’s or Edward II’s death is seldom captured by a Jacobean dramatist. Allardyce Nicoll observes about these dramatists: “The dramatists employ every means, illegitimate as well as legitimate, to stir the emotions of the spectators and to present before them something of novelty.”

**Satire and Realism:** The Jacobean age brought into vogue a new kind of realistic and satiric comedy aimed at the exposure of London life and manners and the vices and follies of the times. The exposure was affected for the purpose of correction through satire and ridicule. We find comedy writers like Ben Jonson and Marston holding the mirror to their age and lashing the follies of the Londoners. Their plays are quite realistic with real London as their background. They do not transport us to the fairyland atmosphere of the romantic comedies such as *As You Like It* or *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. What they give us is a much more direct criticism of life. Ben Jonson was quite articulate about his aim., I’ll strip the ragged follies of the time, Naked, as at their birth;, And with a whip of steel, Print wounding lashes in their iron ribs., Marston and Ben Jonson were engaged in what is known as “the War of Theatres” and wrote stinging satires against each other: The humour of Jacobean comedy was no longer the genial, puckish, fresh and refreshing humour of Shakespeare’s comedies, but the bitter and satirical humour which always arises from poor characterisation, Jacobean drama suffered decadence in the all-important field of characterisation. It could not boast of a character of the stature and psychological complexity of Shakespeare’s Lear or Hamlet, or even Marlowe’s Dr. Faustus.

Jacobean dramatists relied for dramatic effect more on the situation than on the character. In the field of comedy, the Jacobean age presents conventional and wooden types, as, for instance, Ben Jonson’s ‘humours.’ In the field of tragedy, we have again some highly conventional and recurring characters such as, to use the words of Nicoll, the “Headstrong monarch”, the “lustful tyrant,” “a predetermined hero, often a husband, and with him the inevitable heroine either sinning or sinned against.” Then there is the “faithful friend” of the hero. “Again, there are,” says Nicoll, “sudden and wholly unpsychological revolutions of character which mar the majority of these dramas and we realize that there could be no possible delving into the depths of personality such as we find in Shakespeare.”

**Poor Poetry:** Poetically, Jacobean drama is much less rich than Elizabethan drama. The passionate lyricism of Shakespeare and the grandeur of Marlowe’s mighty line became things of the past. Rhetorical devices took the place of true poetry. In Ben Jonson’s tragedies, *Catiline* and *Sejanus*, there is more of oratory than poetry. Playwrights such as Dekker, Heywood, and Tourneur handled blank verse quite loosely, nor could they breathe into it that pulsating life and poetic beauty which constitute an overwhelming proportion of the pleasure we derive from Elizabethan drama.

#### 4.8 LET US SUM UP

Jacobean drama presents the deglamourized vision of renaissance in the first half of the 17th century. It is marked by the reign period of James I who was the successor of Queen Elizabeth to the throne of England.

In Greek James is called Jacob from which the term Jacobean drama has been derived. The English society witnessed vital changes on socio-economic, political and religious front in the aftermath of the death of Queen Elizabeth. Peace and tranquillity in society was badly disturbed. Human relationships were receded to the lowest ebb. Nobody was thinking in terms of norms and principles. Reign of terror and anarchy loomed large which crippled the economy severely causing irreparable damage to the state exchequer. On the political horizon the situation further worsened following the differences emerged in the relationship between the king and the parliament. Queen Elizabeth succeeded in winning the confidence of parliament using her talent and insight which his successor lacked. It led to the rift between the two power centres. James I had firm faith in the concept of divine rights of kingship and considered him the chief arbiter of justice with nobody showing dissent with his jurisdiction. He was even not ready to make any compromise with the parliament on this issue. The relationship between the two forces receded to the lowest ebb. They locked horns which other affected the welfare program and created panic in society. The king's growing apathy and negligence to the interest of the masses enhanced their apprehension that the welfare of the people did not enjoy top priority in his agenda. The country also witness infighting among various religious sects. James first was an ardent admirer of Roman Catholicism. People showing strong affinity with catholic religion were elevated to the higher position in the royal hierarchy sending a wrong message among those having faith in religious sects other than Catholicism. Charges of step motherly treatment were labelled against the Monarch by the Protestants, the Anglicans and the Calvinists. Catholicism emerged as the state religion and the interest of other religious sects was severely damaged forcing them to fight with one another to ensure their supremacy. In this way a grim picture of society was painted during the Jacobean period. The policies of James first divided the society into several independent pockets who quarrelled with one another eroding the warmth and vitality of society. People no longer craved for moral values. Money reigned supreme. People were ready to make compromise in order to achieve their objective human relationships were brought to the dock. Under the background of this socio-political milieu the citadel of Jacobean drama was erected. Ben Jonson, John Webster, Philip Massinger, Thomas Middleton, John Fletcher, John Marston, John Ford, Thomas Heywood have contributed significantly for the enrichment of Jacobean drama. In the Jacobean period there was steep decline in drama.

The playwrights attempted to fulfil the desire of the audience but failed miserably since they lacked organic unity which a supreme art must possess. After Shakespeare there was no other dramatist who could fill his space which marked the decline of drama. Their Plot construction shows a complete want of coherence. There are effective episodes but structural harmony or organization is badly wanting in their drama. Except for Ben Jonson's *Alchemist* and *Volpone* and Webster's *The White Devil* not a single drama achieved the height of that of Shakespeare. The Shakespearean balance between romance and realism was poorly replaced by narrow social activities or by romantic excesses. The Puritan opposition to the drama is also responsible for the decline of Jacobean drama. They regarded drama as the devil's work which must be avoided. Ben Jonson was the most prominent figure of English drama after Shakespeare. Unlike Shakespeare he took keen interest in classical form of dramas. He was a great scholar traces of which can be noticed in his dramas. The basic difference between Jonson and Shakespeare was that while the former wrote drama to display his scholarship the latter used it as a medium to amuse people. Jonson has given a photographic presentation of Jacobean society satirizing their craving or lust for power forcing norms and values to the background. People's growing desire for material advancement has been successfully cultivated in his dramas *The Alchemist* and *Volpone* or *Fox*. He was also the exponent of comedy of humors of which he was the single practitioner. Webster was the other significant dramatist who contributed significantly to the repertory of Jacobean drama. His drama *The White Devil* is the

fine example of the deterioration or moral bankruptcy set in Jacobean society. Besides them Beaumont and Fletcher too have enriched Jacobean drama making significant contributions.

#### **4.9 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

- (1) Which King or Queen's rule is associated with Jacobean Era?
  - a) James I
  - b) Elizabeth I
  - c) Charles I
  - d) Charles II
- (2) What proceeded Jacobean era?
  - a) Elizabethan Era
  - b) Caroline era
  - c) Victorian era
  - d) Jacobean Era
- (3) The Jacobean era ended with a severe economic depression in 1620–1626, complicated by a serious outbreak of \_\_\_\_\_ in London in 1625.
  - a) Cholera
  - b) Tuberculosis
  - c) Bubonic plague
  - d) Plague (disease)
- (4) The word "Jacobean" is derived from the \_\_\_\_\_ name Jacob, which is the original form of the English name James.
  - a) Samaritan Hebrew language
  - b) Biblical Hebrew
  - c) Mishnaic Hebrew
  - d) Hebrew language
- (5) The Jacobean era succeeds the \_\_\_\_\_ and precedes the Caroline era, and \_\_\_\_\_ specifically denotes a style of architecture, visual arts, decorative arts, and \_\_\_\_\_ literature that is predominant of that period.
  - a) Elizabethan era
  - b) English Reformation
  - c) England
  - d) Tudor period

6) Jonson was also an important innovator in the specialized literary sub-genre of the \_\_\_\_\_, which went through an intense development in the Jacobean era.

- a) William Shakespeare
- b) Ben Jonson
- c) Masque
- d) A Midsummer Night's Dream

7) The first fire-breathing dragon in English literature occurs in which Old English epic poem.

- a) Iliad
- b) Odyssey
- c) Beowulf
- d) Canterbury Tales

8) What are the beginning and ending dates of the reign of James I ?

- a) 1592-1608
- b) 1603-1625
- c) 1607-1627
- d) 1608-1639

9) Famous satiric drama Volpone is written by?

- a) Sir Walter Scott
- b) Christopher Marlow
- c) Ben Johnson
- d) George Herbert

10) The foremost poet of Jacobean era was?

- a) John Milton
- b) Charles Bacon
- c) John Donne
- d) Herbert Spencer

11) "The Jacobean Era" refers to a period of time in the early 17th century in which of the following countries?

- a) Jordan

- b) England
- c) Malaysia
- d) Tunisia

**Answers:**

1) a	2) b	3) c	4) d
5) a	6) c	7) c	8) b
9) c	10) c	11) b	

#### **4.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

**Q.1** What were the chief characteristics of Jacobean Era?

**Answer:**

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**Q.2** Write a short note on the dramatists who were writing in the Jacobean Era.

**Answer:**

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**Q.3** Enumerate the causes responsible for the decline of Jacobean Drama.

**Answer:**

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**Q.4** How did Renaissance values influence the development of Jacobean Drama?

**Ans:** The Renaissance was a dynamic era that looked back toward the past with delight, relished the present, and struck out toward the future. It valued the human person, the glories of classical Greece and Rome, and the expansion of the known world through exploration and discovery. These values are reflected in the drama of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Let's look at some examples of how this worked. In the medieval period, drama was largely centered around the Bible. Mystery plays and morality plays dominated the scene as actors presented Bible stories and moral lessons for eager audiences.

In the Renaissance, however, the subject matter of drama greatly expanded. Think, for instance, of the broad scope of Shakespeare's plays. They cover everything from ancient Rome (Julius Caesar, for

instance) to Denmark (Hamlet) to England's history (Richard II, Henry IV). Quite a few are set in the era of classical Greece, showing the Renaissance appreciation for that time but also the Renaissance innovation that made Greek ideas and characters relevant for the Renaissance era. Renaissance drama also tended to focus on the individual. Examples here include Christopher Marlowe's Doctor Faustus and Shakespeare's Macbeth. Renaissance dramatists created characters that are complex and nuanced. They are not allegories or types, but real individuals with real issues, challenges, and choices.

Q.5 Write a short note on Revenge Tragedy.

**Answer:**

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Q.6 Discuss the main characteristics of Comedy Humours with specific reference to the plays of Ben Jonson.

**Answer:**

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#### **4.11 SUGGESTED READINGS:**

- Hume, Robert D. (1976). *The Development of English Drama in the Seventeenth Century*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Hughes, Derek (1996). *English Drama, 1660-1700*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

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## CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE'S EARLY LIFE : INFLUENCES AND EXPERIENCES

### STRUCTURE

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 5.3 Life of Christopher Marlowe
- 5.4 Marlowe's works
- 5.5 His Formative Years
- 5.6 Literary Influences
- 5.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.8 Self-Assesment Questions with Answers
- 5.9 Examination Oriented Questions
- 5.10 Suggested Readings

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) is one of the most suggestive figures of the English Renaissance, and the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors. The glory of the Elizabethan drama dates from his *Tamburlaine* (1587), wherein the whole restless temper of the age finds expression:

*Nature, that framed us of four elements  
Warring within our breasts for regiment,  
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds:  
Our souls--whose faculties can comprehend,  
The wondrous architecture of the world,  
And measure every wandering planet's course,  
Still climbing after knowledge infinite,*

*And always moving as the restless spheres--  
Will us to wear ourselves and never rest.*

*Tamburlaine*, Pt. I, II, vii.

## 5.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Explore the historical and cultural context of Marlowe's life during the Elizabethan era.
2. Identify the major works of Christopher Marlowe and their thematic concerns.
3. Understand Marlowe's contribution to the development of English drama.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Outline the key events in Marlowe's life and the controversies surrounding him.
2. List and briefly describe Marlowe's significant plays, such as *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus*.
3. Analyze how Marlowe's works reflect Renaissance humanism and early modern tensions.

## 5.3 LIFE OF CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Marlowe was born in Canterbury, only a few months before Shakespeare.

He was the son of a poor shoemaker, but through the kindness of a patron was educated at the town grammar school and then at Cambridge. When he came to London (c.1584), his soul was surging with the ideals of the Renaissance, which later found expression in *Faustus*, the scholar longing for unlimited knowledge and for power to grasp the universe. Unfortunately, Marlowe had also the unbridled passions which mark the early, or Pagan Renaissance, as Taine calls it, and the conceit of a young man just entering the realms of knowledge. He became an actor and lived in a low-tavern atmosphere of excess and wretchedness. In 1587, when he was twenty-three years old, he produced *Tamburlaine*, which brought him instant recognition. Thereafter, notwithstanding his wretched life, he holds steadily to a high literary purpose. Though all his plays abound in violence, no doubt reflecting many of the violent scenes in which he lived, he develops his "mighty line" and depicts great scenes in magnificent bursts of poetry, such as the stage had never heard before. In five years, while Shakespeare was serving his apprenticeship, Marlowe produced all his great work. Then he was stabbed in a drunken brawl and died wretchedly, as he had lived. The Epilogue of *Faustus* is written across his tombstone:

*Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,  
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough  
That sometime grew within this learned man.*

## 5.4 MARLOWE'S WORKS

Marlowe is famous for four dramas, now known as the Marlowesque or one-man type of tragedy, each revolving about one central personality who is consumed by the lust of power. The first of these is '*Tamburlaine*', the story of Timur, the Tartar. Timur begins as a shepherdchief, who first rebels and then triumphs over the Persian king. Intoxicated by his success, Timur, rushes like a tempest over the whole of East. Seated on his chariot drawn by captive kings, with a caged emperor before him, he boasts of his power which overrides all things. Then, afflicted with disease, he raves against the gods and would overthrow them as he has overthrown earthly rulers. *Tamburlaine* is an epic rather than a drama; but one can understand its instant success with a people only half-civilized, fond of military glory, and the instant adoption of its "mightyline" as the instrument of all dramatic expression. *Dr. Faustus*, the second play, is one of the best of Marlowe's works. The story is that of a scholar who longs for infinite knowledge, and who turns from Theology, Philosophy, Medicine, and Law, the four sciences of the time, to the study of magic, much as a child might turn from jewels to tinsel and coloured paper. In order to learn magic he sells himself to the devil, on condition that he shall have twenty-four years of absolute power and knowledge. The play is the story of those twenty-four years. Like *Tamburlaine*, it is lacking in dramatic construction, but has an unusual number of passages of rare poetic beauty. Milton's Satan suggests strongly that the author of '*Paradise Lost*' had access to Faustus and used it, as he may also have used *Tamburlaine*, for the magnificent panorama displayed by Satan in '*Paradise Regained*'. For instance, more than fifty years before Milton's hero says, "Which way I turn is hell, myself am hell," Marlowe had written:

Faustus : How comes it then that thou art out of hell?

Mephistophles : Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed  
In one self-place; for where we are is hell,  
And where hell is there must we ever be.

Marlowe's third play is '*The Jew of Malta*', a study of the lust for wealth, which centres about Barabas, a terrible old money lender, strongly suggestive of Shylock in '*The Merchant of Venice*'. The first part of the play is well constructed, showing a decided advance, but the last part is an accumulation of melodramatic horrors. Barabas is checked in his murderous career by falling into a boiling caldron which he had prepared for another, and dies blaspheming, his only regret being that he has not done more evil in his life.

Marlowe's last play is '*Edward II*', a tragic study of a king's weakness and misery. In point of style and dramatic construction, it is by far the best of Marlowe's plays, and is a worthy predecessor of Shakespeare's historical drama. Marlowe is the only dramatist of the time who is ever compared with Shakespeare. When we remember that he died at twenty-nine, probably before Shakespeare had produced a single great play, we must wonder what he might have done had he outlived his wretched youth and become a man. Here and there his work is remarkable for its splendid imagination, for the stateliness of its verse, and for its rare bits of poetic beauty; but in dramatic instinct, in wide knowledge of human life, in humour, in delineation of woman's character, in the delicate fancy which presents an Ariel as perfectly as a Macbeth, in a word, in all that makes a dramatic genius, Shakespeare stands alone. Marlowe simply prepared the way for the master who was to follow.

## 5.5 HIS FORMATIVE YEARS

Marlowe was born in 1564 (the same year as Shakespeare as generally referred), the son of a shoemaker at Canterbury. Taking his master's degree after seven years at Cambridge, in 1587, he followed the other 'University Wits' to London. There, probably the same year and the next, he astonished the public with the two parts of '*Tamburlaine the Great*', a dramatization of the stupendous career of the bloodthirsty Mongol fourteenth-century conqueror. Various influences—psychological, social, economic and political—work as forces upon the child-artist who imbibes in him all that later becomes the source-material for his artistic creations. He is the creative medium through which his age and society find expression. It is, therefore, necessary to examine, analyse and record the early influences which went a long way to the making of Marlowe as an artist. Though the major influences, the literary, the philosophical and the artistic, are dealt with a little later, the early influences are significant in their own way.

Christopher Marlowe, the man, was shaped by environment, the social forces of his times, just as any or all artists have been shaped through ages. His childhood, his family background, his early education and the social milieu of the age were the forces which infused fire and spirit in the young child who was later to make significant changes in the world of thought and art. His psychology like that of any great artist was planted ready-made in him. He identified himself with the currents of thought and movements which though glorious were in their early phases received with shock by the conservative. Though much has been written on Marlowe's childhood and early life, only a few significant facts stand out as authentic records. There is no doubt that the boy was endowed by nature with a precocious nature, sharp mind and keen eye. His humble birth could prove no hurdle in the way of his ambitious and independent pursuits. The absence of any elder brother and sister in the family must have made the boy confident and self-reliant. Thus his psychology was of a lone genius in a world of commonality in which he was to rise by the force of his will and the power of his mind.

As in the case of Shakespeare, so in the case of Marlowe we have very few biographical details. He was the son of John Marlowe, who was a shoe-maker in Canterbury. About his father, Wright says, - 'John Marlowe, the shoe-maker is best described in the words of Dr. Urry as a 'busy, active, pugnacious fellow' clearly very fond of the lime-light, prone to go to law at the slightest excuse, ready to perform public office and probably rather neglectful of his business'. The boy Marlowe must have imbibed some of the traits of his own father. Consciously or unconsciously, at least, he did have the fondness of coming into the lime-light, especially when he had the intellectual resources of a genius. His unusual faculties, it is natural, would not let him find satisfaction in following the trade of his father. Moreover, his unusual qualities must have outshone all others in the family and in his father's trade. Wright records, "His son Christopher ...must have been a strikingly beautiful bright-eyed boy, intelligent beyond the usual, who might readily have attracted the attention of a patron amongst his father's wealthier clients. A likely benefactor has been suggested in the person of Sir Roger Manwood, who might have put in good word to further the lad to the scholarship which he was awarded to the King's school". He got this scholarship when he was about fifteen years old. We do not have much knowledge as to how the boy equipped himself with knowledge that enabled him to get the scholarship.

By attending some local school in Canterbury, he had acquired the basic knowledge of letters, but his restless mind had also rummaged through the books and literary works in quest of more and more knowledge. This can be offered as a plausible explanation of his competence to qualify for the scholarship, notwithstanding the recommendation of the benefactor Sir Roger Manwood. Moreover, the knowledge of classical literature

brought by the Renaissance was gaining popularity by the English translations of classical works, which printed by Caxton, were reaching all corners of England. Canterbury, in particular, had imbibed the influence Renaissance in its earliest phase on account of its situation, its unbroken relationship with the church, its history and also its links with other centers of trade in England and in Europe. As an important place of pilgrimage, it attracted men of all views, professions, trades, ranks and classes.

About his mother we know even less. His mother's tastes reveal that John Marlowe was a flourishing business man and the boy had seen many beautiful things in his house. Boas says, "Catherine Marlowe lingers solicitously over the bestowal of her gold and silver rings, her greatest silver spoons, her taffeta cushions and the rest, it is fanciful to conjecture that Christopher may, in part, have inherited from his mother his eye for 'seld-seen precious stones' for the dazzling blaze and colours of the world. It is permissible to catch at oven such a sight due to the sudden flowering from a prosperous, well-ordered tradesman stock of a revolutionary poetic genius-as inexplicable sport of nature as the emergence in a later age of a Shelley or a Swinburne from an equally conventional though far higher, social environment". Marlowe, there is no doubt might have this and some other sources of his passion for gold, silver, diamond, pearls, rubies and jewels which the reader so often finds scattered in his works. This passion of the best links him at once with the Elizabethan passion for wealth and splendour. As a boy, his psychology was rooted in the life around him to provide him with first hand knowledge. Besides this, we find in his works an elaborate system of imagery of objects such as stars and heavenly bodies which give us a peep into the splendour of the poet's imagination. The consciousness of his intellectual powers combined with his father's fearless spirit, must have made the boy ambitious, with a desire to achieve fame and come into the limelight. "So Christopher Marlowe grew up in a family dominated by females, with a rather fearless father, no doubt that was important dominated his psychological makeup".

The Elizabethans had a passion for fashions, glossy dresses with diamonds stitched or studded, ribbons and gold-laces, brilliantly inlaid scabbards, hilts and poniards. Women had cultivated unusual interest in delicate but costly works of art and handicraft such as, tapestries, hoods, trailing gowns and skirts and jewellery. They took pride in possessing rare pieces of cutlery and other articles of antiquity. All these and many other trends which had branched out in the Elizabethan age may have made the boy look for higher standards, particularly when he found them enlivened by his powerful imagination and recreated by his poetic talent. Beauty both of sight and sound environed Marlowe in his most impressionable years".

Not only the art, but also the architecture of the age with its roots in the past and its glories in the future was likewise making rapid progress. The old and mossy castles and fortress presented a striking contrast with the towering pinnacles of cathedrals and churches. The present seemed to be pregnant will all that would be a fitting expression of the Renaissance urge for glory greater and more impressive than the past had to boast of.

Marlowe was only nine when he had the occasion to witness the arrival of Queen Elizabeth and the royal pageant in all its splendour. It must have been an occasion of imposing significance to the child. "The Queen made it her policy to allow herself to be seen by her subjects and it may be assured that kid had his first glimpse at this tender age of the fabulous Virgin Queen whom he was later to serve as a political agent". It can be reasonably deduced that the sight of royalty with its splendour would have taken whole of the young boy's imagination, which later helped him to conceive of royal glory in his portraiture of *Tamburlaine*.

Christopher Marlowe joined the King's School when he was just two months short of fifteen. He spent just two years at the King's School. But on a boy of his exceptional gifts and interests, in the formative period

between fifteen and seventeen, they must have had a highly important influence. “The curriculum of the school, as has been seen was fashioned according to the Renaissance pedagogic ideals, and its chief aim was to train the scholars to speak and write Latin fluently. The foundation of his familiarity with Latin literature and with the mythology of Greece and Rome must have been laid at the King’s School in 1579-80. A favourite Renaissance method of teaching boys to speak Latin intelligently was training them to act in classical or neo-classical plays. But whether or not there was acting by the king’s scholars in 1579-80, it must have counted for something in Christopher’s development that his school had a tradition of theatrical production which was favoured by the authorities of the Cathedral”. Marlowe in these two years found his potential dramatic talent awakened, his fecund mind touched by his pilgrimage through the classical world of Greece and Rome and his heart fascinated by the wealth of beauty and splendour in the world of art. Marlowe had begun his journey at the King’s School, from the world of wonders, he had moved into the world of art and literature made more complex and interesting by the classical creed of the age.

From the rich and colourful world of Canterbury, he found himself in the rich fields of classical literature. He would have been astounded at the beauty and grace of the classics. It is reasonable to suppose that his creative imagination awakened at school, by the study of classical poetry, and by witnessing or participating in the performance of plays, which were popular at school. We have a detailed account of the curriculum which gives us understanding of the development of his mind at this stage. “According to the statutes of 1541 governing the curriculum, by the time a boy reached Fourth Form (and Marlowe would have gone into this straight way at least or probably to a higher grade) he would have been required to know his Latin syntax thoroughly, and there he would be practiced in poetic tales, the familiar letters of the learned men, and other literature of that sort. In the Fifth Form Latin oratory and classical rules of verse-making were taught, and here Christopher would have made a beginning in ‘translating the chaste poets and the best historian’. In the sixth and highest form, he would cope with Erasmus and learn to very speech in every mood in Latin...as implied by its name and evidenced by the curriculum one of the main functions of the grammar and speech with Greek as second language. To encourage fluency in this, the favoured teaching method of the Renaissance was the performance of these plays in these languages...it may be assumed that early contact with the drama proved a formative influence in the life of Marlowe who was destined to create an entirely new dramatic form for the English stage and call into being a dramatic literature unsurpassed in the history of the world”.

In fact, Marlowe was fortunate to be initiated into the dramatic world by his time and place. The Elizabethan Age, as we know, had inherited the tradition of dramatic performance from native sources. The Mysteries, Miracles and Moralities were popular in every town of England and these were patronised by the guilds. Rowse tells us that city like Canterbury with numerous guilds would have provided means for the “regular performances of Miracle plays, Moralities and musings. There is much more of this element in *Dr. Faustus* than in any of the plays of Shakespeare”. The young dramatist was thus being nursed and nourished in the Renaissance tradition and in the tradition of exploration into the new-found land of human experience, aspiration and achievement.

There was also another side to this glory and splendour of the Elizabethan Age. It was an age, which reveled in punishing its victims. On the one hand, it presented the procession of glorious adventures and statesmen, on the other hand it provided the spectacle of men who had dissented with authority or the Church going to the gallows. Political murders were neither unknown nor infrequent. “There were three public gibbets in Canterbury. The third was put up, evidently to meet a pressing need in 1576. Otherwise, while these were still tenanted, men were hanged on the city walls from the condemned cells in an upper room of West-gate. This seems to have

impressed Marlowe as a boy, for in *Tamburlaine*. The Governor of Babylon is hung up in Chains on the city walls and shot to death". Again, "Under 1540 the city account books, itemize the sums paid out to the various people engaged in the hanging, and perboiling of Fraiar Stone... It may be that Marlowe was drawing upon this event in the annals of Canterbury when he made Barabas fall into a boiling cauldron in the last scene of the *Jew of Malta*".

Thus we see that Marlowe had been collecting material in his psychological reservoir so laboriously that he had simply to turn towards it whenever he wanted source material for his plays. So far as the various scenes of atrocity and cruelty are concerned, he "did not have to go very far afield for the more atrocious incidents in his plays, and conversely, the Elizabethan appetite for horrors was fully catered for by the dramatists... For Marlowe, scenes of cruelty seem to have been a source of exhilaration. His friend Thomas Nash was also very representative of the age in this combination of lyrical sensibility and sadism, for it would be hard to parallel the gusto with which he, describes the death by torture of Cutwolfe in "*The Unfortunate Traveller*". Marlowe's life in his early youth was thus rich in personal experience. Even the rise of puritanism had a different effect on him, for instead of making him devout, it made him react against it. At school, he got more entrenched in the confirmation of experience of his boyhood days.

Thus, upto the age of fifteen, Marlowe's mind had been formed by the colourful yet cruel life of the Renaissance England. He had become familiar with classical stories, he had seen the pageants of Queen Elizabeth, he had felt the wonder and the beauty of the Gothic cathedral of Canterbury, he had known something of the wickedness of human nature by the innumerable fables and stories of ancient and contemporary life which he had read and heard. He had seen plays acted both in and outside school, and had heard the exaggerated declamations of Elizabethan actors.

Thus he was able to gather the rich harvest of the Elizabethan Age even before he crossed the portals of the Cambridge University.

#### **CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks**

1. Christopher Marlowe was a contemporary of William \_\_\_\_.
2. Marlowe's writing is known for its use of \_\_\_\_ verse.
3. Marlowe's mysterious death occurred in the year \_\_\_\_ (accept approximate if taught loosely).
4. *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus* are two of Marlowe's most well-known \_\_\_\_.

#### **Answers**

1. Shakespeare	2. blank	3. 1593	4. tragedies
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## **5.6 LITERARY INFLUENCES**

To be initiated into the literary world, a young artist has to pass through his environmental set up. Cross-currents of literary forces play upon him and give him a direction which leads him to his peculiar literary achievements. Every age has its characteristic literary trends which influence a growing youth. He is nursed upon a certain well-defined tradition which in some sense influences the contemporary literary activity of the nation. Literary influences

begin with the boy's entry into the academic circles or the literary field, particularly if he happens to be extra-intelligent and ambitious. Consciously or unconsciously, he identifies himself with a certain thought, an idea, a movement or a passion chiefly represented in the literary works available to him. Marlowe's own case exemplifies this statement when we probe deeply into the literary scene of his times, the literary activities in the immediate past and the revolutionary thought unravelling the problems and mysteries of life and nature, was fast sweeping England under the impact of the Renaissance. A new angle and a new colour was imparted to the vision of life, literature, human affairs, religion, ethics and politics. Men of very rare potentialities, though in minority, were at work to lead the majority into an altogether novel world of human experience. Marlowe was at that time a student in Cambridge, one of the greatest centres of learning in England. He, by Nature, being unusual in his acceptance, or rejection of knowledge imparted indiscriminately, found himself attracted most to what was being dug out from the so far unexplored areas of investigation in almost every field. "And Cambridge offered a more variegated, a more disturbed and a more exciting scene."

Marlowe was a typical Elizabethan Englishman in the making. He had around him the world of the grown-up Elizabethan Englishmen with their eyes at everything appearing in the intellectual firmament of Europe. Will and Ariel Durant observe, "All in all, the Elizabethan Englishman was a scion of the Renaissance.... The dominant man of the age was a charge of energy released from old dogmas and inhibitions and not yet bound to new; boundless in ambition, longing to develop his capacities, unshackled in humour, sensitive to literature if it breathed life, given to violence of action and speech, but struggling, amid his bombast, vices and cruelties to be a gentleman. His ideal hovered between the amiable courtesies of Castiglione's "Courties" and the ruthless immoralism of Machiavelli's '*Prince*'. He admired Sidney, but he aspired to be Drake."

Such models of daring men were before and around him. He was imbibing ideas both from life and literature just as he was developing in himself the qualities of 'the scion' of the Renaissance. Moreover, we have to remember that it was the age of both creative and the critical effort. The creative led them to the creation of the new models and the critical procured source material from outside the range of ordinary in thought and art. It was thus the national glow of life and thought which made a fitting place for literary and intellectual development of Marlowe.

One of the major sources of the English literary revival was the attempt of English scholars to translate classical works into English. The influence of these translations upon Elizabethan literature was immense. These translations "gave plots to Marlowe, Shakespeare, Webster, Massinger and Ford, and Italian locale to many Elizabethan plays. Italy, which had rejected the Reformation, had gone beyond it to break down the old theology, even the Christian ethics, while Elizabethan religion debated Catholicism and protestantism, Elizabethan literature ignoring that conflict, returned to the spirit and verve of the Renaissance." This was happening at the intellectual centres of England—Oxford and Cambridge. Marlowe was imbibing these influences to the marrow of his bones. He was reading Divinity, apparently in preparation for a life in holy orders at Canterbury. But Marlowe was made of different stuff. His sceptical mind would not let him accept anything without sifting it through the filter of his reason. This scepticism soon led him to atheism. This last loosely defined term comprised any kind of questioning of the accepted religious dogmas. Such an atmosphere proved congenial to the young Marlowe's mind. At Cambridge he found opportunity to study in the small library of Archbishop Parker, where he avidly read Machiavelli, Erasmus, and the Latin Bible. He also read Aristotle and Ramus. But apart from the serious religious and philosophical works, he was particularly interested in Virgil and Ovid, who, alongwith other writers, revealed to him the glories of the antique world. He was already turning away from 'Divinity, although he was morally bound

to it by the terms of the scholarship. His natural urge lay in the free manifestation of his will. He broke the agreement and instead of taking to clerical life and going back to Canterbury, he went to London and became a play-wright. Thus, he followed the opportunistic doctrine of Machiavelli. Wright observes, 'Machiavellian policy was something Christopher was well able to expound. Arch-Bishop Parker scholars consisting of Greek and Latin Bibles, Erasmus's New Testament (Latin version in two volumes), a Latin Bible concordance, classical lexicons and 'thesauri' and a history of Cambridge. If Marlowe resorted to this little library, it was but to sharpen his critical faculty and he was soon weaned on to other literature, browsing particularly happily among the Latin classical authors, Virgil and Ovid claiming him as disciple. Aristotle and Ramus he also read. The controversy over these two was the pivot of much Cambridge disputation. Echoes of this are found in Marlowe's works. As at Canterbury, so now at Cambridge his genius was to receive to some extent, the stamp of his environment and be enriched by it."

In fact, the Cambridge atmosphere of classical learning had endowed Marlowe with an artistic mind and was largely responsible for shaping him into a dramatic artist. The picture of Greek and Roman drama lay vivid before his eyes. Boas says, "Without denying that Marlowe during his six years residence at Cambridge may have acquired the elements of Greek, there can be no doubt that to him as to nearly all English humanists of his time, except a select group of scholars and divines, revelation of the antique world came through the literature of Rome. And to Marlowe the pre-eminent source of this revelation was Ovid—not only in the 'Amores of which his translation may even have dated from his Cambridge days, but even such storehouses of myth and legend as the 'Metamorphosis', the 'Fasti', and the 'Heroide's only second was the attraction for him of Virgil to whom his debt extends well beyond the confines of Dido, Queen of Carthage. Indeed, for him the corpus of Latin literature would include the medieval and neo-classic analysts and biographers who furnished him with materials for *Tamburlaine*.

Marlowe absorbed what he had read, but he did not attempt a slavish imitation of classical models. He was to transform everything that entered his mind into something altogether different, novel and beautiful. His study of classics coupled with his company with dare-devil thinkers and free-lancers at Cambridge made him a symbol of free thought. He became a blasphemous atheist. Will Durant observes, "His study of the classics unsettled his theology and his acquaintance with Machiavelli's ideas gave his skepticism a cynical turn. Moving to London after receiving his M.A. (1517), he shared a room with Thomas Kyd, and found the free-thinking circle of Raleigh and Harriot. Richard Barnes, a Government agent, reported to the Queen (June 3, 1593), that Marlowe had declared that 'the first beginning of religion was only to keep men in awe. That Christ was a bastard....'" "He would be delighted to find Bruno calling Christ a carpenter and treating Greek and Christian legends, in the spaccio, on the same level, or to read in Ramus's *De Religions* that Moses was an Egyptian braggart and the Christians dunces and scoundrels there are direct traces of Bruno's and Machiavelli's influence in his plays."

Marlowe stayed at Cambridge for six and a half years. During this period, apart from absorbing classical knowledge he started his own creative work. Like most scholars he tried his hand at translation, besides composing poetry. "While he should have been studying Divinity, he was writing poetry." He translated Ovid's *Amores* and *Heroides*, and Lucan's *Pharsalia*. "In translating this first book, Marlowe appears for once to look at the centre of the Elizabethan world picture without eccentricity of judgment or tone. The emphasis in social and political, rather than personal...In Marlowe's Lucan, the vision of a world in confusion provokes some of the most deeply-felt writing.... In all this, the matter is of central and common Elizabethan interest, but the voice is distinctly and forcefully Marlowe's."

The translation of Ovid was important in the sense that it enabled him to gain mastery in writing rhymed couplets which makes his '*Hero and Leander*' a classic Elizabethan poem. The translation of Lucan in blank verse gave him mastery in a form which he was to introduce and establish as the vehicle of poetic dream. He translated the first look of Lucan's *Pharsalia* into blank verse; Since he was translating into blank verse...this gave him a tough apprenticeship in the art of blank verse. Here, in this stiff apprenticeship, is the origin of Marlowe's mighty line. Lucan helped Marlowe in another way. He found a strange kinship between his imagination and that of Lucan. Lucan "Let his eye range over the three continents, to the farthest limits where the legions had trod, and he poured forth a wealth of geo-graphical and ethnographical detail which was not lost on the author of *Tamburlaine*. His gaze, too, at times swept the heavens, and here again he touched an answering chord in the Cambridge student of cosmology."

This 'temperamental kinship' with Lucan, Ovid and other ancient masters, and a wilful and diligent apprenticeship gave Marlowe a necessary further vision into the world where lay his polestar, 'the Renaissance tradition.' But it brought him into conflict with the authorities at Cambridge. His bold translations were dangerous in a society governed by morals and manners expounded by archbishops. He did translate but, "it was hardly the sort of poetry the authorities would approve. They did not. Marlowe's translations of Ovid's elegies or 'Amores' achieved the distinction of being publicly burnt by the order of the Archbishop Canterbury and the Bishop of London, and Marlowe's translations from Ovid and Lucan are the work of an immature genius, but they are important for the influence exerted on his creative mind in his formative period. With Ovid and Lucan, Marlowe went to school."

Marlowe's experiments in poetic composition helped him when he started writing plays. The Elizabethan Age was rich in dramatic production, and Marlowe was attracted towards it. Cambridge curriculum encouraged the writings of original dramatic essays. Such an atmosphere at Cambridge perhaps goaded Marlowe to deviate from the Senecan tradition. He must have done a good deal of thinking before he wrote his first play, *Tamburlaine*. Evan probably persuaded him to discard the classical form of dramatic poetry and inspired him to write plays that were different in construction from Senecan plays. He had before him very few literary models. Upto that time England had not produced many dramatic works of high quality; there were the Miracle and Morality plays heavily over-burdened with didactic intent, there was the first attempt at tragedy, *Gorboduc* written in 1562, and there was Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy*, an imitation of Seneca's Revenge tragedies. Marlowe's contemporaries like Nashe and Greene were also writing plays. Professor Wright thinks that he collaborated with Nashe in writing the first draft of his first play. "Casting around for a subject for his first real drama. He may have collaborated in a first draft with Thomas Nashe of St. John's College, who from 1582 onwards, was at the University contemporaneously with Marlowe. Another dramatist with whom Kyd might have first struck acquaintance in Cambridge was Robert Greene." Boas says, Marlowe is more likely to have been influenced by the plays of Lylly dealing with classical subjects and acted by the children of the Chapel and of Paul. The name of Lylly has been so long associated with that of Marlowe as the first heir of his invention. Yet a close examination suggests that Marlowe's Cambridge studies and translations of Latin poetry may well have led him to the choice of the Scythian conqueror for his first play."

## 5.7 LET US SUM UP

Thus, Marlowe grew up in an atmosphere of drama both at school and at Cambridge for as the records show the Elizabethan men and women were in spirit more akin to drama and dramatic poetry than to any other form of literature-to attain than to contemplation. Wright says, "Early contact with the drama proved a formative

influence in the life of Marlowe, who was destined to create an entirely new dramatic form for the English stage and call into being a dramatic literature unsurpassed in the history of the world.” Marlowe had a very close association with the important University Wits, a privilege which Shakespeare did not have. In their company, he discussed and disputed what might have formed the source material, the thematic fabric and the philosophical nucleus of his great plays. The literary environmental conditions were thus like the furnace in which Marlowe the youngman was being shaped into an artist: a poet he was born and a dramatist he became. The stage was set for the great creator, who had instinctively been turning for authority to the Renaissance, to populate the Elizabethan stage with the Renaissance heroes of unusual aspirations, extraordinary dimensions and actions that would shock the Elizabethan out of orthodoxy into admiration.

### **5.8 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS**

1. How old was Marlowe when he produced *Tamburlaine*?

Ans. He produced *Tamburlaine* in 1587 when he was only 23 years old.

2. What was the cause of his early death?

Ans. He was stabbed in a drunken brawl and died wretchedly in 1593 at the age of 29.

3. What is Marlowesque drama?

Ans. It is one-man type of tragedy that revolves around one central personality consumed by the lust for power.

4. Name the four major dramas written by Marlowe.

Ans. The major dramas' are:

(i) *Tamburlaine*

(ii) *Dr. Faustus*

(iii) *Edward II*

(iv) *The Jew of Malta*

5. How was Marlowe initiated into the dramatic world?

Ans. The mysteries, miracles and moralities were popular in every town of England and they were patronized by the guilds.

6. What did his skeptical mind lead him to?

Ans. It led him to atheism.

### **5.9 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Write the themes of the four major plays of Marlowe in brief.

2. What do you know about the early age of Marlowe ?

3. How was Marlowe initiated into the dramatic world ?

4. Marlowe was a typical Elizabethan English man in the making. Discuss.

5. Discuss Marlowe as a symbol of free thought.

## 5.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

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**THE FAUSTUS LEGEND AND ITS ADAPTATION****STRUCTURE**

- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 6.3 The Legend
  - 6.3.0 Reformation and Renaissance
  - 6.2.1 Lutheranism and the Faustian Legend
  - 6.2.2 Faustus and Marlowe's England
  - 6.2.3 Popular Beliefs
- 6.4 Faustus
  - 6.4.0 Faustus : An Ambitious Man
  - 6.4.1 His Moral Degeneration
  - 6.4.2 His Tragic end
  - 6.4.3 His Thirst For Power
  - 6.4.4 Fall in Faustus' Character
  - 6.4.5 Faustus' Union with Helen
- 6.5 Structure and Dramatic Effect
- 6.6 Comic Sub-plot
- 6.7 Themes
- 6.8 Symbols
- 6.9 Motifs
- 6.10 Multiple Choice Questions
- 6.11 Self Assessment Questions
- 6.12 Suggested Readings

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The lesson will discuss the legend of Doctor Faustus, its origin and adaptation. The major themes and the structure and dramatic effect of the play.

## 6.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Understand the origins of the Faustian legend and how Marlowe adapted it.
2. Analyze the character traits of Dr. Faustus and his tragic downfall.
3. Identify and interpret key themes, symbols, and motifs in the play.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Explain the moral and philosophical implications of the Faustian bargain.
2. Evaluate Faustus's internal conflict, ambition, and tragic flaws.
3. Discuss the use of religious imagery, classical allusions, and symbolism in the play.

## 6.3 THE LEGEND

Although Marlowe's Doctor Faustus appeared in 1592, the legend is much older. Like all other Elizabethan dramatists, Marlowe also borrowed the plot of the play from one of the sources available to the dramatists of the day. The real historical personage, Faustus, is believed to have been born in southern Germany in 1480, perhaps in a village near Wurtemberg on Heidelberg, and died in the late 1530's at Staufen in Baden. A German account of his life appeared in 1587. This account was entitled Historia von D. Johan Fausten. The English version of this book was prepared by P. F. Gent and appeared perhaps the same year. One important aspect of the story is that the actual Faustus of Germany was a contemporary of Martin Luther (1483-1546), who launched the reformist movement of the Christian church. The movement came to be known as Reformation, which, along with the movement of the Renaissance, changed the course of life and civilization in Europe. Luther and Faustus lived in and responded to the same society, sometimes at fairly close quarters. Therefore, for an understanding of the personality and the issues raised by the pursuit of Doctor Faustus, it is important to understand the society, in which this person acquired the status of a legend. It was, obviously, the legendary Faustus who fascinated Marlowe, compelling him to write a play which has been an attraction of the ages in England and abroad.

### 6.3.0 Reformation and Renaissance

In the Germany of Faustus and Luther, the Humanist influence - an interest in and enthusiasm for the classical learning of the ancient Graeco-Roman period and the subsequent interest in education, reformation existed side by side. The Church governed the lives of the common folk, offering sacraments, pilgrimages, indulgences, and the intercession of the saints as a solace for personal disquiet. People believed in the existence

of spirits, which thronged the countryside. Life on earth was regarded by the people of this German society as a preparation for the next world of Heaven and Hell. **To ensure one's salvation the best way was to renounce the earthly or material world and join a monastery. Martin Luther also tried this religious recipe.** By an accident of life, he was struck down by lightning in 1505. After the accident, he decided to become a Monk. But the profession gave no relief to his tormented conscience, which kept telling him that he was a sinner unworthy of the presence of God who is just and holy. A visit to Rome only convinced him of the levity and corruption in the church. He reflected on the sacrament of penance, which requires that he confess his sins to a priest before receiving absolution, but that only made him aware of his being a sinner. He came to the conclusion that sinfulness was not simply a series of the acts of sin, but an inescapable condition. This further drove him into deep despair. In 1511, he became a professor of Divinity at the university of Wittenberg, where his job was to expound the teaching of the Bible. **On studying the New Testament directly in depth, he felt that its message of spiritual freedom through trust in God's love was very different from the orthodox religion of ritualistic, penitential and ascetic practices and blind submission to the priesthood. He felt revolted against these practices, he decided to raise a banner of revolt against it.**

Luther thought of church reform in terms of education. He pleaded that learners as well as common people should study original documents of Christianity in the Bible. They should avoid reading later commentaries and interpretation of the Bible, which only distorted its teaching and made religion a matter of fear and superstition instead of love and reconciliation. **In 1517, Luther objected to a sanction of Pope, by which Indulgences were to be sold, permitting purchase of penance by people. Luther called it commercialization of religion and a debasement of its seriousness. This set in the movement of Reformation. Very soon, it led to the formation of National Churches (free from the domain of the Church of Rome) in several European countries, including England. By insisting upon individual's direct communion with God through Christ, without the need for priest or ritual, Luther recovered a basis for the self-confidence of the individual in the face of his own guilt and anxiety.**

This central element in Luther's teaching is of great significance in the study of Doctor Faustus. In fact, the German Faustbuch has been recognized by scholars as a piece of Lutheran writing. The narrative of the German book goes even beyond the Lutheran position, and so does Marlowe's play. It is important to note that Faustus taught at the University of Erfurt, which was Luther's own place of residence. And like Luther, Faust came against hostile authorities. He was expelled from the cities of Nuremberg and Ingolstadt. Faustus also lived for a while at Wittenberg, where Luther was the Professor of Divinity. This very city became the mise-en-scene of the Faustbuch. Like Faustus, Luther believed in personal encounters with demonic forces, and had experienced extreme despair, from which he finally recovered by faith in God's love and by a life of meaningful hard work. In 1527, Luther wrote, "The Devil can so beleaguer a heart, so terrify it, that it will avoid God, become His enemy, and blaspheme, for to a miserable conscience there is nothing other than that God, devil, death, sin, hell, and all creatures are eternal unceasing enemies.... For more than a week I was close to the gates of death and hell. I trembled in all my members. Christ was wholly lost. I was shaken by desperation and blaspheme of God."

**The cases of Faustus and Luther represent two very different faces of Renaissance individualism. In their different ways, both challenged the orthodoxy of the Christian society of Germany.** Consequently, each had to face his personal devils. Luther survived in integrity, Faustus did not. Ernst Troeltsch, a German sociologist, has made out a difference between the individualism of Renaissance. In his view, the Protestant emphasis on freedom of conscience in the matters of belief is accompanied by an emphasis on secular

vocation as a means relating oneself to mankind through one's work. This work of secular vocation is to be performed in a spirit of duty, earnestness, and industry. Thus, individualism of conscience and conviction is moderated by social concern. On the other hand, **the Renaissance individualism is of greater extreme. Its ideal is uomo universale, which means the universal man, who is a man without vocation, who receives freedom for self-development and self-achievement in the universal potential of his talents through joining the ruling powers. This distinction holds good in the case of Luther and Faustus also.** While Luther represents the Protestant individualism, Faustus represents the Renaissance individualism. Faustus tries different vocations, uses his magic as a means of self-aggrandizement, and hob-nobs with the ruling powers. All these activities of Faustus measure up to the model of the Renaissance ideal of individualism. Burckhardt's classic study, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860), supports Troeltsch's theory. In fact, the latter was inspired by the former. Burckhardt provides with enough evidence to show that there was in the Italian Renaissance a lack of moral scruples in the individualistic pursuit of political and personal goals. At the same time, the tone of the Renaissance thought before Machiavelli was idealistic. Certain significant Italian writings even imbibed a new sense of man's capacity for self-expression and self-expansion to older religious values, including self-restraint. An example of such a document is an oration by Picodella Mirandole, "On the Dignity of Man." It is regarded as a representative of the Renaissance view on man. In the very beginning of his piece, Mirandola gives his version of the creation of Adam. In his view, the Creator (God) completed the structure of nature before creating man. He decided that man should be an indeterminate and composite being, who represents the whole range of nature within himself. His address to man is important:

*I have placed thee at the centre of the world, that from there thou mayest more conveniently look around and see whatsoever is in the world. Neither heavenly nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal have we made thee. Thou, like a judge appointed for being honourable, art the moulder and maker of thyself; thou mayst sculpt thyself into whatever shape thou dost prefer. Thou canst grow downward into the lower natures, which are brutes. Thou canst again grow upward from thy soul's reason into the higher natures which are divine.*

### 6.3.1 Lutheranism and the Faustian Legend:

Several versions of Faustus come from the Luther circle, Luther himself mentions him in his Table-Talk as an assistant to the devil. Luther's humanist friend, Melanchthon, who was university teacher at Wittenberg in 1521, also mentions him as a magician who met with a violent death. As a university official, Melanchthon was also entrusted with the duty of quelling the "public tumults at tight" caused by bands of unruly learners. Interestingly, Faustbuch places Faustus as the central figure of a reveling and irreverent student group. Here, Marlowe's source is apparent, as much as are the others, we have been talking about in this lesson. The Faustus legend, in fact, goes back to 1507, when his mention begins to be made in the letters of the humanists. One of the more striking of these mentions is in the Sermones Conviviales (1548) by a Protestant preacher, Jonhannes Gast. Soon after his death in the late 1530's he seems to have become in the folk imagination a leader of carnival and an example of levity and buffoonery. He began to be used as an example for the moral instruction of reformed Germany.

The first complete life of Doctor Faustus in print was published by Johan Spies in Frankfurt. It came to be known as Spies Faustbuch. It is almost identical with an earlier manuscript of the 70's, written by Wolfenbuttel.

This earlier version combines sensational legendary story with awful warning to the student community as well as to the world in general. The English Historie of 1592, an English translation of the Spies edition, contains several themes and episodes from the medieval literature of festivity, which have been transferred to Faustus. But it begins and ends as a serious religious tract on the dangers of impiety of which Faustus is an outstanding example. The devil figures in Faustbuch were an active part of the folk imagination in the Germany of the 16th century. In fact, there is a whole farrago of comic, grotesque, and moralizing tales, which were available to Marlowe to choose from. Faustbuch reflects several kinds of dramatic spectacle and entertainment common on the German streets and in student circles.

### **6.3.2 Faustus and Marlowe's England:**

When Marlowe came to write his famous play on the legend of Doctor Faustus, he looked through all this wealth of material available to him, large part of which stood translated into English. His penetration into the character of Faustus is remarkable. He surpassed all his sources and made the eccentric man of magic, an immortal figure. Marlowe borrowed part of his parapharnelia for the plot of Doctor Faustus from the England of his time also. Trials of witches, for instance, was still a living phenomenon in Marlowe's England. Diabolism or worship of the devil, which also involved often making a pact with him, used to be one of the accusations made at trials for witchcraft from the eleventh century onwards. Even the view of magic in the medieval thinking carried a latent tension between human and demonic power. Marlowe presents both in a highly dramatized form. He poses in his play the question: who was really in power, magician or devil? In early records of witch-trials, the devil was considered subservient to the witch. But in the fifteenth century trials, the accused was presented as having made ? himself over to the devil. Although not so common as in certain other countries of Europe, such as Germany, accusations of pact with the devil were made in certain cases. Literary accounts of such phenomenon did add to the scare of witchcraft among the educated. Obviously, the sources that Marlowe seems to have used for his play were literary rather than oral. Also, perhaps, these sources were classical and continental rather than romantic and native.

### **6.3.3 Popular Beliefs**

Just as the English society of Marlowe's time began to pay attention to Faustus legend, a controversy was brewing between Puritans and Moderates in the Anglican church over the legitimacy of devils who had possessed the minds of the victims. Much publicity was given to certain cases of this type. A famous instance was that of a law student called Briggs, who in 1574 was afflicted by melancholia after hearing a religious discourse on unpardonable sin. He is said to have fallen into a trance. At last, he himself was prevailed upon to command the Devil to depart in God's name, and his troubles were over. The exorcist in this case was the famous Puritan writer, John Foxe, whose writings made available to Marlowe, the story of Pope Bruno in Doctor Faustus. By 1580's the custom of exorcism had spread among the Puritans. In 1589, an exorcist was prosecuted by the High Commission for fraud. Even in the Roman Catholic circles of England the practice was in vogue at the time.

The Dutch humanist Erasmus, in his book, On Preparing to Die (1532), had presented three vivid dialogues with the Devil. Later William Perkins of Cambridge, a powerful Puritan preacher, in his A Discourse of Conscience (1596) also presented a dialogue between Satan and a man whom he tempts to lose his faith. Decidedly, Marlowe, a Cambridge University Wit, knew all this, and he made use of it in his play. Similarly, Dr. John Dee's example, who studied law and medicines, studied abroad and lectured, and was under suspicion for

being a conjurer or magician, is also said to be an immediate source for Marlowe. There is no end of the source material for this legendary figure of Doctor Faustus and the practices he adopted. Marlowe being a university scholar did make use of whatever appeared to him. But more important than sources is his own art; or what he made of his sources.

## 6.4 FAUSTUS

### 6.4.0 Faustus : An Ambitious Man

Faustus is an ambitious scholar, although with a humble birth. He has developed an evil desire for magic. He thinks about the choices available to him for a life of ultimate value. He considers and rejects philosophy. Similarly, he considers and rejects the disciplines of medicine, law, and divinity. He finally settles on magic. At this stage, arrives a Good Angel to dissuade Faustus from his choice of magic. He is advised to look to God. At the same time comes a Bad Angel, who encourages Faustus to continue with his plan to learn and practice magic. Fully convinced that magic is the best means to achieve power, he approaches two magicians. Their names are Valdes and Cornelius. They encourage him to study the art of magic. Faustus now feels confident that with the help of these two master magicians he can conjure spirits. On hearing his course of action, two scholar-friends of Faustus approach the university Rector for help in dissuading Faustus from the damnable practice. But Faustus makes fast progress, and in his very first attempt conjures, Mephistophilis. Since his shape is horrible (grotesque), on Faustus's request it is changed to that of an old Franciscan Friar. Faustus sends Mephistophilis to Lucifer, ruler of Hell, with his terms, which are that Faustus will sell his soul to the devil in return for 24 years of power.

### 6.4.1 His Moral Degeneration

Faustus also has an apprentice, whose name is Wagner. He also feels confident that he has learnt the art of magic. He enlists the service of a poor Clown with the promise that he would teach the Clown the black art of magic. Mephistophilis returns from Hell with the news that the contract is cleared by Lucifer. Now, Faustus asks questions about the cosmos. Once he has a temporary relapse into repentance, but his diabolical agents return to reaffirm the bargain. He then vows his allegiance to the bond and is rewarded with the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins. Now, Faustus and Mephistophilis make a visit to Rome and appear in Pope's private chamber. When Pope begins eating a lavish banquet, Faustus, now invisible, torments him. Finally, the Pope orders that the spirits causing disorder be communicated. But the clerics who try to do it are beaten and tormented by Faustus. The third Chorus tells about the spread of Faustus's fame throughout the world. Now Faustus arrives at the court of Emperor Charles V. Here he brings forth the spirits of Alexander, Darius, and Alexander's Paramour. The Emperor feels delighted at the magic show of Faustus. Benvolio, a nobleman at the Emperor's court, shows disbelief in Faustus's power of magic. After Faustus has shown his power, Benvolio is punished with a pair of horns on his head. But the Emperor orders for the removal of the horns. Next, Faustus visits the court of the Duke of Vanholt. Here, he performs more magic. He provides the Duke's pregnant wife with a dish of ripe grapes. Interrupted by the four men he has fooled or cheated, Faustus silences each with his magic, which delights all at the court.

### 6.4.2 His Tragic End

Now, Faustus returns home. He entertains his scholar-friends with a feast and the magical vision of Helen of Troy. All his friends agree that Helen was the most beautiful woman ever born. After all have departed, Faustus is visited by an old man, who tries to persuade him to repent. Faustus refuses to repent. On the contrary, he asks Mephistophilis to make Helen his paramour. Helen comes in all her beauty. She is escorted by two Cupids. On seeing Helen, Faustus forgets his salvation. Now, Faustus's time of 24 years is almost complete. The devils who have served him now savor the agony he will suffer in his last moments. Faustus undergoes great suffering. He now feels that he cannot receive the grace of God, no matter how hard he tries. First of all, the eleventh hour strikes, then the half hour, then midnight. This is followed by Faustus's desperate cries as the devils approach to take him away to Hell. When his friends come in the morning to meet Faustus, they find nothing but his torn limbs, which they promise to bury. The fourth chorus laments that a man with such fine possibilities was so utterly lost.

One of the questions raised about the character of Faustus is: once he has acquired the magical powers of doing whatever he wishes to do, why does he not pursue goals worthy of his professed ideals? Why does he abandon these without a qualm of conscience? Why does he show himself content to amuse the Emperor with conjuring tricks? Why does he play childish pranks on Pope? It seems quite natural to raise these questions regarding the character of Faustus, for they point to an inconsistency of a vital nature. What Marlowe seems to have done is to show us the betrayal of ideals, or the lapse into luxury and buffoonery, on the part of Faustus after he has signed the bond with the devil. Well, all that happens to Faustus after the bond is signed, or all that he does after that unholy agreement, is decidedly the devil's work, not of the scholar Faustus. This is precisely what the playwright has attempted to show in Faustus; that once you have chosen the devil's company, you will be doing the devilish deeds, not the good ones, which you would have, had you not fallen in the devil's company.

After the bond has been signed, whatever Faustus does cannot, and should not, be measured by human standards, because he ceases to be a human character. Who but a fool would dream that any power but evil could be won by a bargain with evil? Not that Faustus is a fool. But a wise man tempted by the lure of power can become worse than a fool. He gets blinded by the dazzle of the vanity fair he wants at his command. Once given to the ways of the devil he has no benefit of human understanding or human considerations. **His mind works in lower regions and only the evil doings come to his mind. Also, once he has gained power, he gets corrupted in the ways of the world. As the saying goes, power corrupts, and the absolute power corrupts absolutely. Marlowe knew the nature of the evil power of magic he was putting into the hands of his hero, as also the inevitable curse it carried with it.** Of course, the corruption of character in Faustus is not an automatic outcome of his pact with the devil. He has an earnest desire to know truth. His means may be wrong, his goal is not ignoble or evil. Marlowe also casts about the character of Faustus the glamour of the Marlowean hero, which makes him superior to others, gives him an aura of a superman, and a pride of an imperial sort. But all these factors notwithstanding, the fact remains that the seeds of decay are in his character from the start. How else should he come to make his fatal bargain with the devil? We know how from the beginning Faustus shows a strong passion for knowledge as also a lust for riches, pleasure, and power.

Faustus may for wealth: be less single-minded than Barbas, he shares the latters thirst

*I'll have them fly to India for gold,*

*Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,*

*And search all corners of the new-found world*

*For pleasant fruits and princely delicacies...*

Also, Faustus has an inordinate ambition, like any politician has, for power. And like a politician, his patriotism is only a garb for hiding his ambition :

*He will Chase the Prince of Parma from our land*

*And reign sole king of all our provinces...*

#### 6.4.3 His Thirst for Power

His ambition for power knows no bounds. Like Tamburlaine, he would like to conquer the entire world. Although born with humble origin, like Tamburlaine, his hunger for power is insatiable. Maybe, in both the cases the hunger is bred by the humble origin itself. See how he is impatient to have the entire earth beneath his feet:

*I'll join the hills that bind the Afric shore*

*And make that country continent to Spain,*

*And both contributory to my crown:*

*The Emperor shall not live but by my leave,*

*Nor any potentate in Germany.*

Here, Faustus clearly emerges a prototype of Hitler who, mad for power, launched the World War II to have all countries under his supreme control. Faustus's air of superiority is no less frightening than that of Hitler. The Marlowean hero aspires to become the Jove of the earth. As Jove is in Greek mythology, the God of gods, he would like to be the Emperor of emperors. As the Bad Angel reveals the inside of the hero's mind,

*Be thou on earth, as Jove is in the sky,*

*Lord and commander of these elements.*

Faustus has also an inordinate fascination for a life of sensuousness. His early demand to "live in all voluptuousness" anticipates his later carnal desires:

*Whilst I am here on earth let me be cloyed*

*With all things that delight the heart of man;*

*My four and twenty years of liberty*

*I'll spend in pleasure and in dalliance*

He seems to be fully aware, though, that "the god thou serv'st is thine own appetite." He is greatly dazzled by the unlimited power of magic. And he is alive to his own weakness for things of beauty and pleasure which to him are a joy forever. After he signs his bond with the devil in his own blood, we can notice several stages of a gradual deterioration in his character. His first interview with Mephistophilis strikes a note of earnest, if slightly skeptical, inquiry with which he enters on his quest for knowledge. He eagerly questions about hell, to which the

spirit replies. But the moment the bond is signed, we can detect a change in the character of Faustus. His skeptical levity takes on a more truculent and jeering tone. When he asks Mephistophilis, "Where is the place that men call hell?" the latter replies:

*Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it:  
Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
Or In being deprived of everlasting bliss?  
Hell hath no limits, nor is circumscribed  
In one self place, but where we are is hell,  
And where hell is, there must we ever be:  
And to conclude, when all the world dissolves  
And every creature shall be purified,  
All places shall be hell that is not heaven.*

#### 6.4.4 Fall in Faustus's Character

We see a further fall in the character of Faustus in the next scene when there arises a quarrel on the spirit's refusal to say who made the world. This leads to the intervention of Lucifer and the "pastime" of the Seven Deadly Sins. Faustus is here no less delighted with the dance of the devils that offered him crowns with rich apparel on his signing the bond. His further degradation is well indicated by his demanding "the fairest maid in Germany, for I am wanton and lascivious." Until this point, Faustus has not left Wittenberg, and emphasis has been rather on the hollowness of his bargain in respect of any intellectual enlightenment than on the actual degradation of his character. As yet only his childish pleasure in the devil- dance and the pageant of the sins hints at the depth of vulgar triviality into which he is doomed to descend. In company with Mephistophilis he now launches forth into the world. However, his dragon-flights "to find the secrets of astronomy," and "to prove cosmography" only land him at last in the Pope's privy-chamber to "take some part of holy Peter's feast, and to live with dalliance in "the view of rarest things and royal courts, of kings." It is true that in the more complete text of 1616, the rescue of "Holy Bruno," who is an imperial candidate for the papal throne, lends a more serious touch to the sheer horseplay of the Roman scenes in the 1604 version. Even the "horning" episode at the Emperor's court is at least developed into some dramatic coherence. But this only brings out more clearly and pointedly the progressive fatuity of Faustus's career. His career sinks to the depth of buffoonery in the clowning and conjuring tricks at Anhalt.

Some readers have argued that the gradual deterioration in the character of Faustus and the prostitution of his powers stand out less clearly than they should. This has been attributed by others to the dramatist's negligent handling of a theme that failed to kindle his wayward inspiration. It can also be attributed partly to the inaptitude of his collaborator. One also notices that there is something strange and peculiar not-only in Faustus's situation, but also in his character. Once he has committed himself to the bond with the devil, he is in a position of having

of his own free will renounced salvation. This much seems quite clear. But much less clear is the inner change Faustus has brought upon himself. There is no doubt that Faustus, through his bargain with the devil, has himself taken on the infernal nature. At the same time, it is also made clear that Faustus, despite the bond, still retains his human soul. This throws a fresh light upon the question, whether Faustus can be saved by repentance, which continues to be debated throughout the play. Of course, Faustus is shown repenting forever. He is also shown recanting through fear of bodily torture and death. The point is forever disputed by the Good Angel and Bad Angel, who represent the two sides of the character of Faustus as well as of everyone.

There are two passages in the play which are particularly significant in respect of the key question: whether Faustus can be saved by repentance. The first passage is the following :

*Good Angel : Faustus, repent; yet God will pity thee.*  
*Bad Angel : Thou art a spirit; God cannot pity thee.*  
*Faustus : Who buzzeth in mine ears, I am a spirit?*  
*Be I a devil, yet God may pity me;*  
*Yea, God will pity me if I repent.*  
*Bad Angel : Ay, but Faustus never shall repent.*

Here, it is clear that the Bad Angel is trying to evade the issue. The question remains unanswered. Later in the same scene, when Faustus calls on Christ to save his soul, Lucifer replies with remarkable logic:

*Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just:*  
*There's none but I have interest in the same.*

Thus, the question of Faustus's salvation is left nicely poised in doubt.

A significant change takes place in the character of Faustus after he returns among his learners at Wittenberg. It is here that he faces the final reckoning, and it is by this act that he attains some measure of heroic dignity. The passage of time has wrought a change. Faustus's faithful apprentice, Wagner, gets puzzled at change:

*I wonder what he means; if death were nigh,*  
*He would not banquet and carouse and swill*  
*Among the learners, as even now he doth...*

Decidedly, this is a very different Faustus from the fearless teacher his learners used to know, whose even a slight absence from the class caused serious concern -

*I wonder what's become of Faustus, that wont*  
*to make our schools ring with sic probo.*

Two qualities seem to remain permanent with Faustus: One, his genuine tenderness towards his learners; two, his love of beauty in nature and in art : ???

*Have not I made blind Homer sing to me*  
*Of Alexander's love and Oenon's death?*

*And hath not he that built the walls of Thebes  
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp  
Made music -?*

#### 6.4.5 Faustus's Union with Helen

The climax in the career of Faustus comes in his union with the immortal beauty of Helen. Here, Marlowe's measures are admittedly the most lovely that flowed from his lyre. It raises also an important question: Is Faustus's sensitive appreciation of Helen's beauty something that has survived uncorrupted from his days of innocence? There seems no evidence to this effect in the austere student of the early scenes. Is it then some strange flowering of his moral decay? This seems to be a greater possibility. What, after all, is that "ravishing sound" if not the symphony of hell?

*Made music with my Mephistophilis !*

And Helen, what of her? Here, for sure, we come to the central theme of the damnation of Faustus. The lines, in which he addresses Helen, are some of the most famous in the English language:

*Was this the face that launched a thousand ships  
And burnt the topless towers of Illium?  
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss! ...  
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,  
And all is dross that is not Helen.*

In these lines, Marlowe's uncertain genius soared to its height. But the splendour of these lines obscures the real nature of the situation. "Her lips suck forth my soul," says Faustus. What is Helen? Her position in the play is made clear by the scene, in which she appears the second time. Urged by the Old Man, Faustus has attempted a last revolt. As usual, he has been cowed into submission and has renewed the blood-bond.

Faustus sinks so low near the play's end that he begs revenge upon his would be saviour -

*Torment, sweet friend, that base and aged man,  
That durst dissuade me from thy Lucifer,  
With greatest torments that our hell affords.*

And, in the first place, it is as a safeguard against relapse that he seeks possession of Helen. Love and revenge seem to be similar insurances against salvation. "Helen" then is a "spirit," and in this play a spirit means a devil. In making Helen his paramour Faustus commits the sin of demoniality, that is, bodily intercourse with demons. The implication of Faustus's action is made clear in the remarks of the Old Man and the Angels. Immediately before the Helen episode, the Old Man called on Faustus to repent:

*Ah, Doctor Faustus, that I might prevail  
To guide thy steps into the way of life !*

But with Faustus' union with Helen the nice balance between his possible salvation and an imminent damnation is upset. The Old Man, who has seen the union, recognizes the inevitable:

*Accursed Faustus, miserable man,  
That from thy soul exclud'st the grace of heaven  
And fliest the throne of his tribunal-seat!*

The Good Angel says the same: "Oh thou hast lost celestial happiness." And Faustus himself, still haunted in his final agony by the sure prospect of the salvation being out of his reach -

*See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmaments  
One drop would save my soul -*

In his talk with his learners, Faustus shows a great clarity of vision: "A surfeit of deadly sin, that hath damned both body and soul... Faustus's offence can never be pardoned: the Serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus." This clear vision is also echoed by Mephistophilis: "Ay, Faustus, now hast thou no hope of heaven!"

Thus, Faustus dies damned, unsaved by the grace of God. Marlowe's masterly dramatization of the fall and damnation of Faustus, coupled with the grandeur of verse, has made immortal both the figure of Faustus as well as the tragic drama that makes a presentation of this figure. Marlowe's hero remains more memorable than even Shakespeare's Macbeth who, too, chooses the course of damnation. Both Marlowe and Shakespeare use their powers of poetry to enable their villain- heroes. Both succeed remarkably because of the excellence of their art. The dazzle of their poetry blinds us to the dark interior of their heroes.

#### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. The Faustian legend revolves around a man who sells his \_\_\_ for knowledge and power.
2. Faustus makes a pact with \_\_\_, the devil's servant.
3. A recurring symbol in *Doctor Faustus* is the \_\_\_, representing the passing of time.
4. The play explores the Renaissance tension between medieval religion and emerging \_\_\_ thought.

#### Answers

1. soul
2. Mephistopheles
3. clock
4. humanist / secular

## 6.5 STRUCTURE AND DRAMATIC EFFECT

### Aristotle's Views

By plot or structure of a literary work we mean the organization of the material into a coherent whole. **It all started with Aristotle who, in his Poetics, says that plot is the soul of tragedy, and prescribes**

**various elements which would make a plot perfect.** In his view, episodic plots are the worst, because they are not unified. He also does not approve of double plots, where action runs into two or more directions. He speaks of plot in terms of an action of certain magnitude with a beginning, middle, and end, where all the three are interlinked, one leading to the other. For him, linking of different incidents on the principle of probability is very important. **Also important for Aristotle is the principle of three unities, namely, of place, time and action.** In his view, while time should not be too long nor too short for a play which is to be acted in about three hours. Hence, the action should be confined to a period not exceeding one year. Similarly, there should no be shifting of scenes from one place to another. For instance, the scene should not move from Rome to London, or from London to Paris. All scenes should take place, if not at the same place, at least on places near each other. As for the unity of action, he insists on the different incidents being a chain with interlinking of each with the other, moving from beginning to middle to end logically and coherently. Making characters and incidents life-like is another virtue of a good plot.

### **Act Division**

Gradually, tradition developed in which dramatists came to insist on the division of action into acts and scenes. **The Roman critics like Horace and the dramatists like Terence insisted on dividing a play's action into five acts. The Greeks did not have any such division, nor does Aristotle insist in Poetics on any such a split. But the Elizabethans came to prefer the division of action into scenes. Evidence shows that the act division was not there at that time. It was only later in the seventeenth century that the five-act division was imposed on the plays of Shakespeare, Marlowe and other Elizabethan dramatists.** Also, mere division does not constitute any kind of structure of a play. Such a division does not impart any unity. Unity has to be sought only in terms of relation between interests or themes, even between images and motives.

The act-division of Marlowe's Doctor Faustus is arbitrary. The texts available to us in the different manuscripts or editions of the play do not show any such division. The play, as it has been handed down to us, is only a stream or sequence of scenes with various choruses studded in between them. In fact, even the order of the scenes cannot be said to be the same as it obtained at the time. the play was staged in Marlowe's time. The arrangement might have been altered later by the actors or the managers who staged it after Marlowe's death. On the arrangement of scenes, there has been no unanimity among critics. Different critics hold different views on the subject.

Most critics, in fact, are of the opinion that several scenes in the text available to us were later added by others; they were not there in the original manuscript of the play composed by Marlowe. There is also an argument to the effect that more than one scene of the original text seem to be missing. In terms of the Aristotalian beginning, middle, and end, we can divide Doctor Faustus, without much effort. For there seems to be a clear line of development of the action focused on the action related to a single character. From the opening scene to the end of Act II, Scene 2, which covers the hero's initial examination of choices to the signing of the bond with the devil, can be said to be the beginning of the play. The middle of the play's action is spread from Act II, Scene 3 to Act IV, Scene 6, which concerns the effects of magic for all those involved in it. The end or the last part of the play's plot can be said to spread from Act V, Scene 1 to the last scene of that act, which reveals the dire consequences of Faustus' bargain with the devil in personal terms. For an understanding of Marlowe's play, we need to examine the relationship of these three parts to see whether they do make a coherent action, a whole, and do not remain episodic or unrelated marring the unity.

Some readings of the play have insisted on the linear progress of Faustus from temptation to damnation. Others have sought to find a coherent theological framework which Marlowe is supposed to have used for imparting unity to his work. The history of Doctor Faustus is decidedly not linear, which we may like to make it for our convenience as readers. Also, Marlowe's play derives its dramatic power from its conflict between doubt and faith, not from any religious framework. There is no single theological perspective which Marlowe seems to have adopted or embodied in his play. In fact, the play seems to juxtapose various theological viewpoints, and none seems to dominate the dramatic work. As in Shakespeare's mature plays, say King Lear, dramatic necessity dictates or determines the induction of a particular viewpoint. One illustration can clarify the dramatic method used by Marlowe. Pope Adrian is not an attractive figure, but Faustus chooses Bruno who is still in the Catholic framework. At the same time, the low tricks that Faustus and Mephostophilis play upon the Pope indicate an anti-Catholic stance. Obviously, the dramatic juxtaposition of the two only suggests ambivalence. Those, who search for the religious perspective of the dramatist by examining the play, or by applying one perspective to both Marlowe and his hero, do gross injustice to the dramatic art of Marlowe as well as his intellectual integrity.

No doubt, Marlowe was keenly aware of the religious controversies of his times. The play's intellectual range as well as its complex vision are demonstrated by the dramatist through a conscious manipulation of the contesting viewpoints represented by the Calvinists, the Lutherians, and the Catholics. **The best way to approach the text of Marlowe's play is to view it as a study of the tension between the Renaissance or secular view of the possibilities of man's potential and the Medieval or Christian view of man's limitations. Faustus stands at the crossroads of the Medieval and the Renaissance with all the perplexities attendant on a crossing of opposing ideas.** The fresh allurements on the one side and the old commandments on the other pull him into opposite directions. His tragedy is caused, not by the possibilities available to him in an open-minded approach to life, but by the inherited legacy which still sticks to him. He is not able to free himself from the dark world of his medieval heritage. The contradiction, which proves fatal, arises from his Renaissance goals on the one hand and the medieval means on the other. The goals and the means do not square up with each other. His power of language reaches ahead of time.

If viewed from another angle, the great strength of Faustus lies in his power of disputation. He is a talker of the highest order. In this view, Doctor Faustus becomes a kind of commentary on the art of rhetoric as it was blossoming forth in England during the 1580's. In some respects, the power of magic and that of imagination are related to each other. Of course, the two are also critically differentiated in certain respects. The language of magic has its limitations, just as its uses. Magic permits Faustus to explore the cosmos, but it does not empower him to change it. Imagination, on the other hand, can make a new world. As Philip Sidney suggested, poetry can create a "golden" world, a "utopia," that might be best. This is the way Faustus looks at it in the beginning. But magic stifles imagination and confines it. The tragedy of Faustus is that he fails to see it even near the end.

Not notwithstanding all these aspects, however, one characteristic of the play's structure is clear. Faustus, the play's hero, dominates it from beginning to end. No other character gets a chance to step into the spotlight for a full exposure. **In fact, all the characters in the play except Doctor Faustus are flat. They are only used as means towards the one and only end of the play, which is to unfold the round and complex character of the hero.** One can call the play's structure as unipolar, in which the entire edifice is erected around the only pillar standing at its centre. Faustus stands above all particular themes. In other words, all themes in the play issue from the personality of the hero. In revolving, as Faustus does, between the utter extremes of passion, insight and poetry, he becomes a cosmos himself. He represents man's universe of possibilities. That is why he is grand as

well as hateful, poetic as well as petty, cruel as well as pathetic, brilliant as well as foolish. He is large enough to represent multitudinous dimensions of humanity.

One of the controversies about the structure of Doctor Faustus has been the nature of the plot. While some readers have viewed it as a progression from the hero's pride and ambition to his phased fall, others have seen the movement of the plot as circular, ending where it begins, without any progress at all. But the problematic point in the structure is the play's middle, which is spread over a period of twenty four years that lapse between the time Faustus signs the bond with the devil and his tragic end in utter damnation. Readers have found it hard to accept the scenes of long digression in the middle portion of Marlowe's play. These digressive scenes are predominantly comic, which fill the middle Acts III and IV. One of the more favoured explanations has been in terms of the play's dependence on *The Damnable Life*, on the need to entertain an audience with a play of a certain length without long monotony on guilt and damnation. It has also been explained in terms of the play's theme of vast expectations disappointed, of powers frittered away in frivolity. And yet it (the middle portion of the play) continues to be questioned in terms of its irreconcilability with the tragic beginning and ending of the play's plot. Here, the critical contention is that there are better ways of presenting boredom, than by being bored, or triviality than by being trivial. But there have also been readers like Goethe (who also wrote his famous *Faust*) who is credited with the remark, "How greatly is it all planned!"

One of the interesting studies made in this regard is by David Bevington. His study concerns the influence of the Tudor practice of doubling or tripling of parts by members of the popular dramatic Troupes on the structure of the moral play. The practice is said to have led to alternation of scenes consisting of different groups of characters, and effects of symmetry. These comic figures used to be a part of the historical setting. They would dwell in alternate scenes that comment satirically on the main action of the play. Theatre in Marlowe's time did have more actors than the conventional five of the traveling popular troupes. The clowning scenes in Doctor Faustus which involve the hero's comic servant, Wagner, are precisely of this type. We see in these scenes the 'low' magic of man parodying the 'high' magic of the master. All the same, this constitutes only one layer of the comic matter in the play. These scenes of the middle portion of the play's plot overtake the main action; the play's plot collapses into the underplot. The seeds of this collapse can be seen in the person of Faustus himself who shows traces of the Vice about him in his universalized acquaintance of evil and his penchant for practical humour.

## 6.6 COMIC SUB-PLOT

These comic scenes of the sub-plot or underplot of the play are said to descend from those of *Combyses*, *Apius* and *Virginia*, and *Horsetes*, where there are rustics and servants, who perpetuate something of the Vice's attendants. They were considered, quite conventionally, as a "foil" to the main plot. They were also viewed as "comic relief" in the tragic drama of the age. In our own times, the dominant tendency in the critical readings of the play has been to view these comic scenes, not as digression or relief, but as functional to the main plot. They become functional in various ways, by offering parody or burlesque of the main plot, by offering choric commentary in a more serious form, or by offering reinforcing contrast to the main intent of the play. This approach to the comic scenes in tragedy goes back to De Quincey's brilliant essay on the knocking scene in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. That pioneering insight set the approach for subsequent interpretations of the Elizabethan tragedies, including Doctor Faustus. In the same vein, the comic scenes of Marlowe's play have been viewed as both an effect of, and a parodic analogue to, the preceding episode in the career of Faustus. Thus, the comic middle of the play

is interpreted as an assimilation of the parodic effect of the subplot into the main plot and the gradual descent of the main plot into the subplot.

### **Relevance of Middle Comic Scenes :**

In another attempt to offer an explanation for the presence of the middle comic scenes in Doctor Faustus, a comparison has been drawn between Marlowe's play and those of the theatre of the Absurd. The relevant parallel seen here is in the common dramatic strategy of breaking the unity and concentration of the tragic effect, considered artificial and unrealistic by the theatre of the absurd. Thus, the reader response or that of the audience to the hero, the centre of the play, is unsettled or decentred by the alternation of the scenes of delusion followed by discomfiture through realism. Neither of the two impulses is allowed to dominate or give way to the other. Each is allowed to co-exist with the other. As a result, a state of mind is produced in the audience which is at once contradictory and yet profoundly true of feeling and thinking about the play's central concern, the fulfillment of will. Thus, more than one explanations have been offered for the relevance of the middle scenes, to show how they are not digressionary, but are functional in producing the intended dramatic effect.

Further, there are critics who have not only found these middle scenes relevant to the play's structure, but also an instance of Marlowe's innovation in dramaturgy. David Palmer, for instance, has emphasized the originality of Marlowe's contribution to the Elizabethan dramaturgy. By adding these middle scenes, it is argued, Marlowe transforms the stage into an illusion of a vast world embracing heaven, hell, and earth. This recalls the scope of the medieval cycle plays. Marlowe maintains this illusion, which the medieval drama was never able to do, through language as well as action. In a way, Marlowe creates Sidney's 'golden world'. At the same time, he defies Sidney's humanistic structure by not observing the unities and by mingling the comic with the tragic. Yet magical grandeur is only half of Marlowe's vein. The other is shrinkage to cramping dimensions, as Faustus realizes that he has been trapped.

Another praise for the structure of Doctor Faustus has come from C. L Barber, who has related the openness of its plot to the new kind of stage for which Marlowe wrote. In fact, Marlowe himself had created this new kind of stage for his first tragedy, Tamburlaine. This new stage provided the audience with a multiple perspective on the action, through which they could consider blasphemy as either good or bad. Another suggestion on the subject has come from Max Bluestone. His view is that in their dramaturgy the morality elements tragically compound rather than homiletically resolve ambiguities. In this approach, it is made out that the Aristotelian concept of plot as a cause-and-effect sequence of incidents is not relevant to a play like Doctor Faustus, which covers the entire cosmos on its canvas rather than a single action restricted to a town. From whatever angle, in this view, the play is regarded, it is found full of ambiguities which unsettle our assurances and invite a questioning response.

## **6.7 THEMES**

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

### **Sin, Redemption and Damnation**

Insofar as *Doctor Faustus* is a Christian play, it deals with the themes at the heart of Christianity's understanding of the world. First, there is the idea of sin, which Christianity defines as acts contrary to the will

of God. In making a pact with Lucifer, Faustus commits what is in a sense the ultimate sin: not only does he disobey God, but he consciously and even eagerly renounces obedience to him, choosing instead to swear allegiance to the devil. In a Christian framework, however, even the worst deed can be forgiven through the redemptive power of Jesus Christ, God's son, who, according to Christian belief, died on the cross for humankind's sins. Thus, however terrible Faustus's pact with Lucifer may be, the possibility of redemption is always open to him. All that he needs to do, theoretically, is ask God for forgiveness. The play offers countless moments in which Faustus considers doing just that, urged on by the good angel on his shoulder or by the old man in scene 12—both of whom can be seen either as emissaries of God, personifications of Faustus's conscience, or both.

Each time, Faustus decides to remain loyal to hell rather than seek heaven. In the Christian framework, this turning away from God condemns him to spend an eternity in hell. Only at the end of his life does Faustus desire to repent, and, in the final scene, he cries out to Christ to redeem him. But it is too late for him to repent. In creating this moment in which Faustus is still alive but incapable of being redeemed, Marlowe steps outside the Christian worldview in order to maximize the dramatic power of the final scene. Having inhabited a Christian world for the entire play, Faustus spends his final moments in a slightly different universe, where redemption is no longer possible and where certain sins cannot be forgiven.

### **The Conflict Between Medieval and Renaissance Values**

Scholar R.M. Dawkins famously remarked that *Doctor Faustus* tells “the story of a Renaissance man who had to pay the medieval price for being one.” While slightly simplistic, this quotation does get at the heart of one of the play’s central themes: the clash between the medieval world and the world of the emerging Renaissance. The medieval world placed God at the center of existence and shunted aside man and the natural world. The Renaissance was a movement that began in Italy in the fifteenth century and soon spread throughout Europe, carrying with it a new emphasis on the individual, on classical learning, and on scientific inquiry into the nature of the world. In the medieval academy, theology was the queen of the sciences. In the Renaissance, though, secular matters took center stage.

Faustus, despite being a magician rather than a scientist (a blurred distinction in the sixteenth century), explicitly rejects the medieval model. In his opening speech in scene 1, he goes through every field of scholarship, beginning with logic and proceeding through medicine, law, and theology, quoting an ancient authority for each: Aristotle on logic, Galen on medicine, the Byzantine emperor Justinian on law, and the Bible on religion. In the medieval model, tradition and authority, not individual inquiry, were key. But in this soliloquy, Faustus considers and rejects this medieval way of thinking. He resolves, in full Renaissance spirit, to accept no limits, traditions, or authorities in his quest for knowledge, wealth, and power.

The play’s attitude toward the clash between medieval and Renaissance values is ambiguous. Marlowe seems hostile toward the ambitions of Faustus, and, as Dawkins notes, he keeps his tragic hero squarely in the medieval world, where eternal damnation is the price of human pride. Yet Marlowe himself was no pious traditionalist, and it is tempting to see in Faustus—as many readers have—a hero of the new modern world, a world free of God, religion, and the limits that these imposed on humanity. Faustus may pay a medieval price, this reading suggests, but his successors will go further than he and suffer less, as we have in modern times. On the other hand, the disappointment and mediocrity that follow Faustus’s pact with the devil, as he descends from

grand ambitions to petty conjuring tricks, might suggest a contrasting interpretation. Marlowe may be suggesting that the new, modern spirit, though ambitious and glittering, will lead only to a Faustian dead end.

### **Power as a Corrupting Influence**

Early in the play, before he agrees to the pact with Lucifer, Faustus is full of ideas for how to use the power that he seeks. He imagines piling up great wealth, but he also aspires to plumb the mysteries of the universe and to remake the map of Europe. Though they may not be entirely admirable, these plans are ambitious and inspire awe, if not sympathy. They lend a grandeur to Faustus's schemes and make his quest for personal power seem almost heroic, a sense that is reinforced by the eloquence of his early soliloquies.

Once Faustus actually gains the practically limitless power that he so desires, however, his horizons seem to narrow. Everything is possible to him, but his ambition is somehow sapped. Instead of the grand designs that he contemplates early on, he contents himself with performing conjuring tricks for kings and noblemen and takes a strange delight in using his magic to play practical jokes on simple folks. It is not that power has corrupted Faustus by making him evil: indeed, Faustus's behavior after he sells his soul hardly rises to the level of true wickedness. Rather, gaining absolute power corrupts Faustus by making him mediocre and by transforming his boundless ambition into a meaningless delight in petty celebrity.

In the Christian framework of the play, one can argue that true greatness can be achieved only with God's blessing. By cutting himself off from the creator of the universe, Faustus is condemned to mediocrity. He has gained the whole world, but he does not know what to do with it.

### **The Divided Nature of Man**

Faustus is constantly undecided about whether he should repent and return to God or continue to follow his pact with Lucifer. His internal struggle goes on throughout the play, as part of him of wants to do good and serve God, but part of him (the dominant part, it seems) lusts after the power that Mephistophilis promises. The good angel and the evil angel, both of whom appear at Faustus's shoulder in order to urge him in different directions, symbolize this struggle. While these angels may be intended as an actual pair of supernatural beings, they clearly represent Faustus's divided will, which compels Faustus to commit to Mephistophilis but also to question this commitment continually.

## **6.8 SYMBOLS**

### **Blood**

Blood plays multiple symbolic roles in the play. When Faustus signs away his soul, he signs in blood, symbolizing the permanent and supernatural nature of this pact. His blood congeals on the page, however, symbolizing, perhaps, his own body's revolt against what he intends to do. Meanwhile, Christ's blood, which Faustus says he sees running across the sky during his terrible last night, symbolizes the sacrifice that Jesus, according to Christian belief, made on the cross; this sacrifice opened the way for humankind to repent its sins and be saved. Faustus, of course, in his proud folly, fails to take this path to salvation.

In scene 1, Faustus goes through a list of the major fields of human knowledge—logic, medicine, law, and theology—and cites for each an ancient authority (Aristotle, Galen, Justinian, and Jerome's Bible, respectively).

He then rejects all of these figures in favor of magic. This rejection symbolizes Faustus's break with the medieval world, which prized authority above all else, in favor of a more modern spirit of free inquiry, in which experimentation and innovation trump the assertions of Greek philosophers and the Bible.

### **The Good Angel and Bad Angel**

The angels appear at Faustus's shoulder early on in the play—the good angel urging him to repent and serve God, the bad angel urging him to follow his lust for power and serve Lucifer. The two symbolize his divided will, part of which wants to do good and part of which is sunk in sin.

## **6.9 MOTIFS**

### **Magic and the Supernatural**

The supernatural pervades Doctor Faustus, appearing everywhere in the story. Angels and devils flit about, magic spells are cast, dragons pull chariots (albeit offstage), and even fools like the two ostlers, Robin and Rafe, can learn enough magic to summon demons. Still, it is worth noting that nothing terribly significant is accomplished through magic. Faustus plays tricks on people, conjures up grapes, and explores the cosmos on a dragon, but he does not fundamentally reshape the world. The magic power that Mephistophilis grants him is more like a toy than an awesome, earth-shaking ability. Furthermore, the real drama of the play, despite all the supernatural frills and pyrotechnics, takes place within Faustus's vacillating mind and soul, as he first sells his soul to Lucifer and then considers repenting. In this sense, the magic is almost incidental to the real story of Faustus's struggle with himself, which Marlowe intended not as a fantastical battle but rather as a realistic portrait of a human being with a will divided between good and evil.

Once he gains his awesome powers, Faustus does not use them to do great deeds. Instead, he delights in playing tricks on people: he makes horns sprout from the knight's head and sells the horse-courser an enchanted horse. Such magical practical jokes seem to be Faustus's chief amusement, and Marlowe uses them to illustrate Faustus's decline from a great, prideful scholar into a bored, mediocre magician with no higher ambition than to have a laugh at the expense of a collection of simpletons.

### **The Pursuit of Knowledge**

Whether it is Faustus's or Lucifer's, the pursuit of knowledge is a recurring motif within the play and is the driving force behind the plot. Faustus's pursuit of knowledge is marked by restlessness, arrogance, and, ultimately, mediocrity. The more knowledge he gains, the clearer it becomes that the universe bends toward God, whom Faustus has now forsaken. Paralleling the escalation of his desire for knowledge are opportunities to showcase his talents. In the midst of his travels, his reputation grows, but ironically it is the acquisition of everything he ever wanted—power, fame, knowledge, riches—that saps him of his earlier ambition, rendering him little more than a magician listlessly performing party tricks for heads of state.

## **6.10 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. What is the full name of the main character in “Doctor Faustus”?
  - A) John Faustus
  - B) Thomas Faustus

C) Christopher Faustus  
D) Johann Faustus

2. In “Doctor Faustus,” what does Faustus desire above all else?  
A) Wealth and power  
B) Immortality  
C) True love  
D) Worldly knowledge and magical abilities

3. How does Faustus initially summon the demon Mephistopheles in the play?  
A) By reciting a Latin incantation  
B) By signing a blood pact  
C) By ringing a bell  
D) By praying to God

4. Who serves as the chorus in “Doctor Faustus,” providing commentary on the events of the play?  
A) Wagner  
B) Lucifer  
C) The Pope  
D) The Good Angel and the Evil Angel

5. What does Faustus use his newfound magical powers to do in the play?  
A) Predict the future  
B) Perform miracles for the needy  
C) Amuse himself with pranks  
D) Satisfy his worldly desires and ambitions

6. Who represents the forces of good in Faustus’s internal struggle between good and evil?  
A) Mephistopheles  
B) Lucifer  
C) The Good Angel  
D) The Pope

7. What is the tragic fate that ultimately befalls Doctor Faustus at the end of the play?  
A) He becomes the ruler of a powerful kingdom.  
B) He is forgiven by God and lives a virtuous life.  
C) He is taken to hell by Mephistopheles.  
D) He escapes his pact with Lucifer and lives happily ever after.

8. Who is the author of the original legend of Faust, upon which Marlowe's play is based?

- A) William Shakespeare
- B) Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
- C) Thomas Kyd
- D) Anonymous folklore

9. In the play, what is the name of the emperor who seeks Faustus's magical services?

- A) Emperor Nero
- B) Emperor Augustus
- C) Emperor Charles V
- D) Emperor Constantine

10. What is the significance of the clock striking in the final scene of "Doctor Faustus"?

- A) It signals the end of Faustus's time on Earth.
- B) It marks the beginning of Faustus's magic'l powers.
- C) It indicates the time for Faustus to meet with the Pope.
- D) It symbolizes Faustus's etern'l torment in hell.

**Answers :** 1D, 2D, 3A, 4D, 5D, 6C, 7C, 8D, 9C, 10A.

#### **6.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Marlowe as a tragic dramatist.
2. Examine the plot and structure of *Doctor Faustus*.

#### **6.12 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. U.M. Ellis-Fermor, *Christopher Marlowe* (London, 1027).
2. M. Poririer, *Marlower* (London, 1951).
3. J.B. Sterne, *Marlowe: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, 1964).
4. Clifford Leech (ed.). *Marlowe : A Collection of Critical Essay*, (New Delhi Prentice-Hall of India, 1979).

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**ACTWISE SUMMARY****STRUCTURE**

- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 7.3 Scenewise summary of the play
- 7.4 Glossary (Act I, Act II, Act III, Act IV, Act V)
- 7.5 Characters
- 7.6 Plot
- 7.7 Recapitulation of the lesson
- 7.8 Self Assessment Questions
  - 7.8.1 Short Answer Type Questions
- 7.9 Multiple Choice Questions
- 7.10 Suggested Readings

**7.1 INTRODUCTION**

Doctor Faustus was probably written in 1592, although the exact date of its composition is uncertain, since it was not published until a decade later. The idea of an individual selling his or her soul to the devil for knowledge is an old motif in Christian folklore, one that had become attached to the historical persona of Johannes Faustus, a disreputable astrologer who lived in Germany sometime in the early 1500s. The immediate source of Marlowe's play seems to be the anonymous German work *Historia von D. Johan Fausten* of 1587, which was translated into English in 1592, and from which Marlowe lifted the bulk of the plot for his drama. Although there had been literary representations of Faust prior to Marlowe's play, Doctor Faustus is the first famous version of the story. Later versions include the long and famous poem *Faust* by the nineteenth-century Roman-tic writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, as well as operas by Charles Gounod and Arrigo Boito and a symphony by Hector Berlioz. Meanwhile, the phrase "Faustian bargain" has entered the English lexicon, referring to any deal made for a short-term gain with great costs in the long run.

## 7.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Understand the major plot developments in each act of *Doctor Faustus*.
2. Identify and describe the major characters in the play.
3. Examine the structure of the plot and how it contributes to Faustus's tragic arc.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Summarize each act of *Doctor Faustus* clearly and concisely.
2. Discuss the roles and functions of key characters such as Mephistopheles, Wagner, and the Good and Evil Angels.
3. Explain how the plot structure supports the play's tragic and moral themes.

## 7.3 SCENEWISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

**Act I**-Scene i, Scene ii, Scene iii, Scene iv,

**Act II**-Scene i, scene ii, Scene iii, Chorus I

**Act III**-Scene i, Scene ii, Seene iii, Chorus II

### Act I

#### Scene i

The play begins with a long soliloquy where Faustus reflects on the most rewarding type of scholarship. He first considers logic, quoting the Greek philosopher Aristotle, but notes that disputing well seems to be the only goal of logic, and, since Faustus debating skills are already good, logic is not scholarly enough for him. He considers medicine, quoting the Greek physician Galen, and decides that medicine, with its possibility of achieving miraculous cures, is the most fruitful pursuit yet he notes that he has achieved great renown as a doctor already and that this fame has not brought him satisfaction. He considers law, quoting the Byzantine emperor Justinian, but dismisses law as too petty, dealing with trivial matters rather than larger ones. Divinity, the study of religion and theology, seems to offer wider vistas, but he quotes from St. Jerome's Bible that all men sin and finds the Bible's assertion that "[t]he reward of sin is death" an unacceptable doctrine. He then dismisses religion and fixes his mind on magic, which, when properly pursued, he believes will make him "a mighty god" (1.62).

Wagner, Faustus's servant, enters as his master finishes speaking. Faustus asks Wagner to bring Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus's friends, to help him learn the art of magic. While they are on their way, a good angel and an evil angel visit Faustus. The good angel urges him to set aside his book of magic and read the Scriptures

instead, the evil angel encourages him to go forward in his pursuit of the black arts. After they vanish, it is clear that Faustus is going to heed the evil spirit, since he exults at the great powers that the magical arts will bring him. Faustus imagines sending spirits to the end of the world to fetch him jewels and delicacies, having them teach him secret knowledge and using magic to make himself king of all Germany.

Valdes and Cornelius appear, and Faustus greets them, declaring that he has set aside all other forms of learning in favor of magic. They agree to teach Faustus the principles of the dark arts and describe the wondrous powers that will be his if he remains committed during his quest to learn magic. Cornelius tells him that "[t]he miracles that magic will perform / Will make thee vow to study nothing else" (1.136-137). Valdes lists a number of texts that Faustus should read, and the two friends promise to help him become better at magic than even they are. Faustus invites them to dine with him, and they exit.

### **Scene ii**

Two scholars come to see Faustus. Wagner makes jokes at uicu p then tells them that Faustus is meeting with Valdes and Cornelius. Aware that Valdes and Cornelius are infamous for their involvement in the black arts, the scholars leave with heavy hearts, fearing that Faustus may also be falling into "that damned art" as well (2.29).

### **Scene iii**

That night, Faustus stands in a magical circle marked with various signs and words, and he chants in Latin. Four devils and Lucifer, the ruler of hell, watch him from the shadows. Faustus renounces heaven and God, swears allegiance to hell, and demands that Mephistophilis rise to serve him. The devil Mephistophilis then appears before Faustus, who commands him to depart and return dressed as a Franciscan friar, since "[t]hat holy shape becomes a devil best" (3.26). Mephistophilis vanishes, and Faustus remarks on his obedience. Mephistophilis then reappears, dressed as a monk, and asks Faustus what he desires. Faustus demands his obedience, but Mephistophilis says that he is Lucifer's servant and can obey only Lucifer. He adds that he came because he heard Faustus deny obedience to God and hoped to capture his soul.

Faustus quizzes Mephistophilis about Lucifer and hell and learns that Lucifer and all his devils were once angels who rebelled against God and have been damned to hell forever. Faustus points out that Mephistophilis is not in hell now but on earth; Mephistophilis insists, however, that he and his fellow demons are always in hell, even when they are on earth, because being deprived of the presence of God, which they once enjoyed, is hell enough. Faustus dismisses this sentiment as a lack of fortitude on Mephistophilis's part and then declares that he will offer his soul to Lucifer in return for twenty-four years of Mephistophilis's service. Mephistophilis agrees to take this offer to his master and departs. Left alone, Faustus remarks that if he had "as many souls as there be stars," he would offer them all to hell in return for the kind of power that Mephistophilis offers him (3.102). He eagerly awaits Mephistophilis's return.

### **Scene iv**

Wagner converses with a clown and tries to persuade him to become his servant for seven years. The clown is poor, and Wagner jokes that he would probably sell his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton; the clown answers that it would have to be well-seasoned mutton. After first agreeing to be Wagner's servant, however, the clown abruptly changes his mind. Wagner threatens to cast a spell on him, and he then conjures up

two devils, who he says will carry the clown away to hell unless he becomes Wagner's servant. Seeing the devils, the clown becomes terrified and agrees to Wagner's demands. After Wagner dismisses the devils, the clown asks his new master if he can learn to conjure as well, and Wagner promises to teach him how to turn himself into any kind of animal but he insists on being called "Master Wagner"

## Act II

### Scene i

Faustus begins to waver in his conviction to sell his soul. The good angel tells him to abandon his plan and "think of heaven, and heavenly things," but he dismisses the good angel's words, saying that God does not love him (5.20). The good and evil angels make another appearance, with the good one again urging Faustus to think of heaven, but the evil angel convinces him that the wealth he can gain through his deal with the devil is worth the cost. Faustus then calls back Mephistophilis, who tells him that Lucifer has accepted his offer of his soul in exchange for twenty-four years of service. Faustus asks Mephistophilis why Lucifer wants his soul, and Mephistophilis tells him that Lucifer seeks to enlarge his kingdom and make humans suffer even as he suffers.

Faustus decides to make the bargain, and he stabs his arm in order to write the deed in blood. However, when he tries to write the deed his blood congeals, making writing impossible. Mephistophilis goes to fetch fire in order to loosen the blood, and, while he is gone, Faustus endures another bout of indecision, as he wonders if his own blood is attempting to warn him not to sell his soul. When Mephistophilis returns, Faustus signs the deed and then discovers an inscription on his arm that reads "Homo fuge," Latin for "O man, fly" (5.77). While Faustus wonders where he should fly Mephistophilis presents a group of devils, who cover Faustus with crowns and rich garments. Faustus puts aside his doubts. He hands over the deed, which promises his body and soul to Lucifer in exchange for twenty-four years of constant service from Mephistophilis

### Scene ii

After he turns in the deed, Faustus asks his new servant where hell is located. and Mephistophilis says that it has no exact location but exists everywhere. He continues explaining, saying that hell is everywhere that the damned are cut off from God eternally. Faustus remarks that he thinks hell is a myth. At Faustus's request for a wife, Mephistophilis offers Faustus a she-devil, but Faustus refuses. Mephistophilis then gives him a book of magic spells and tells him to read it carefully.

Faustus once again wavers and leans toward repentance as he contemplates the wonders of heaven from which he has cut himself off. The good and evil angels appear again, and Faustus realizes that "[m]y heart's so hardened I cannot repent!" (5.196). He then begins to ask Mephistophilis questions about the planets and the heavens. Mephistophilis answers all his queries willingly, until Faustus asks who made the world. Mephistophilis refuses to reply because the answer is "against our kingdom", when Faustus presses him, Mephistophilis departs angrily (5.247). Faustus then turns his mind to God, and again he wonders if it is too late for him to repent. The good and evil angels enter once more, and the good angel says it is never too late for Faustus to repent. Faustus begins to appeal to Christ for mercy, but then Lucifer, Belzebub (another devil), and Mephistophilis enter. They tell Faustus to stop thinking of God and then present a show of the Seven Deadly Sins. Each sin Pride, Covetousness, Envy, Wrath, Gluttony, Sloth, and finally Lechery- appears before Faustus and makes a brief speech. The sight of the sins delights Faustus's soul, and he asks to see hell. Lucifer promises to take him there that night. For the meantime he gives Faustus a book that teaches him how to change his shape.

### **Scene iii**

Meanwhile, Robin, a stablehand, has found one of Faustus's conjuring books, and he is trying to learn the spells. He calls in an innkeeper named Rafe, and the two go to a bar together, where Robin promises to conjure up any kind of wine that Rafe desires.

### **Chorus I**

Wagner takes the stage and describes how Faustus traveled through the heavens on a chariot pulled by dragons in order to learn the secrets of astronomy. Wagner tells us that Faustus is now traveling to measure the coasts and kingdoms of the world and that his travels will take him to Rome.

### **Act III**

#### **Scene i**

Faustus appears, recounting to Mephistophilis his travels throughout Europe first from Germany to France and then on to Italy. He asks Mephistophilis if they have arrived in Rome, whose monuments he greatly desires to see, and Mephistophilis replies that they are in the Pope's privy chamber. It is a day of feasting in Rome, to celebrate the Pope's victories, and Faustus and Mephistophilis agree to use their powers to play tricks on the Pope.

As Faustus and Mephistophilis watch, the Pope comes in with his attendants and a prisoner, Bruno, who had attempted to become Pope with the backing of the German emperor. While the Pope declares that he will depose the emperor and forces Bruno to swear allegiance to him, Faustus and Mephistophilis disguise themselves as cardinals and come before the pope. The Pope gives Bruno to them, telling them to carry him off to prison; instead, they give him a fast horse and send him back to Germany.

#### **Scene ii**

Later, the Pope confronts the two cardinals whom Faustus and Mephistophilis have impersonated. When the cardinals say that they never were given custody of Bruno, the Pope sends them to the dungeon. Faustus and Mephistophilis, both invisible, watch the proceedings and chuckle. The pope and his attendants then sit down to dinner. During the meal, Faustus and Mephistophilis make themselves invisible and curse noisily and then snatch dishes and food as they are passed around the table. The churchmen suspect that there is some ghost in the room, and the Pope begins to cross himself, much to the dismay of Faustus and Mephistophilis. Faustus boxes the Pope's ear, and the Pope and all his attendants run away. A group of friars enters, and they sing a dirge damning the unknown spirit that has disrupted the meal. Mephistophilis and Faustus beat the friars, fling fireworks among them, and flee.

#### **Scene iii**

Robin the ostler, or stablehand, and his friend Rafe have stolen a cup from a tavern. They are pursued by a vintner (or wine-maker), who demands that they return the cup. They claim not to have it, and then Robin conjures up Mephistophilis, which makes the vintner flee. Mephistophilis is not pleased to have been summoned for a prank, and he threatens to turn the two into an ape and a dog. The two friends treat what they have done as a joke, and Mephistophilis leaves in a fury, saying that he will go to join Faustus in Turkey.

## **Chorus II**

The Chorus enters to inform us that Faustus has returned home to Germany and developed his fame by explaining what he learned during the course of his journey. The German emperor, Charles V, has heard of Faustus and invited him to his palace, where we next encounter him.

## **Act IV**

### **Scene i-ii**

At the court of the emperor, two gentlemen, Martino and Frederick, discuss the imminent arrival of Bruno and Faustus. Martino remarks that Faustus has promised to conjure up Alexander the Great, the famous conqueror. The two of them wake another gentleman, Benvolio, and tell him to come down and see the new arrivals, but Benvolio declares that he would rather watch the action from his window, because he has a hangover.

Faustus comes before the emperor, who thanks him for having freed Bruno from the clutches of the pope. Faustus acknowledges the gratitude and then says that he stands ready to fulfill any wish that the emperor might have. Benvolio, watching from above, remarks to himself that Faustus looks nothing like what he would expect a conjurer to look like.,

The emperor tells Faustus that he would like to see Alexander the Great and his lover. Faustus tells him that he cannot produce their actual bodies but can create spirits resembling them. A knight present in the court is skeptical, and asserts that it is as untrue that Faustus can perform this feat as that the goddess Diana has transformed the knight into a stag. Before the eyes of the court, Faustus creates a vision of Alexander embracing his lover Faustus conjures a pair of antlers onto the head of the knight. The knight pleads for mercy, and the emperor entreats Faustus to remove the horns. Faustus complies, warning Benvolio to have more respect for scholars in the future.

### **Scene iii-iv**

With his friends Martino and Frederick and a group of soldiers, Benvolio plots an attack against Faustus. His friends try to dissuade him, but he is so furious at the damage done to his reputation that he will not listen to reason. They resolve to ambush Faustus as he leaves the court of the emperor and to take the treasures that the emperor has given Faustus. Frederick goes out with the soldiers to scout and returns with word that Faustus is coming toward them and that he is alone. When Faustus enters, Benvolio stabs him and cuts off his head. He and his friends rejoice, and they plan the further indignities that they will visit on Faustus's corpse. But then Faustus rises with his head restored. Faustus tells them that they are fools, since his life belongs to Mephistophilis and cannot be taken by anyone else. He summons Mephistophilis, who arrives with a group of lesser devils, and orders the devils to carry his attackers off to hell. Then, reconsidering, he orders them instead to punish Benvolio and his friends by dragging them through thorns and hurling them off of cliffs, so that the world will see what happens to people who attack Faustus. As the men and devils leave, the soldiers come in, and Faustus summons up another clutch of demons to drive them off.

Benvolio, Frederick, and Martino reappear. They are bruised and bloody from having been chased and harried by the devils, and all three of them now have horns sprouting from their heads. They greet one another unhappily, express horror at the fate that has befallen them, and agree to conceal themselves in a castle rather than face the scorn of the world.

## **Scene v**

Faustus, meanwhile, meets a horse-courser and sells him his horse. Faustus gives the horse-courser a good price but warns him not to ride the horse into the water. Faustus begins to reflect on the pending expiration of his contract with Lucifer and falls asleep. The horse-courser reappears, sopping wet, complaining that when he rode his horse into a stream it turned into a heap of straw. He decides to get his money back and tries to wake Faustus by hollering in his ear. He then pulls on Faustus's leg when Faustus will not wake. The leg breaks off, and Faustus wakes up, screaming bloody murder. The horse-courser takes the leg and runs off. Meanwhile, Faustus's leg is immediately restored, and he laughs at the joke that he has played. Wagner then enters and tells Faustus that the Duke of Vanholt has summoned him. Faustus agrees to go, and they depart together.

Robin and Rafe have stopped for a drink in a tavern. They listen as a carter, or wagon-driver, and the horse-courser discuss Faustus. The carter explains that Faustus stopped him on the road and asked to buy some hay to eat. The carter agreed to sell him all he could eat for three farthings, and Faustus proceeded to eat the entire wagonload of hay. The horse-courser tells his own story, adding that he took Faustus's leg as revenge and that he is keeping it at his home. Robin declares that he intends to seek out Faustus, but only after he has a few more drinks.

## **Scene vi**

At the court of the Duke of Vanholt, Faustus's skill at conjuring up beautiful illusions wins the duke's favor. Faustus comments that the duchess has not seemed to enjoy the show and asks her what she would like. She tells him she would like a dish of ripe grapes, and Faustus has Mephistophilis bring her some grapes. Robin, Dick, the carter, the horse-courser, and the hostess from the tavern burst in at this moment. They confront Faustus, and the horse-courser begins making jokes about what he assumes is Faustus's wooden leg. Faustus then shows them his leg, which is whole and healthy, and they are amazed. Each then launches into a complaint about Faustus's treatment of him, but Faustus uses magical charms to make them silent, and they depart. The duke and duchess are much pleased with Faustus's display, and they promise to reward Faustus greatly.

## **Chorus 4**

Wagner announces that Faustus must be about to die because he has given Wagner all of his wealth. But he remains unsure, since Faustus is not acting like a dying man-rather, he is out carousing with scholars.

## **Act V**

### **Scene i**

Faustus enters with some of the scholars. One of them asks Faustus if he can produce Helen of Greece (also known as Helen of Troy), who they have decided was "the admirablest lady / that ever lived" (12.3-4). Faustus agrees to produce her, and gives the order to Mephistophilis: immediately, Helen herself crosses the stage, to the delight of the scholars.

The scholars leave, and an old man enters and tries to persuade Faustus to repent. Faustus becomes distraught, and Mephistophilis hands him a dagger. However, the old man persuades him to appeal to God for mercy, saying, "I see an angel hovers o'er thy head/And with a vial full of precious grace / Offers to pour the same

into thy soul!" (12.44-46). Once the old man leaves, Mephistophilis threatens to shred Faustus to pieces if he does not reconfirm his vow to Lucifer. Faustus complies, sealing his vow by once again stabbing his arm and inscribing it in blood. He asks Mephistophilis to punish the old man for trying to dissuade him from continuing in Lucifer's service; Mephistophilis says that he cannot touch the old man's soul but that he will scourge his body. Faustus then asks Mephistophilis to let him see Helen again. Helen enters, and Faustus makes a great speech about her beauty and kisses her.

### **Scene ii**

The final night of Faustus's life has come, and he tells the scholars of the deal he has made with Lucifer. They are horrified and ask what they can do to save him, but he tells them that there is nothing to be done. Reluctantly, they leave to pray for Faustus. A vision of hell opens before Faustus's horrified eyes as the clock strikes eleven. The last hour passes by quickly, and Faustus exhorts the clocks to slow and time to stop, so that he might live a little longer and have a chance to repent. He then begs God to reduce his time in hell to a thousand years or a hundred thousand years, so long as he is eventually saved. He wishes that he were a beast and would simply cease to exist when he dies instead of facing damnation. He curses his parents and himself, and the clock strikes midnight. Devils enter and carry Faustus away as he screams, "Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer! I'll burn my books-ah, Mephistophilis!" (13.112-113).

### **Chorus 4-Epilogue**

The Chorus enters and warns the wise "only to wonder at unlawful things" and not to trade their souls for forbidden knowledge. The final scenes contain some of the most noteworthy speeches in the play, especially Faustus's speech to Helen and his final soliloquy. His address to Helen begins with the famous line "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships," referring to the Trojan War, which was fought over Helen, and goes on to list all the great things that Faustus would do to win her love (12.81). He compares himself to the heroes of Greek mythology, who went to war for her hand, and he ends with a lengthy praise of her beauty. In its flowery language and emotional power, the speech marks a return to the eloquence that marks Faustus's words in earlier scenes, before his language and behavior become mediocre and petty. Having squandered his powers in pranks and childish entertainments, Faustus regains his eloquence and tragic grandeur in the final scene, as his doom approaches. Still, as impressive as this speech is, Faustus maintains the same blind spots that lead him down his dark road in the first place. Earlier, he seeks transcendence through magic instead of religion. Now, he seeks it through sex and female beauty, as he asks Helen to make him "immortal" by kissing him (12.83). Moreover, it is not even clear that Helen is real, since Faustus's earlier conjuring of historical figures evokes only illusions and not physical beings. If Helen too is just an illusion, then Faustus is wasting his last hours dallying with a fantasy image, an apt symbol for his entire life.

Faustus's final speech is the most emotionally powerful scene in the play, as his despairing mind rushes from idea to idea. One moment he is begging time to slow down, the next he is imploring Christ for mercy. One moment he is crying out in fear and trying to hide from the wrath of God, the next he is begging to have the eternity of hell lessened somehow. He curses his parents for giving birth to him but then owns up to his responsibility and curses himself. His mind's various attempts to escape his doom, then, lead inexorably to an understanding of his own guilt.

The passion of the final speech points to the central question in Doctor Faustus of why Faustus does not repent. Early in the play, he deceives himself into believing either that hell is not so bad or that it does not exist. But, by the close, with the gates of hell literally opening before him, he still ignores the warnings of his own conscience and of the old man, a physical embodiment of the conscience that plagues him. Faustus's loyalty to Lucifer could be explained by the fact that he is afraid of having his body torn apart by Mephistophilis. But he seems almost eager, even in the next-to-last scene, to reseal his vows in blood, and he even goes a step further when he demands that Mephistophilis punish the old man who urges him to repent. Marlowe suggests that Faustus's self-delusion persists even at the end. Having served Lucifer for so long, he has reached a point at which he cannot imagine breaking free.

In his final speech, Faustus is clearly wracked with remorse, yet he no longer seems to be able to repent. Christian doctrine holds that one can repent for any sin, however grave, up until the moment of death and be saved. Yet this principle does not seem to hold for Marlowe's protagonist. Doctor Faustus is a Christian tragedy, but the logic of the final scene is not Christian. Some critics have tried to deal with this problem by claiming that Faustus does not actually repent in the final speech but that he only speaks wistfully about the possibility of repentance. Faustus appears to be calling on Christ, seeking the precious drop of blood that will save his soul. Yet some unseen force whether inside or outside him--prevents him from giving himself to God.

Ultimately, the ending of Doctor Faustus represents a clash between Christianity, which holds that repentance and salvation are always possible, and the dictates of tragedy, in which some character flaw cannot be corrected, even by appealing to God. The idea of Christian tragedy, then, is paradoxical, as Christianity is ultimately uplifting. People may suffer as Christ himself did but for those who repent, salvation eventually awaits. To make Doctor Faustus a true tragedy, then, Marlowe had to set down a moment beyond which Faustus could no longer repent, so that in the final scene, while still alive, he can be damned and conscious of his damnation.

The unhappy Faustus's last line returns us to the clash between Renaissance values and medieval values that dominates the early scenes and then recedes as Faustus pursues his mediocre amusements in later scenes. His cry, as he pleads for salvation, that he will burn his books suggests, for the first time since early scenes, that his pact with Lucifer is primarily about a thirst for limitless knowledge a thirst that is presented as incompatible with Christianity. As the Chorus says in its final speech:

*Faustus is gone! Regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise  
Only to wonder at unlawful things:  
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits be  
To practice more than heavenly power permits.*

*(Epilogue. 4-8)*

In the duel between Christendom and the rising modern spirit, Marlowe's play seems to come down squarely on the side of Christianity. Yet Marlowe, himself notoriously accused of atheism and various other sins, may have had other ideas, and he made his Faustus sympathetic, if not necessarily admirable. While his play shows how the untrammelled pursuit of knowledge and power can be corrupting, it also shows the grandeur of such a quest. Faustus is damned, but the gates that he opens remain standing wide, waiting for others to follow.

**CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks**

1. In Act I, Faustus decides to practice \_\_\_\_ instead of traditional disciplines.
2. Mephistopheles serves the devil named \_\_\_\_.
3. The \_\_\_\_ and Evil Angels symbolize Faustus's inner conflict.
4. Faustus signs the pact in his own \_\_\_\_.

**Answers**

1. necromancy
2. Lucifer
3. Good
4. blood

**7.4 GLOSSARY (ACT I, ACT II, ACT III, ACT IV, ACT V)****Act I**

Mars- the god of war  
Mate- help  
Dalliance-amusement  
Muse - poet  
Vaunt- display  
Swoln-puffed up  
Cunning-pride of knowledge  
Self-conceit egoism  
Glutted-filled  
Necromancy-black art, magic  
Profess-attain proficiency in  
Ravished charmed  
Eternized - immortalized  
Physic - medicine  
Aphorisms - axioms  
Bills - prescriptions  
Monuments - memorials  
Paltry - trivial  
Mercenary - money-minded  
siest Trash - something worthless  
Servile - low and mean  
Necromantic - pertaining to magic

Omnipotence - unlimited power  
Artizan - artist  
Exceeds - excels  
Deity- supernatural power  
Conference - conversation  
Plod- wok laboriously  
Blasphemy-insult to God  
Conceit- notion  
Ambiguities- doubtful or obscure matters  
Desperate-reckless  
Ransack- search thoroughly  
Delecat- delicious eatables  
Clad- dressed  
Brunt-assault Keel- ship  
Fantasy-imagination  
Ruminates-meditates  
Concise- brief  
Syllogisms-logical conclusions  
Gravelled-puzzled  
Pastor- priest  
Swarm-come in a crowd  
Infernal- of hell  
Canonize-elevate to sainthood bundares  
Almain-German  
Fleece-treasure  
Mystery-magical skill  
Delphian-located in Delphi  
Entrails-depths  
Canvass-examine or discuss  
Quiddity-essential  
Sirrah-Sir  
Licentiates- those studying for a doctors degree cobi zis) -nozull  
Dunces-block heads  
Phlegmatic- not excitable

Precisian-puritan  
Drizzling-watery  
Anagrammatized-rearranged  
Virtue- merit  
Plint-obedient  
Laureate-distinguished  
Abjure- renounce  
Stoutly- firmly  
Belzebub-devil  
Elysium-heaventa  
Frivolous-triviale  
Passionate-emotionally stirred  
Fortitude-courage  
Tidings- news  
Voluptuous-lustful  
Potentate-ruler  
Speculation-contemplative study.  
Bare-half clad  
Vile-ugly or foul  
Flee- a flying insect  
Wenches-girls

## **Act II**

Altar- place of worship  
Contrition-repentance  
Illusions- false ideas yoongeb of  
Lunacy-madness  
Signiory- lordship  
Tidings-news  
Hazarded-risked  
Bequeath- leave to somebody by signing a bill  
Solemnly-earnestly  
Craves- strong desires  
Bind-pledge  
Regent- ruler

Congeals-solidifies  
Potend- indicate  
Chafer-vessel  
Apparel- clothes  
Scroll- roll of paper  
Prescribed-laid down  
Inviolate- intact  
Wilt-desire  
Circumscribed-having definite boundaries  
Bowels- interior  
Affable-myth  
Chaste-pure  
Tempest-storm  
Armour-armed men  
Execute-accomplish  
Fain-gladly  
Dispositions- attribute  
Renounce-give up Salvation-soul's liberation  
Ravishing-charming  
Despair- hopelessness  
Celestial-heavenly  
Faint- tnreal  
Accursed- damned  
Raze-touch lightly  
Distressed- tormented  
Tartan Slay-kill  
Gratify-please  
Fie- shame  
Scent- smell  
Covetousness- greed  
Begotten-born  
Rapiers-pair of swords  
Envy-jealous  
Gluttony- greed for food  
Sloth-lazy

### **Act III**

Astronomy-science of stars and planets

Firmament- sky

Toil- tiresome

Exploits- adventures

Flint-rock

Sumptuous-highly ornamented

Privy chamber- private room

Ordinance- artillery and ammunition

Discerned-seen

Choke- suffocate

Halt-stop

Dirge-funeral services

Hog-pig

Calf- young one of cow

### **Act IV**

Conjuring books- books of magic deeply cuelial

Prithee- request

cal figures:

Tarry-wait

Dismembered- cut in to pieces

Tabern- liquor bar

Goblet- wine cup

Vintner- wine seller

Gull-cheat

Supernatural-magical

Favour-kind permission

Impeach- accuse

a Scour-punish

Presumption- arrogance

Endamaged-harmed

Closest-private study

Sundry-miscellaneous

Provice- valour

Subdued-conquered  
Paramour-mistress  
Substantial-important  
Deceased- dead  
Content- satisfy  
Begone- go away  
Stag-male deer  
Execrable-hateful  
Monstrous- ugly and fearful  
Worthily-fittingly  
Requited-punished  
Injurious- unjust  
Restless- without a pause  
Horse Courser- horse dealer

#### **Act V**

Goods-belongings  
Banquet- enjoy feasting  
Carouse- drinks to one's fill  
Swill-drink heavily  
Belly-cheer- food and drink  
Peerless- having no equal  
Dame- lady  
Beholding-indebted  
Unfeigned- sincere  
Paragon- matchless person  
Prevail- succeed  
Celestial-heavenly  
Loathsome-hateful  
Filthiness-wickedness  
Stench-foul smell  
Flagitious- deeply criminal  
Commiseration-pity  
Vial- a small vessel for holding a  
Revolt- rebel against God

Shun- avoid  
Snares- trap  
Piece meal- bit by bit  
Afflict- torment  
Glut-satisfy  
Dross-something worthless  
Sagged- destroyed  
Combat- fight  
Hapless- unfortunate  
Wanton- flirtatious  
Azure-blue  
Sift-tempt our  
Fiends-devils  
Surfeit-access  
Pants-beat quickly  
Quiver- shakes  
Felicity- Happiness  
Divinity- God  
Wrath- anger  
Ransomed- redeemed  
Incessant-constant  
Plagued- tormented  
Engendered-produced  
Fierce- frightening  
Gape- urban  
Exhort- instruct  
Helen  
Entice- lure  
Wits-Intellects

## 7.5 CHARACTERS

**Doctor Faustus** - Doctor Faustus, the protagonist of the play, is a brilliant sixteenth- century scholar from Wittenberg, Germany, whose ambition for knowledge, wealth, and worldly might make him willing to pay the ultimate price his soul to Lucifer in exchange for supernatural powers. Faustus's initial tragic grandeur is diminished by the fact that he never seems completely sure of the decision to forfeit his soul and constantly wavers about

whether or not to repent. His ambition is admirable and initially awesome, yet he ultimately lacks a certain inner strength. He is unable to embrace his dark path wholeheartedly but is also unwilling to admit his mistake. "Mephistophilis - He is a devil whom Faustus summons with his initial magical experiments. Mephistophilis's motivations are ambiguous: on the one hand, his oft-expressed goal is to catch Faustus's soul and carry it off to hell; on the other hand, he actively attempts to dissuade Faustus from making a deal with Lucifer by warning him about the horrors of hell. Mephistophilis is ultimately as tragic a figure as Faustus, with his moving, regretful accounts of what the devils have lost in their eternal separation from God and his repeated reflections on the pain that comes with damnation.

**Chorus** - A character who stands outside the story, providing narration and commentary. The Chorus was customary in Greek tragedy.

**Old Man** - An enigmatic figure who appears in the final scene. The old man urges Faustus to repent and to ask God for mercy. He seems to replace the good and evil angels, who in the first scene, try to influence Faustus's behavior.

**Good Angel** - A spirit that urges Faustus to repent for his pact with Lucifer and return to God. Along with the old man and the bad angel, the good angel represents, in many ways, Faustus's conscience and divided will between good and evil.

**Evil Angel** - A spirit that serves as the counterpart to the good angel and provides Faustus with reasons not to repent for sins against God. The evil angel represents the evil half of Faustus's conscience.

**Lucifer** - The prince of devils, the ruler of hell, and Mephistophilis's master.

**Wagner** - Faustus's servant. Wagner uses his master's books to learn how to summon devils and work magic.

**Clown** - A clown who becomes Wagner's servant. The clown's antics provide comic relief; he is a ridiculous character, and his absurd behavior initially contrasts with Faustus's grandeur. As the play goes on, though, Faustus's behavior comes to resemble that of the clown.

**Robin** - An ostler, or innkeeper, who, like the clown, provides a comic contrast to Faustus. Robin and his friend Rafe learn some basic conjuring, demonstrating that even the least scholarly can possess skill in magic. Marlowe includes Robin and Rafe to illustrate Faustus's degradation as he submits to simple trickery such as theirs.

**Rafe** - An ostler, and a friend of Robin. Rafe appears as Dick (Robin's friend and a clown) in B-text editions of *Doctor Faustus*.

**Valdes and Cornelius** - Two friends of Faustus, both magicians, who teach him the art of black magic.

**Horse-courser** - A horse-trader who buys a horse from Faustus, which vanishes after the horse-courser rides it into the water, leading him to seek revenge.

The Scholars Faustus's colleagues at the University of Wittenberg. Loyal to Faustus, the scholars appear at the beginning and end of the play to express dismay at the turn Faustus's studies have taken, to marvel at his achievements, and then to hear his agonized confession of his pact with Lucifer.

**The Pope** - The head of the Roman Catholic Church and a powerful political figure in the Europe of Faustus's day. The pope serves as both a source of amusement for the play's Protestant audience and a symbol of the religious faith that Faustus has rejected.

**Emperor Charles V** - The most powerful monarch in Europe, whose court Faustus visits.

**Knight** - A German nobleman at the emperor's court. The knight is skeptical of Faustus's power, and Faustus makes antlers sprout from his head to teach him a lesson. The knight is further developed and known as Benvolio in B-text versions of *Doctor Faustus*, Benvolio seeks revenge on Faustus and plans to murder him.

**Bruno** - A candidate for the papacy, supported by the emperor. Bruno is captured by the pope and freed by Faustus. Bruno appears only in B-text versions of *Doctor Faustus*.

**Duke of Vanholt** - A German nobleman whom Faustus visits.

**Martino and Frederick** - Friends of Benvolio who reluctantly join his attempt to kill Faustus. Martino and Frederick appear only in B-text versions of *Doctor Faustus*.

## 7.6 PLOT

Doctor Faustus, a well-respected German scholar, grows dissatisfied with the limits of traditional forms of knowledge-logic, medicine, law, and religion and decides that he wants to learn to practice magic. His friends Valdes and Cornelius instruct him in the black arts, and he begins his new career as a magician by summoning up Mephistophilis, a devil. Despite Mephistophilis's warnings about the horrors of hell, Faustus tells the devil to return to his master, Lucifer, with an offer of Faustus's soul in exchange for twenty-four years of service from Mephistophilis. Meanwhile, Wagner, Faustus's servant, has picked up some magical ability and uses it to press a clown named Robin into his service.

Mephistophilis returns to Faustus with word that Lucifer has accepted Faustus's offer. Faustus experiences some misgivings and wonders if he should repent and save his soul; in the end, though, he agrees to the deal, signing it with his blood. As soon as he does so, the words "Homo fuge," Latin for "O man, fly," appear branded on his arm. Faustus again has second thoughts, but Mephistophilis bestows rich gifts on him and gives him a book of spells to learn. Later, Mephistophilis answers all of his questions about the nature of the world, refusing to answer only when Faustus asks him who made the universe. This refusal prompts yet another bout of misgivings in Faustus, but Mephistophilis and Lucifer bring in personifications of the Seven Deadly Sins to prance about in front of Faustus, and he is impressed enough to quiet his doubts.

Armed with his new powers and attended by Mephistophilis, Faustus begins to travel. He goes to the pope's court in Rome, makes himself invisible, and plays a series of tricks. He disrupts the pope's banquet by stealing food and boxing the pope's ears. Following this incident, he travels through the courts of Europe, with his fame spreading as he goes. Eventually, he is invited to the court of the German emperor, Charles V (the enemy of the pope), who asks Faustus to allow him to see Alexander the Great, the famed fourth- century B.C. Macedonian king and conqueror. Faustus conjures up an image of Alexander, and Charles is suitably impressed. A knight scoffs at Faustus's powers, and Faustus chastises him by making antlers sprout from his head. Furious, the knight vows revenge.

Meanwhile, Robin, Wagner's clown, has picked up some magic on his own, and with his fellow stablehand, Rafe, he undergoes a number of comic misadventures. At one point, he manages to summon Mephistophilis, who threatens to turn Robin and Rafe into animals (or perhaps even does transform them; the text isn't clear) to punish them for their foolishness.

Faustus then goes on with his travels, playing a trick on a horse-courser along the way. Faustus sells him a horse that turns into a heap of straw when ridden into a river. Eventually, Faustus is invited to the court of the Duke of Vanholt, where he performs various feats. The horse-courser shows up there, along with Robin, a man named Dick (Rafe in the A text), and various others who have fallen victim to Faustus's trickery. But Faustus casts spells on them and sends them on their way, to the amusement of the duke and duchess.

As the twenty-four years of his deal with Lucifer come to a close, Faustus begins to dread his impending death. He has Mephistophilis call up Helen of Troy, the famous beauty from the ancient world, and uses her presence to impress a group of scholars. An old man urges Faustus to repent, but Faustus drives him away. Faustus summons Helen again and exclaims rapturously about her beauty. But time is growing short. Faustus tells the scholars about his pact, and they are horror-stricken and resolve to pray for him. On the final night before the expiration of the twenty-four years, Faustus is overcome by fear and remorse. He begs for mercy, but it is too late. At midnight, a host of devils appears and carries his soul off to hell. In the morning, the scholars find Faustus's limbs and decide to hold a funeral for him.

Faustus becomes dissatisfied with his studies of medicine, law, logic and theology; there- fore, he decides to turn to the dangerous practice of necromancy, or magic. He has his servant Wagner summon Valdes and Cornelius, two German experts in magic. Faustus tells them that he has decided to experiment in necromancy and needs them to teach him some of the fundamentals.

When he is alone in his study, Faustus begins experimenting with magical incanta- tions, and suddenly Mephistophilis appears, in the form of an ugly devil. Faustus sends him away, telling him to reappear in the form of a friar. Faustus discovers that it is not his conjuring which brings forth Mephistophilis but, instead, that when anyone curses the trinity, devils automatically appear. Faustus sends Mephistophilis back to hell with the bargain that if Faustus is given twenty-four years of absolute power, he will then sell his soul to Lucifer.

Later, in his study, when Faustus begins to despair, a Good Angel and a Bad Angel appear to him; each encourages Faustus to follow his advice. Mephistophilis appears and Faust agrees to sign a contract in blood with the devil even though several omens appear which warn him not to make this bond. Faustus begins to repent of his bargain as the voice of the Good Angel continues to urge him to repent. To divert Faustus, Mephistophilis and Lucifer both appear and parade the seven deadly sins before Faustus. After this, Mephistophilis takes Faustus to Rome and leads him into the pope's private chambers, where the two become invisible and play pranks on the pope and some unsus- pecting friars.

After this episode, Faustus and Mephistophilis go to the German emperor's court, where they conjure up Alexander the Great. At this time, Faustus also makes a pair of horns suddenly appear on one of the knights who had been skeptical about Faustus powers. After this episode, Faustus is next seen selling his horse to a horse-courser with the advice that the man must not ride the horse into the water. Later, the horse-courser enters Faustus' study and accuses Faustus of false dealings because the horse had turned into a bundle of hay in the middle of a pond.

After performing other magical tricks such as bringing forth fresh grapes in the dead of winter, Faustus returns to his study, where at the request of his fellow scholars, he conjures up the apparition of Helen of Troy. An old man appears and tries to get Faustus to hope for salvation and yet Faustus cannot. He knows it is now too late to turn away from the evil and ask for forgiveness. When the scholars leave, the clock strikes eleven and Faustus realizes that he must give up his soul within an hour. As the clock marks each passing segment of time, Faustus sinks deeper and deeper into despair. When the clock strikes twelve, devils appear amid thunder and lightning and carry Faustus off to his eternal damnation.

## 7.7 RECAPITULATION OF THE LESSON

The present lesson discussed the Act IV and V of the play. The final scenes contain some of the most noteworthy speeches in the play, especially Faustu's speech of Helen and his final soliloquy. Faustus's final speech is the most emotionally powerful scene in the play, as his despairing mind rushes from idea to idea. One moment he is begging time to slow down, the next he is imploring Christ for mercy. One moment he is crying out in fear and trying to hide from the wrath of God, the next he is begging to have the eternity of hell lessened somehow. He curses his parents for giving birth to him but then owns up to his responsibility and curses himself. His mind's various attempts to escape his doom, then, lead inexorably to an understanding of his own guilt.

The passion of the final speech points to the central question in Doctor Faustus of why Faustus does not repent. Early in the play, he deceives himself into believing either that hell is not so bad or that it does not exist. But, by the close, with the gates of hell literally opening before him, he still ignores the warnings of his own conscience and of the old man, a physical embodiment of the conscience that plagues him. Faustus's loyalty to Lucifer could be explained by the fact that he is afraid of having his body torn apart by Mephistophilis. Marlowe suggests that Faustus's self-delusion persists even at the end. Having served Lucifer for so long, he has reached a point at which he cannot imagine breaking free. In his final speech, Faustus is clearly wracked with remorse, yet he no longer seems to be able to repent.

## 7.8 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

### 7.8.1 Short Answer Type Questions

#### Q1. What are the sources of the legend?

**Possible Answer:** The old legend that a man could obtain supernatural power by selling his soul to the devil found its climax in the sixteenth century in the person of Doctor Faustus who really lived in the first half of that century. This man was a wandering scholar who became notorious as a necromancer, braggart, and super-quack, who, abandoning the disinterested pursuit of knowledge in favour of its worldly exploitation, and attaining some temporary success, ultimately met disaster. After his death, a book called Faust MCQS (or, Faustbook) appeared in German in 1587. This book was supposed to contain the experiences and adventures of Doctor Faustus. It was translated into English under the title: The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus. Marlowe must have taken the material for writing of his play from this English translation.

#### Q2. Discuss the plot of the play Doctor Faustus.

**Possible Answer:** Doctor Faustus, a well-respected German scholar, grows dissatisfied with the limits of traditional forms of knowledge-logic, medicine, law, and religion and decides that he wants to learn to practice magic. His friends Valdes and Cornelius instruct him in the black arts, and he begins his new career as a magician by summoning up Mephistophilis, a devil. Despite Mephistophilis's warnings about the horrors of hell, Faustus tells the devil to return to his master, Lucifer, with an offer of Faustus's soul in exchange for twenty-four years of service from Mephistophilis. Meanwhile, Wagner, Faustus's servant, has picked up some magical ability and uses it to press a clown named Robin into his service.

### **Q3. What is the dramatic significance of the opening soliloquy of Faustus?**

**Possible answer:** The play begins with a long soliloquy where Faustus reflects on the most rewarding type of scholarship. He first considers logic, but notes that logic him. He considers medicine and law but dismisses law as is not scholarly enough for him. too petty, dealing with trivial matters rather than larger ones. Divinity, the study of religion and theology, seems to offer wider vistas, but he then dismisses religion and fixes his mind on magic, which, when properly pursued, he believes will make him "a mighty god".

### **Q4. What does Faustus Study?**

**Possible answer:** Faustus renounces heaven and God, swears allegiance to hell, and demands that Mephistophilis rise to serve him. The devil Mephistophilis then appears before Faustus, who commands him to depart and return dressed as a Franciscan friar. Mephistophilis vanishes, and Faustus remarks on his obedience. Mephistophilis then reappears, dressed as a monk, and asks Faustus what he desires. Faustus offers his soul to Lucifer in return for twenty-four years of Mephistophilis's service. Mephistophilis agrees to take this offer to his master and departs. Left alone, Faustus remarks that if he had "as many souls as there be stars," he would offer them all to hell in return for the kind of power that Mephistophilis offers him (3.102). He eagerly awaits Mephistophilis's return.

### **Q5. Discuss Faustus' apostrophe to Helen of Troy?**

**Possible Answer:** His address to Helen begins with the famous line "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships," referring to the Trojan War, which was fought over Helen, and goes on to list all the great things that Faustus would do to win her love.

### **Q6. How does Faustus teach Benvolio a lesson?**

**Possible answer:** The emperor tells Faustus that he would like to see Alexander the Great and his lover. Faustus tells him that he cannot produce their actual bodies but can create spirits resembling them. A knight present in the court is skeptical, and asserts that it is as untrue that Faustus can perform this feat as that the goddess Diana has transformed the knight into a stag. Before the eyes of the court, Faustus creates a vision of Alexander embracing his lover Faustus conjures a pair of antlers onto the head of the knight. The knight pleads for mercy, and the emperor entreats Faustus to remove the horns. Faustus complies, warning Benvolio to have more respect for scholars in the future.

### **Q7. What does Faustus thoughts soon turn away from?**

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Q8. What are the Seven Deadly Sins?**

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q9.** Why did Faustus barter his soul to the Devil?

\Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q10.** How does Faustus sign his compact with Lucifer?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q11.** What does the Latin words "Homo Fuge" means?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q12.** Who tries to dissuade Faustus from signing the pact with Devil?

Ans. \_\_\_\_\_

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**Q13.** Write a short note on the structure of Doctor Faustus.

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**Q14.** Discuss briefly the main characters in the play.

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**Q15.** Explain the opening of Scene V.

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**Q16.** What noteworthy speeches does the final scene contain?

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### 7.9 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Q1. Who is the main character in the play Doctor Faustus?

- a) Lucifer
- b) Mephistophilis
- c) Doctor Faustus
- d) Good Angel

Q2. What is the nationality of Doctor Faustus?

- a) English
- b) Dutch
- c) Irish
- d) German

Q3 Except for the Good Angel, who dissuades Faustus from signing the deal with

- a) Mephistophilis
- b) Lucifer
- c) The Old Man
- d) Wagner

Q4. This play is written in the form of a:

- a) Lyric
- b) Ode
- c) Blank Verse
- d) Sonnet

Q5. Which translation was banned?

- a) Amores
- b) Pharsalia
- c) Doctor Faustus
- d) Dido

Q6. Which field of study does Faustus opt for ?

- a) Logic
- b) Theology
- c) Medicine
- d) Necromancy

Q7. Who is the ruler of hell ?

- a) Mephistophilis
- b) Dr. Fraustus
- c) Bad Angel
- d) Lucifer

Q8. For how many years does Faustus offer his soul to Mephistophilis?

- a) 10
- b) 12
- c) 24
- d) 30

Q9. "Homo Fuge" is a \_\_\_\_\_ term. Latin

- a) Spanish
- b) Latin
- c) Mexican
- d) Portuguese

Q10. Which German emperor invites Dr. Faustus to his palace?

- a) Charles V
- b) Paul V
- c) Albert V
- d) John V

Q11. The Trojan War lasted for how many years?

- a) 12
- b) 11
- c) 10
- d) 8

Q12. Whom did Faustus free from the clutches of the Pope?

- a) Bruno
- b) Old Man
- c) Helen
- d) Wagner

Q13. Which famous conqueror does Faustus conjure up in the court of the emperor?

- a) William the Great
- b) Alexander the Great
- c) Napoleon the Great
- d) Charles the Great

Q14. Which war was fought for Helen?

- a) War of Mesopotamia
- b) War of Macedonia
- c) Punic War
- d) Trojan War

Q15. Doctor Faustus represents a clash between Renaissance and

- a) Medievalism
- b) Modernism
- c) Utilitarianism
- d) Humanitarianism

**Answer:**

1. c)
2. d)
3. c)
4. c)
5. d)
6. d)
7. c)
8. b)
9. a)
- 10) c)
- 11) a)
- 12) b)
- 13) d)
- 14) a)

**7.10 SUGGESTED READINGS**

1. Doctor Faustus - Edited by Suroopa Mukherjee
2. The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature - R. Beadle
3. Christopher Marlowe : a Biographical and Critical study - F. S. Boas
4. Renaissance Self-fashioning from More to Shakespeare - Stephen Greenblatt
5. English drama before Shakespeare - P. Happle

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**FAUSTUS AS A RENAISSANCE MAN****STRUCTURE**

- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Objectives and outcomes
- 8.3 Faustus : As a Renaissance man
- 8.4 His thirst for power
- 8.5 His moral degeneration
- 8.6 His tragic fall
- 8.7 His tragic end
- 8.8 Explanation with reference to the context
- 8.9 Recapitulation of the lesson
- 8.10 Check your progress
- 8.11 Self Assessment Questions
  - 8.11.1 Short Answer Type Questions
- 8.12 Examination Oriented Questions
- 8.13 Multiple Choice Questions
- 8.14 Answer Key
- 8.15 Let us sum up
- 8.16 Suggested Readings

**8.1 INTRODUCTION**

The lesson provides a critical analyses of Faustus' character.

## 8.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Understand the characteristics of a Renaissance man and how Faustus embodies them.
2. Analyze Faustus's ambition, moral conflict, and eventual downfall.
3. Explore the theme of knowledge versus morality in Renaissance drama.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Define the concept of a Renaissance man and apply it to Faustus.
2. Evaluate Faustus's intellectual pride and desire for power as causes of his tragedy.
3. Discuss how Faustus's moral degeneration leads to his tragic fall.

## 8.3 FAUSTUS : AS A RENAISSANCE MAN

Faustus appears as a man of the Renaissance in the very opening scene when, rejecting the traditional subjects of study, he turns to magic and considers the varied uses to which he can put his magic skill after he has acquired it. He contemplated the "world of profit and delight, of power, of honour, of omnipotence" which he hopes to enjoy as a magician. In dwelling upon the advantages which will accrue to him by the exercise of his magic power, he shows his ardent curiosity, his desire for wealth and luxury, his nationalism, and his longing for power. These were precisely the qualities of the Renaissance, which was the age of discovery. A number of allusions in the first scene of Act I maintain our sense of the enlarged outlook and extended horizons of that great period of English history. Faustus desires gold from the East Indies, pearls from the depths of the sea, pleasant fruits and princely delicacies from America. His friend Valdes refers to the Indians in the Spanish colonies, to Lapland giants, and to the annual plate-fleet which supplied gold and silver to the Spanish treasury from the New World. There was much in this scene to inflame the hearts of English audiences who must have heartily approved of Faustus' intention to chase away the Prince of Parma from the Netherlands. Thus Faustus' dream of power included much that had a strong appeal for the English people including Marlowe himself.

Faustus certainly embodies the new enquiring and aspiring spirit of the age of the Renaissance. Marlowe expressed in this play both his fervent sympathy with that new spirit and, ultimately, his awed and pitiful recognition of the danger into which it could lead those who were dominated by it. The danger is clearly seen in Faustus' last soliloquy in which Faustus offers to burn his books. No doubt these books are chiefly the books of magic. Faustus attributed his downfall, partly at least, to his learning.

Doctor Faustus as not only the first major Elizabethan tragedy, but the first to explore the tragic possibilities of the direct clash between the Renaissance compulsions and the Hebraic-Christian tradition. Faustus put into an old legend a new meaning. He inserted into the old medieval or Christian moral equation the new and ambiguous

dynamic of the Renaissance. He treated the legend of Faustus in such a manner as to give it a fascination and a dignity never realized in previous treatments of the story. The story of this 24 year action, compressed by Marlowe in a few vivid scenes, represents a soul torn between the desire to stretch to its utmost limit its new mastery and freedom on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the claims of the old teachings a defiance of which meant guilt and a growing sense of alienation from society.

The legend of Faustus was believed to be a terrible and ennobling example, and a warning to all Christians to avoid the pitfalls of science, pleasure, and ambition which had led to Faustus' damnation. But it has to be noted that all that the Renaissance valued is represented in what the devil has to offer, and one is left wondering whether it is the religious life of the worldly life that is more attractive. All that the Good Angel in this play has to offer is "warnings". For instance, the Good Angel warns Faustus against reading the book of magic because it will invite God's "heavy wrath" upon his head, and asks him to think of heaven. To this the Evil Angel replies: "No Faustus, think of honour and wealth". At another point in the play the Evil Angel urges Faustus to go forward in the famous art of magic and to become a lord and commander of the earth. There can be no doubt that the devil here represents the natural ideal of the Renaissance by appealing to the vague but healthy ambitions of a young soul which wishes to launch itself upon the wide world. No wonder that Faustus, a child of the Renaissance, cannot resist the devil's suggestion. We like him for his love of life, for his trust in Nature, for his enthusiasm for beauty. He speaks for all when, looking at Helen he cries: "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships/And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?" To sum up, Marlowe's Faustus is a martyr to everything that the Renaissance valued - power, curious knowledge, enterprise, wealth, and beauty. The play shows Marlowe's own passion for these Renaissance values.

#### **8.4 HIS THIRST FOR POWER**

The Prologue, or first Chorus, sets Faustus, his character and his doom before us in clear, emphatic terms. We are here told that Faustus, swollen with pride in his attainments, meets a sad end because he has preferred forbidden pursuits to the pursuit of salvation. His insatiable thirst for knowledge and power is clearly evident from the first scene which deals with Faustus' decision to take up magic. One by one he examines the branches of higher learning as they were organized in the universities of his day: philosophy, medicine, law, and theology. One by one the feats of secular leaning are rejected because their ends do not satisfy his demand. But his demands has clearly to be understood. He does not pursue knowledge for the sake of truth, but for the sake of power, super-human power, the power over life and death. His fundamental grievances is: "Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man". Dissatisfied with his human status, he rebels against human limitations. He would like to have the power to make men live eternally, and the power to bring the dead back to life. He rejects divine learning (or theology) also, because it is based on a recognition of man's mortality and fallibility. Leaving divinity to God, Faustus dedicates himself to the devil. Rejecting the fatalism of the doctrine "Che sera, sera" (what will be, shall be), he performs an act of his own will, and it is one of the developing ironies of the play that what he wills to be shall be (that is, he chooses the devil and damnation, and he goes, in the end, to the devil and damnation).

When the two Angels make their exit, and Faustus is left alone, in a soliloquy, Faustus dwells upon the power and the pleasures that he will be able to enjoy by means of magic. He will make spirits bring him gold from India, pearls from the ocean, and delicious fruits from all corners of the New World. He will make spirits

read to him "strange philosophy" and tell him the secrets of foreign kings. Through the agency of spirits, he will wall all Germany with brass, make the river Rhine circle the city of Wittenberg, clothe university learners with silk, raise an army to chase the Prince of Parma from his land, and have at his disposal marvelous weapons of war.

The study of Necromancy further aids to fulfill his achievements as he makes it clear that magic has "ravished" him. He recalls his victories in the discussions he has had with the priests of the German church and says that he has resolved to become as great a magician as Agrippa used to be. Valdes encourages Faustus in his resolve and says that spirits of every element will be at the service of Faustus. Spirits will attend on him, guard him, and bring great treasures to him from America. Sometimes these spirits will appear before him as lovely women, or unmarried maidens. Faustus assures Valdes of his firm resolution. Cornelius says that, as Faustus is fully qualified and equipped for the study of magic, he will in course of time be held in greater reverence than the Delphian oracle. Valdes then gives Faustus the necessary guidance and asks him to go to some solitary grove in order to conjure. Faustus decides to conjure this same night, no matter what happens.

The superficial logic by which Faustus rejects the scriptures and divinity is in itself a deeply ironic comment on his character and career. This logic is also misleading, and only an excuse for Faustus to try to gain "a world of profit and delight, of power, of honour, and omnipotence". This logic betrays not only a willingness to discard the scriptures but also an attitude of mind that will gradually lead him to the sin of despair. In aspiring to be more than man, Faustus repudiates his humanity, and rebels against the ultimate reality. In his aspiration to be as God, he chooses the not-God.

The first section of the play ends with the first scene. Faustus has "settled his studies" and decided to conjure the same night "thought I die therefore". The reference to death here foreshadows ironically the ultimate result of the choice he has made.

## **8.5 HIS MORAL DEGENERATION**

As soon as Faustus, has decided that necromancy is the only study worth his while, he seeks the aid of Valdes and Cornelius, who, are already proficient in the art. The pair are ready enough to help Faustus, for they have been trying in the past to lead him into forbidden ways. he tells them that their exhortations have won him at last "to practise magic and concealed arts". At the same time, he is anxious not to appear too pliant, and adds: "Yet not your words only, but mine own fantasy." He makes it plain that he is no humble seeker after instruction, but one who has already earned fame and honour. The two friends are willing to accept him on his own terms.

Utrems He paints a glowing picture of the possibilities before them, the only condition being that Faustus remains firm in his decision: "If learned Faustus will be resolute." However, it soon appears that for all their reputation for proficiency in magic, the two friends of Faustus have not yet gone far. They have certainly called spirits, but they have made no use of this success. They have been careful not to sacrifice their salvation for the attainment of supernatural powers. They have never yielded to the temptation of the spirits and never put their powers to test. Even when they agree to guide Faustus in his explorations of magic, they leave us in no doubt of their intention to use Faustus as a tool rather than run into danger themselves. These two men are not perfect magicians welcoming a promising beginner, but merely the devil's decoys !uring Faustus along the road to destruction. They serve their purpose in giving a dramatic turn to the scene of his temptation, and except for a passing mention by the learners, we hear no more of them.

Faustus goes to conjure alone, and alone he concludes his pact with the devil. As for the use to which he will put his newly-acquired powers, he speaks in a heroic vein about the world of profit and delight, of power, of honour, and omnipotence; all things that move between the quiet poles shall be at his command; his dominion will stretch as far as does the mind of man; he will become a demi-god; he will wall all Germany with brass, and chase the Prince of Parma from his land. Whatever baser elements there may be in his ambition, we should not fail to recognize its nobler elements, even though subsequently Faustus, instead of pursuing ends worthy of his professed ideals, abandons these and appears content to amuse the Emperor with conjuring tricks and play childish pranks on the Pope.

Faustus soon lapses into luxury and buffoonery. The reason is that all that happens to Faustus, once the pact has been signed, is the devil's work. Who but a fool would imagine that any power but evil could be won by a bargain with evil, or that truth could be elicited from the father of lies? Marlowe knew the nature of the power his hero had acquired and the inevitable curse it carried with it. Of course, Faustus' deterioration is not an automatic result of his pact with the devil. In spite of his genuine desire to know truth, the seeds of decay existed in his character from the first; otherwise he would not have made his fatal bargain. Besides his passion for knowledge, he has a lust for riches and pleasure and power. He does express patriotic sentiments, but he has an almost vulgar desire to exercise authority over kings and rulers and even reveals his sensual nature by speaking of living "in all voluptuousness." Faustus is a man dazzled by an unlimited possibilities of magic, and he shows himself quite aware of his own weakness when he says: "The god thou servest is thine own appetite."

After Faustus has signed the bond with his blood, we can trace the stages of a gradual deterioration. Although he was sceptical regarding hell and heaven in his first interview with Mephistophilis (before he signed the bond), his scepticism now becomes bolder and more jeering. He now tells Mephistophilis that he thinks hell to be a "fable".

He refuses to believe that "after life there is any pain". To Mephistophilis's remark that he (Mephistophilis) is now in hell, Faustus's reply is that if this be hell ("sleeping, eating, walking, and disputing"), he will willingly be damned. Faustus's discussion with Mephistophilis on the subject of astronomy is curiously barren. The quarrel that follows on Mephistophilis's refusal to say who made the world leads to the intervention of Lucifer and the "pastime" of the Seven Deadly Sins. It is a much shrunken Faustus who, after seeing the parade of the Seven Deadly Sins, exclaims: "O, this feeds my soul." He had felt equally delighted with the dance of the devils who offered him "crowns and rich apparel" just before his signing the bond. At that time he was told that he would be able to conjure up such spirits at will and even perform greater feats. Faustus had thereupon said: "Then there's enough for a thousand souls." We may perhaps infer that Mephistophilis's promise included sensual satisfaction. That inference would accord with Faustus's mood soon, afterwards when he demands a wife, "the fairest maid in Germany", and when, instead of providing a suitable wife for him, Mephistophilis offered to bring him a mistress, any woman who attracted him, "be she as chaste as was Penelope....."

So far Faustus has not left Wittenberg, and the emphasis has been on the hollowness of his bargain in respect of any intellectual progress or enlightenment. Only his childish pleasure in the devil-dance (Act III, Scene I, Lines 82-83) and the pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins (Act II, Scene II, Lines 112-172) hints at the vulgar trivialities to which he will descend. Now, in the company of Mephistophilis, he launches forth into the world (Act III-the speech of the Chorus). 200

There is something strange and peculiar, not only in Faustus's situation, but in his nature. Once he has signed the bond, he has of his own free will renounced salvation. But he has brought upon himself another change also. In this connection, we should not neglect the first clause of his agreement with the devil: "that Faustus may be a spirit in form and substance". This clause has generally been taken to mean merely that Faustus will be free of the bonds of flesh, so that he may be invisible at will, able to change his shape, ride on dragons, and so on.

When Faustus calls on Christ to save his distressed soul, Lucifer replies with admirable logic that Christ, being just, will not interfere because Faustus's soul has been pledged to the devil. Thus the possibility of Faustus's salvation is left nicely balanced in doubt. It is only when, back among his learners at Wittenberg, he faces the final reckoning that Faustus regains some degree of heroic dignity.

One good, or at least amiable, quality, apart from a genuine tenderness towards his learners, Faustus shows throughout: a love of beauty in Nature and in art:

*Have not I made blind Homer sing to me  
Of Alexander's love and Oenon's death?  
And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes  
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,*

Made music-? (Act II, Scene II, Lines 26-30)

The climax of his career in his union with the immortal beauty of Helen. This sensitive appreciation of beauty could be something that has survived uncorrupted from his days of innocence. And who is Helen? Here we come to the central theme of the damnation of Faustus. When the Emperor asks him to summon Alexander and his paramour, Faustus explains the nature of the figures that will appear. The circumstances in which Helen is summoned for the second time should also be noted. Urged by the Old Man, Faustus has tried for the last time to revolt against the devil. But he has been threatened into submission, and has renewed the blood-bond. He has sunk so low as to ask for the revenge upon the Old Man who had tried to save his soul. And it is in the first place as a safeguard against once again trying to desert the devil that he seeks possession of Helen. He wants Helen so that her sweet embraces "may extinguish clean/ Those thoughts that do dissuade me from my vow,/ And keep mine oath I made to Lucifer!" Revenge upon the Old Man and the desire to make love to Helen are both sought as guarantees against salvation. Helen then is a "spirit", and in this play a spirit means a "devil". In making her his paramour Faustus commits the sin of demoniality, that is, bodily or sexual intercourse with a demon.

Thus with Faustus's union with Helen the nice balance between possible salvation and imminent damnation is upset, and the Old Man recognizes the inevitable in his above-quoted speech. Faustus, in his talk with the Scholars in Act V, Scene II, shows a terrible clarity of vision: "a surfeit of deadly sin, that hath damned both body and soul. Faustus' offence can never be pardoned: the serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus." In the final scene Faustus is still haunted by the idea of a salvation beyond his reach:

*See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!  
One drop would save my soul, half a drop: Ah, my Christ!*

(Act V, Scene III, Lines 79-80)

This play presents the fall and slow moral disintegration of an ardent, but erring, spirit. It depicts not only Faustus's spiritual sin of bartering his soul to the powers of evil, but also the physical counterpart of that sin, the physical counterpart being demoniality.

## 8.6 HIS TRAGIC FALL

The first thing that strikes us about Faustus is his extra-ordinary learning and scholarship. The Chorus, in his very first speech, tell us of this aspect of Faustus's character,. According to the Chorus, Faustus made a rapid progress in the study of divinity. From Faustus' first soliloquy we learn that, before he decided to practice magic, he had already attained mastery over various branches of study. He had acquired great proficiency in logic; his medical skill had won him great renown; he had made a name as a theologian; and so on. Intellectually equipped as Faustus is, he soon becomes a great magician whose wonderful performances astonish all Germany. Speaking to the Scholars towards the end of the play, Faustus recalls the wonders that he has done and that the whole world has witnessed.

Faustus is endowed with a rare imaginative faculty. Having rejected the various branches of study, Faustus visualizes the wonders that he will be able to work with the power of magic:

*O, what a world of profit and delight  
Of power, of honour, of omnipotence,  
Is promised to the studious artizan!*

(Act I, Scene 1, Lines 51-53)

He goes on to speak of the unlimited authority he will wield. He will be greater than emperors and kings, and his dominion will "stretch as far as doth the mind of man". He will become a "mighty god". He sees bright visions of spirits bringing his gold from India, pearls from the ocean, pleasant fruits from distant corners of the world. He hopes to wall all Germany with brass, make the Rhine circle the city of Wittenberg, chase the Prince of Parma from his land, and so on. He thinks that he will be able to make a bridge through the moving air in order to cross the ocean with an army of soldier; he thinks of joining the hills that bind the African shore; he imagines that no ruler will be able to rule except by his permission. Not only does Faustus possess an exceptional imaginative power which enables him to see bright dreams of his future as a magician, but he is a born poet. His poetic faculty is, indeed, remarkable. Almost every major speech of Faustus is instinct with the poetry that is an innate gift with him. Even the manner in which he gives expression to his conflicts and despairs is worthy of a poet.

Faustus' sin is pride, presumption, and elf-conceit. The Chorus refers to his as becoming "swollen with cunning, of a self-conceit," and compares his to Icarus who flew into the sky with wings made of wax which melted with the heat of the sun and led to Icarus' dropping to the earth and meeting his death because of his presumption in challenging the Gods who then "conspired his overthrow". Faustus' pride is the pride of knowledge with which he proceeds to study necromancy. The Chorus puts it thus:

*Nothing so sweet as magic is to him  
Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss:*

In his very first soliloquy, Faustus speaks of a "world of profit, and delight, of honour, of omnipotence" which he hopes to attain. He dreams of ruling all things "that move between the quiet poles" and thinks that his

power will "stretch as far as doth the mind of man". "A sound magician is a mighty god", he says, and decides to exert his brains in order "to gain a deity". He quickly responds to the suggestion of the Evil Angel that he should be on earth "as Jove in the sky", and attain the position of a "lord and commander" of this world. Faustus sees extravagant visions of the power that he will wield, and is encouraged in his hopes by Valdes and Cornelius. He becomes so proud that the word "damnation", he says, "terrifies not him" and he refuses to believe that there is any pain waiting for human beings after death. He scolds Mephistophilis for feeling unhappy at having lost the joys of heaven and asks him to learn from him "manly fortitude". He expects Mephistophilis to do whatever he shall command, "be it to make the moon drop from her sphere,/Or the ocean to overwhelm the world." Closely allied to the sin of pride is Faustus' "curiosity" which makes him probe the secrets of the universe. He not only wants Mephistophilis to tell him what hell is like but he would like to visit to hell in order that he can see it with his own eyes: "O, might I see hell, and return again." He demands from the devil a book which can teach him all about spells and incantations, characters and planets of the heavens, the plants and trees that grow on the earth. With the power of magic, he ascends to the top of the Olympus mountain, sees the Tropic, the Zones, and the heights of Primum Mobile, and studies cosmography, not to speak of his visits of various places on the earth. This excessive curiosity is also regarded as part of Faustus' sin. But that is not all. He is also guilty of sensuality. While laying down his conditions for signing a contract with the devil, he demands that he should be allowed to live for twenty-four years "in all voluptuousness". Soon after the bond has been signed, he demands a wife, "the fairest maid in Germany" because, as he says, he cannot live without a wife. Subsequently, he asks for Helen whose sweet embraces, he says, will drive out from his mind all thoughts of rebellion against Lucifer. When Helen is brought to him, he goes into raptures over her beauty and says that none but she shall be his paramour. Faustus knows very well that the woman to whom he is making love is not the real Helen, but a succuba, a devil in the guise of Helen. This means that, in making love to her, he commits the sin of demoniality. Finally, Faustus is guilty of the sin of despair. "Despair" in this context means allegiance to the devil and loss of faith in God. At several points in the course of the play, Faustus speaks of his despair. For instance, after the Old Man, has spoken to him of his sinful life, Faustus, addressing himself, says: "Damned art thou, Faustus, damned; despair and die!"

Although it is in a mood of exhilaration and elation that Faustus decides to take the study of necromancy and to practice magic, he has no peace once he has taken that decision. Throughout the twenty-four years during which he practices magic, he experiences a mental conflict between his godly and ungodly impulses. A feeling of regret at having alienated God keeps haunting him during this period. The Good and the Evil Angels, who appear to him on several occasions, are merely that personifications of his own good and evil impulses. The words they speak to him are symbolic of the mental debate that goes on his own mind between his desire to enjoy the fruits of the power he has gained through magic and an urge not to renounce his trust in God. Several times he gives an outward expression to the tussle that goes on in his mind.

Even while continuing to practice magic, Faustus experiences the pangs and pricks of his conscience. The manner in which Faustus harasses the Pope by snatching away eatables and drinks from the Pope's hands and the manner in which he befools and cheats the Horse-courses, far from doing him any credit, lower and degrade him in our eyes. This great scholar, who had planned to wall all Germany with brass and to drive away the Prince of Parma from his land, is now frittering away his energies by playing crude tricks and by giving magic performances to entertain the Emperor and the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt. Perhaps the scene of the Pope's harassment and the Horse-courser scene were not written by Marlowe himself. Perhaps it was Marlowe's intention to show, with the help of such scenes, the rapid deterioration that takes place in the character of Faustus after his becoming

a disciple of the devil. The Faustus who plays tricks on the Pope, the Knight, and the Horse-courser is different from the Faustus of the opening scenes.

The final monologue of Faustus not only emphasizes Faustus imaginative and poetic faculties, but is unsurpassed as an expression of spiritual horror. Faustus here realizes that time will not stop and that the devil will come at the fixed hour :

*The starts move still, time runs, the clock will strike,*

*The devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.*

(Act V, Scene III, Lines 76-77)

Faustus wishes that he did not have a soul or that his soul were not immortal. He would like his body to turn into air and his soul to little water-drops which may mingle with the ocean and never be found again. The climax of horror is reached in the last four lines of his monologue.

#### **CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks**

1. A Renaissance man is typically well-versed in many fields of \_\_\_\_.
2. Faustus's greatest flaw is his excessive \_\_\_\_ and ambition.
3. Despite warnings, Faustus refuses to \_\_\_\_ his pact.
4. The play ends with Faustus being dragged to \_\_\_\_.

#### **Answers**

1. knowledge	2. pride	3. repent	4. hell
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### **8.7 HIS TRAGIC END**

We first see Faustus at the peak of his worldly career. He is already master of all the existing knowledge and skills. He is a famous physician, honoured by whole cities and held in reverence by his learners. Why, then did he becomes restless? Why was he unwilling to remain "but Faustus, and a man"? (Act I, Scene I, Line 23). Why did he feel an urge to command "all things that move between the quiet poles"? (Act I, Scene I, Line 54). It is because a tragic hero feels the compulsion to realize himself fully in the face of all the odds, and that the test of his heroism is the degree of the risk he is willing to take. In his sense, the tragedy of Faustus is the tragedy of Adam. To Adam, paradise was not enough. He sought knowledge, and this was a forward step in the direction of self-realization. To the orthodox people, Adam's action is surely sinful, just as Faustus' action is wholly devilish in the eyes of the Chorus who opens and closes of the play. Faustus' opening soliloquy also represents his action as sinful because, after he has dismissed all studies but necromancy (which he thinks to be the key to his self-realization), the Good Angel tells him to put aside the damned book of magic, while the Evil Angel urges him to go forward in that famous art.

Marlowe sees the whole case not only as Good or Evil would see it but as it would be seen by a man of flesh and blood, the man who takes the risk is prepared to face the consequences. The meaning is the total

yield of the situation into which Faustus walks of his own free will, in accordance with the mysterious, tragic urge of his times. Faustus' first move after deciding upon necromancy as the field of his research is one of arrogant and impatient lust for power. His absurd egotism is mixed with intellectual and humanitarian impulses. He would resolve all ambiguities, read strange philosophy, rid his country of the foreign domination and fortify it with a wall of brass, clothe the schoolboys in silk. He is prepared, at the end of Act I, Scene I, to take the ultimate risk: "This night I'll conjure, though I die therefore". Kater, in Act I, Scene III, he rebukes the Devil's own messenger, Mephistophilis, whose heart faints as he anticipates Faustus' awful fate. Faustus here speaks of his own "manly fortitude", he scorns Mephistophilis' warning; he rejects all hope of heavenly joys; and offers his soul to Lucifer for twenty-four years of his heart's desires. With this decision come new energy, new power, new command.

By the time of his second conjuring (Act II, Scene I), even before the signing of the bond, he confesses doubts, "Something sounds in mine ears: Abjure this magic, turn to God again!", he says. And he asks himself why he is wavering. He feels like turning to God again, but thinks that God does not love him. The doubts will not vanish, and Faustus lives out his twenty-four years as the first modern tragic man, part believer, part unbeliever, wavering between independence, and dependence upon God, now arrogant and confident, now anxious and worried, justified yet horribly unjustified.

Faustus is forced constantly to renew his choice between two alternatives. In contrast moods, he sees greater heights, and he experiences greatest terror. Soon the gentle voice that sounded in his ears, urging him to give up his magic and return to God, takes the shape of "fearful echoes" thundering in his ears: "Faustus, thou art damned" (Act II, Scene II, Lines 20-21). What he is learning is the truth of his own nature, that he is a creature, as well as a creator, a man and not a God, a dependent and a responsible part of a greater whole. He learns that his soul is not a mere trifle which he can use as a commodity, and that contrition, prayer, repentance, hell, and damnation are not just "illusions" (as the Evil Angel told him).

Between the high-soaring scholar of the first scene and the agonised figure of the final scene, there is a notable difference. In the final scene, Faustus enters with the Scholars, and for the first time in the play he has normal, compassionate discourse with his fellows. His role of demi-god is over; he is human once more, a friend and befriended. "Ah, gentlemen, learn me with patience", says he who had been only recently acting as if he were the lord of all creation. His friends now seem more "sweet" (he uses this word thrice for them) than any "princely delicate", or the "Signiory of Emden". Although the thrill of his exploits still lingers (in his recollection of "the wonders he has done"), he is humble and repentant. He longs to weep and pray but finds himself prevented by the devils from doing so. He confesses to the Scholars the cause of all his misery. Knowing his doom is near, he refuses their help and asks them not to talk to him but save themselves and depart. They retire, leaving him to meet his fate alone.

Faustus reaches levels of perception never gained by less venturesome individuals. He must see things with his own eyes. He does not want so much what power can bring: he never takes the Signiory of Emden, never builds a brass wall around Germany, never clothes the school-boys in silk. He wants what all men, good and bad, have wanted. He wants to conquer time, space, and ignorance. Above all, he wants knowledge: What is hell? Where is it? Who made the world? He wants to know everything about "the plants, the herbs, the trees that grow upon the earth". "He explores this world and also the regions above this world; he tries to understand the secrets of the heavens. He digs into the past, making blind Homer sing to him, and Amphion play the harp for him. What Marlowe dramatizes is not only the terror of the black art as the old legend told about it, but the wonder of it,

the wonder of the man who dared to use the black art and the wonder of the mysteries it reveals. But the play also points to the peculiar dilemma of modern times. On the one hand is human limitation: on the other is the compulsion of the modern man to deny his limitations, and to press even further into the mysteries of a universe which appears steadily to yield more and more of its secrets to his enquiring mind. To rest content with his limitations would mean that he refuses to make the fullest use of his own God-given powers; yet to explore the mysteries of the universe is somehow evil and may bring not only the present suffering but the horrors of eternity".

In his last despairing moments, Faustus asks why he was not born a creature lacking in a soul, or why his soul had to be immortal. Medieval theology held that man is because he believes. To this the answer of the Renaissance was that man is because he thinks and acts and discovers. Neither view, as Marlowe presents Faustus' dilemma, is wholly right or wholly wrong. In the world of tragedy, the hero can only take the road of experiment. He must follow his bent, take action, and live it through.

## 8.8 EXPLANATION WITH REFERENCE TO THE CONTEXT

### Passage I

*These metaphysics of magicians,  
And necromantic books are heavenly!*

**Reference:** These lines are taken from Act I, scene I of Christopher Marlowe's play Dr. Faustus.

**Context :** The play begins with a long soliloquy where Faustus reflects on the most rewarding type of scholarship. He first considers logic, quoting the Greek philosopher Aristotle, but notes that disputing well seems to be the only goal of logic, and, since Faustus' debating skills are already good, logic is not scholarly enough for him. He considers medicine, quoting the Greek physician Galen, and decides that medicine, with its possibility of achieving miraculous cures, is the most fruitful pursuit-yet he notes that he has achieved great renown as a doctor already and that this fame has not brought him satisfaction. He considers law, quoting the Byzantine emperor Justinian, but dismisses law as too petty, dealing with trivial matters rather than larger ones. Divinity, the study of religion and theology, seems to offer wider vistas, but he quotes from St. Jerome's Bible that all men sin and finds the Bible's assertion that "the reward of sin is death" an unacceptable doctrine. He then dismisses religion and fixes his mind on magic, which, when properly pursued, he believes will make him "a mighty god" (1.62).

### Passage II

*Think'st tough that I, who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?*

**Reference:**

This passage has been taken from Scene III of Act I

## **Explanation:**

Faustus stands in a magical circle marked with various signs and words, and he chants in Latin. Four devils and Lucifer, the ruler of hell, watch him from the shadows. Faustus renounces heaven and God, swears allegiance to hell, and demands that Mephistophilis rise to serve him. The devil Mephistophilis then appears before Faustus, who commands him to depart and return dressed as a Franciscan friar, since "that holy shape becomes a devil best" (3.26). Mephistophilis vanishes, and Faustus remarks on his obedience. Mephistophilis then reappears, dressed as a monk, and asks Faustus what he desires. Faustus demands his obedience, but Mephistophilis says that he is Lucifer's servant and can obey only Lucifer. He adds that he came because he heard Faustus deny obedience to God and hoped to capture his soul.

## **Passage III**

*Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.  
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?*

**Reference :** This passage has been extracted from Act I, Scenes III, Lines 76-80.

**Context :** The speaker is Mephistophilis. He offers a powerful portrait of hell that seems to warn against any pact with Lucifer. He exposes the horrors of his own experience as if offering sage guidance to Faustus. His honesty in mentioning the "ten thousand hells" that torment him shines a negative light on the action of committing one's soul to Lucifer.

## **Passage IV**

*Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:  
Her lips sucks forth my soul, see where it flies!  
Come Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips,  
And all is dross that is not Helena!*

**Reference:** These lines occur in Act V, Scene I of the play.

**Context:** Faustus enters with some of the scholars. One of them asks Faustus if he can produce Helen of Greece (also known as Helen of Troy), who they have decided was "the admirablest lady / that ever lived" (12.3-4). Faustus agrees to produce her, and gives the order to Mephistophilis: immediately, Helen herself crosses the stage, to the delight of the scholars. He is awed by her beauty and graces and loses sense of time. He wants to attain immortality by kissing her. He praises her lips as filled with sweetness that they have drawn his soul out of his body. Then he asks her to give back his soul which the first kiss had sucked forth. He believes that heaven is in her lips.

## Passage V

*Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
this And then thou must be damned perpetually.  
Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer!  
I'll burn my books-ah, Mephistophilis!*

**Reference:** These lines occur in Scene III of Act V of the play.

**Context :** The final night of Faustus's life has come, and he tells the scholars of the deal he has made with Lucifer. They are horrified and ask what they can do to save him, but he tells them that there is nothing to be done. Reluctantly, they leave to pray for Faustus. A vision of hell opens before Faustus's horrified eyes as the clock strikes eleven. The last hour passes by quickly, and Faustus exhorts the clocks to slow and time to stop, so that he might live a little longer and have a chance to repent. He then begs God to reduce his time in hell to a thousand years or a hundred thousand years, so long as he is eventually saved. He wishes that he were a beast and would simply cease to exist when he dies instead of face damnation. He curses his parents and himself, and the clock strikes midnight. Devils enter and carry Faustus away as he screams, "Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer! I'll burn my books-ah, Mephistophilis!"

## Passage VI

*O, I'll leap up to my God! Who pulls me down?....  
One drop of blood would save my soul, half a drop: ah my  
Christ (13.69-71)*

**Reference :** These lines are spoken by Dr. Faustus in the Epilogue.

**Context :** Faustus appears to be calling on Christ, seeking the precious drop of blood that will save his soul. Yet some unseen force-whether inside or outside him- prevents him from giving himself to God.

## Passage VII

*Faustus is gone! Regard his hellish fall,  
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise  
Only to wonder unlawful things:  
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits  
To practice more than heavenly power permits.*

**Reference:** These lines occur in the Epilogue of the play in lines 4-8.

**Context :** In the duel between Christendom and the rising modern spirit, Marlowe's play seems to come down squarely on the side of Christianity. Yet Marlowe, himself notoriously accused of atheism and various other sins, may have had other ideas, and he made his Faustus sympathetic, if not necessarily admirable. While his play shows

how the untrammelled pursuit of knowledge and power can be corrupting, it also shows the grandeur of such a quest. Faustus is damned, but the gates that he opens remain standing wide, waiting for others to follow.

### **8.9 RECAPITULATION OF THE LESSON**

In this lesson, the important passages from the play have been given and explained with reference to context.

### **8.10 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

1. Explain with reference to context.

- a) Think'st though that I, who saw the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells  
In being deprived of everlasting bliss?
- b) Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,  
And then thou must be damned perpetually.  
Ugly hell gape not! Come not, Lucifer!  
I'll burn my books-ah, Mephistophilis!
- c) Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss:  
Her lips sucks forth my soul, see where it flies!  
Come Helen, come, give me my soul again.  
Here will I dwell, for heaven be in these lips,  
And all is dross that is not Helena!

Answer the following questions :

- 1.. Discuss Doctor Faustus as a Morality play.
- 2. Discuss the structure or construction of the play Doctor Faustus.
- 3. Comment on the appropriateness or otherwise of the comic and farcical scenes in Doctor Faustus.
- 4. Write a note on the Renaissance character of the play Doctor Faustus.

### **8.11 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

#### **8.11.1 Short answer type questions**

##### **Q1. Discuss Faustus as a man of Renaissance.**

**Possible answer :** Faustus appears as a man of the Renaissance in the very opening scene when, rejecting the traditional subjects of study, he turns to magic and considers the varied uses to which he can put his magic skill after he has acquired it. He contemplated the "world of profit and delight, of power, of honour, of omnipotence"

which he hopes to enjoy as a magician. In dwelling upon the advantages which will accrue to him by the exercise of his magic power, he shows his ardent curiosity, his desire for wealth and luxury, his nationalism, and his longing for power. These were precisely the qualities of the Renaissance, which was the age of discovery.

**Q2. How makes Doctor Faustus a tragedy?**

**Possible answer:** The first thing that strikes us about Faustus is his extra-ordinary learning and scholarship. The Chorus, in his very first speech, tell us of this aspect of Faustus's character. According to the Chorus, Faustus made a rapid progress in the study of divinity. From Faustus' first soliloquy we learn that, before he decided to practice magic, he had already attained mastery over various branches of study. He had acquired great proficiency in logic; his medical skill had won him great renown; he had made a name as a theologian; and so on. Intellectually equipped as Faustus is, he soon becomes a great magician whose wonderful performances astonish all Germany. Speaking to the Scholars towards the end of the play, Faustus recalls the wonders that he has done and that the whole world has witnessed.

**Q3. What is the cause of tragedy in Doctor Faustus?**

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**Q4. Trace the various stages of Faustus's damnation.**

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**Q5. How does Marlowe portray the character of Faustus?**

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**8.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

**Q1. Discuss Marlowe's contribution to English Drama?**

**Ans.** The chief works of Marlowe are as follows; *Dido, Queen of Carthage* is believed to have been his first. It was performed by the Children of the Chapel, a company of boy actors, between 1587 and 1593. The play

was first published in 1594; the title page attributes the play to Marlowe and Thomas Nashe. Marlowe's first play performed on the regular stage in London, in 1587, was Tamburlaine the Great, about the conqueror Tamburlaine, who rises from shepherd to war-lord. It is among the first English plays in blank verse, and, with Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, generally is considered the beginning of the mature phase of the Elizabethan theatre. Tamburlaine was a success, and was followed with Tamburlaine the Great, Part II. The two parts of Tamburlaine were published in 1590. The Jew of Malta, about a Maltese Jew's barbarous revenge against the city authorities, has a prologue delivered by a character representing Machiavelli. It was probably written in 1589 or 1590, and was first performed in 1592. It was a success, and remained popular for the next fifty years.

Edward the Second is an English history play about the deposition of King Edward II by his barons and the Queen, who resent the undue influence the king's favourites have in court and state affairs. The play was entered into the Stationers' Register on 6 July 1593, five weeks after Marlowe's death. The Massacre at Paris is a short and luridly written work, the only surviving text of which was probably a reconstruction from memory of the original performance text, portraying the events of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacre in 1572, which English Protestants invoked as the blackest example of Catholic treachery. It features the silent "English. Agent", whom subsequent tradition has identified with Marlowe himself and his connections to the secret service. The Massacre at Paris is considered his most dangerous play, as agitators in London seized on its theme to advocate the murders of refugees from the low countries and, indeed, it warns Elizabeth I of this possibility in its last scene. Its full title was The Massacre at Paris: With the Death of the Duke of Guise. Marlowe also wrote the poem Hero and Leander (published in 1598), the popular lyric "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love", and translations of Ovid's Amores and the first book of Lucan's Pharsalia. In 1599, his translation of Ovid was banned and copies publicly burned as part of Archbishop Whitgift's crackdown on offensive material.

## **Q2. What is the dramatic significance of the opening scene of the play Doctor Faustus?**

**Possible Answer:** The play begins with a long soliloquy where Faustus reflects on the most rewarding type of scholarship. He first considers logic, quoting the Greek philosopher Aristotle, but notes that disputing well seems to be the only goal of logic, and, since Faustus' debating skills are already good, logic is not scholarly enough for him. He considers medicine, quoting the Greek physician Galen, and decides that medicine, with its possibility of achieving miraculous cures, is the most fruitful pursuit-yet he notes that he has achieved great renown as a doctor already and that this fame has not brought him satisfaction. He considers law, quoting the Byzantine emperor Justinian, but dismisses law as too petty, dealing with trivial matters rather than larger ones. Divinity, the study of religion and theology, seems to offer wider vistas, but he quotes from St. Jerome's Bible that all men sin and finds the Bible's assertion that "the reward of sin is death" an unacceptable doctrine. He then dismisses religion and fixes his mind on magic, which, when properly pursued, he believes will make him "a mighty god".

Wagner, Faustus's servant, enters as his master finishes speaking. Faustus asks Wagner to bring Valdes and Cornelius, Faustus's friends, to help him learn the art of magic. While they are on their way, a good angel and an evil angel visit Faustus. The good angel urges him to set aside his book of magic and read the Scriptures instead; the evil angel encourages him to go forward in his pursuit of the black arts. After they vanish, it is clear that Faustus is going to heed the evil spirit, since he exults at the great powers that the magical arts will bring him. Faustus imagines sending spirits to the end of the world to fetch him jewels and delicacies, having them teach him secret knowledge, and using magic to make himself king of all Germany.

### **Q3. Discuss Doctor Faustus as a man of Renaissance.**

**Possible Answer :** Faustus appears as a man of the Renaissance in the very opening scene when, rejecting the traditional subjects of study, he turns to magic and considers the varied uses to which he can put his magic skill after he has acquired it. He contemplated the "world of profit and delight, of power, of honour, of omnipotence" which he hopes to enjoy as a magician. In dwelling upon the advantages which will accrue to him by the exercise of his magic power, he shows his ardent curiosity, his desire for wealth and luxury, his nationalism, and his longing for power. These were precisely the qualities of the Renaissance, which was the age of discovery. A number of allusions in the first scene of Act I maintain our sense of the enlarged outlook and extended horizons of that great period of English history. Faustus desires gold from the East Indies, pearls from the depths of the sea, pleasant fruits and princely delicacies from America. His friend Valdes refers to the Indians in the Spanish colonies, to Lapland giants, and to the annual plate-fleet which supplied gold and silver to the Spanish treasury from the New World. There was much in this scene to inflame the hearts of English audiences who must have heartily approved of Faustus' intention to chase away the Prince of Parma from the Netherlands. Thus Faustus' dream of power included much that had a strong appeal for the English people including Marlowe himself.

### **V, Scene II (91-92)**

Faustus certainly embodies the new enquiring and aspiring spirit of the age of the Renaissance. Marlowe expressed in this play both his fervent sympathy with that new spirit and, ultimately, his awed and pitiful recognition of the danger into which it could lead those who were dominated by it. The danger is clearly seen in Faustus' last soliloquy in which Faustus offers to burn his books. No doubt these books are chiefly the books of magic. Faustus attributed his downfall, partly at least, to his learning.

Doctor Faustus as not only the first major Elizabethan tragedy, but the first to explore the tragic possibilities of the direct clash between the Renaissance compulsions and the Hebraic-Christian tradition. Faustus put into an old legend a new meaning. He inserted into the old medieval or Christian moral equation the new and ambiguous dynamic of the Renaissance. He treated the legend of Faustus in such a manner as to give it a fascination and a dignity never realized in previous treatments of the story. The story of this 24 year action, compressed by Marlowe in a few vivid scenes, represents a soul torn between the desire to stretch to its utmost limit its new mastery and freedom on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the claims of the old teachings a defiance of which meant guilt and a growing sense of alienation from society.

The legend of Faustus was believed to be a terrible and ennobling example, and a warning to all Christians to avoid the pitfalls of science, pleasure, and ambition which had led to Faustus' damnation. But it has to be noted that all that the Renaissance valued is represented in what the devil has to offer, and one is left wondering whether it is the religious life of the worldly life that is more attractive. All that the Good Angel in this play has to offer is "warnings". For instance, the Good Angel warns Faustus against reading the book of magic because it will invite God's "heavy wrath" upon his head, and asks him to think of heaven. To this the Evil Angel replies: "No Faustus, think of honour and wealth". At another point in the play the Evil Angel urges Faustus to go forward in the famous art of magic and to become a lord and commander of the earth. There can be no doubt that the devil here represents the natural ideal of the Renaissance by appealing to the vague but healthy ambitions of a young soul which wishes to launch itself upon the wide world. No wonder that Faustus, a child of the Renaissance, cannot resist the devil's suggestion. We like him for his love of life, for his trust in Nature, for his enthusiasm for beauty.

He speaks for all when, looking at Helen he cries: "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships/And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?" (Act To sum up, Marlowe's Faustus is a martyr to everything that the Renaissance valued-power, curious knowledge, enterprise, wealth, and beauty. The play shows Marlowe's own passion for these Renaissance values.

#### **Q4. Trace the various stages of Faustus's damnation.**

**Possible Answer :** The first thing that strikes us about Faustus is his extra-ordinary learning and scholarship. The Chorus, in his very first speech, tell us of this aspect of Faustus's character, According to the Chorus, Faustus made a rapid progress in the study of divinity. From Faustus' first soliloquy we learn that, before he decided to practice magic, he had already attained mastery over various branches of study. He had acquired great proficiency in logic; his medical skill had won him great renown; he had made a name as a theologian; and so on. Intellectually equipped as Faustus is, he soon becomes a great magician whose wonderful performances astonish all Germany. Speaking to the Scholars towards the end of the play, Faustus recalls the wonders that he has done and that the whole world has witnessed.

Faustus is endowed with a rare imaginative faculty. Having rejected the various branches of study, Faustus visualizes the wonders that he will be able to work with the power of magic. He goes on to speak of the unlimited authority he will wield. He will be greater than emperors and kings, and his dominion will "stretch as far as doth the mind of man". He will become a "mighty god". He sees bright visions of spirits bringing his gold from India, pearls from the ocean, pleasant fruits from distant corners of the world. He hopes to wall all Germany with brass, make the Rhine circle the city of Wittenberg, chase the Prince of Parma from his land, and so on. He thinks that he will be able to make a bridge through the moving air in order to cross the ocean with an army of soldier; he thinks of joining the hills that bind the African shore; he imagines that no ruler will be able to rule except by his permission. Not only does Faustus possess an exceptional imaginative power which enables him to see bright dreams of his future as a magician, but he is a born poet. His poetic faculty is, indeed, remarkable. Almost every major speech of Faustus is instinct with the poetry that is an innate gift with him. Even the manner in which he gives expression to his conflicts and despairs is worthy of a poet.

Faustus' sin is pride, presumption, and self-conceit. The Chorus refers to his as becoming "swollen with cunning, of a self-conceit," and compares his to Icarus who flew into the sky with wings made of wax which melted with the heat of the sun and led to Icarus' dropping to the earththe study of necromancy and to practice magic, he has no peace one he has taken that decision. Throughout the twenty-four years during which he practices magic, he experiences a mental conflict between his godly and ungodly impulses. A feeling of regret at having alienated God keeps haunting him during this period. The Good and the Evil Angels, who appear to him on several occasions, are merely that personifications of his own good and evil impulses. The words they speak to him are symbolic of the mental debate that goes on his own mind between his desire to enjoy the fruits of the power he has gained through magic and an urge not to renounce his trust in God. Several times he gives an outward expression to the tussle that goes on in his mind. At the beginning of Act II, Scene I, we find him speaking of the tug-of-war that is going on in his mind. Faustus, while continuing to practice magic, yet experiences the pangs and pricks of his conscience. The manner in which Faustus harasses the Pope by snatching away eatables and drinks from the Pope's hands and the manner in which he befools and cheats the Horse-courses, far from doing him any credit, lower and degrade him in our eyes. This great scholar, who had planned to wall all Germany with brass and to drive away the Prince of Parma from his land, is now frittering away his energies by playing

crude tricks and by giving magic performances to entertain the Emperor and the Duke and Duchess of Vanholt. Perhaps the scene of the Pope's harassment and the Horse-courser scene were not written by Marlowe himself. Perhaps it was Marlowe's intention to show, with the help of such scenes, the rapid deterioration that takes place in the character of Faustus after his becoming a disciple of the devil. The Faustus who plays tricks on the Pope, the Knight, and the Horse-courser is different from the Faustus of the opening scenes.

The final monologue of Faustus not only emphasizes Faustus imaginative and poetic faculties, but is unsurpassed as an expression of spiritual horror. Faustus here realizes that time will not stop and that the devil will come at the fixed hour:

*The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,*

*The devil will come and Faustus must be damned.*

*(Act V, Scene III, Lines 76-77)*

Faustus wishes that he did not have a soul or that his soul were not immortal. He would like his body to turn into air and his soul to little water-drops which may mingle with the ocean and never be found again. The climax of horror is reached in the last four lines of his monologue.

#### **Q5. What do you think is the cause of the tragedy in Doctor Faustus?**

**Possible Answer :** We first see Faustus at the peak of his worldly career. He is already master of all the existing knowledge and skills. He is a famous physician, honoured by whole cities and held in reverence by his learners. Why, then did he becomes restless? Why was he unwilling to remain "but Faustus, and a man"? (Act I, Scene I, Line 23). Why did he feel an urge to command "all things that move between the quiet poles"? (Act I, Scene I, Line 54). It is because a tragic hero feels the compulsion to realize himself fully in the face of all the odds, and that the test of his heroism is the degree of the risk he is willing to take. In his sense, the tragedy of Faustus is the tragedy of Adam. To Adam, paradise was not enough. He sought knowledge, and this was a forward step in the direction of self-realization. To the orthodox people, Adam's action is surely sinful, just as Faustus' action is wholly devilish in the eyes of the Chorus who opens and closes of the play. Faustus' opening soliloquy also represents his action as sinful because, after he has dismissed all studies but necromancy (which he thinks to be the key to his self- realization), the Good Angel tells him to put aside the damned book of magic, while the Evil Angel urges him to go forward in that famous art.

Marlowe sees the whole case not only as Good or Evil would see it but as it would be seen by a man of flesh and blood, the man who takes the risk is prepared to face the consequences. The meaning is the total yield of the situation into which Faustus walks of his own free will, in accordance with the mysterious, tragic urge of his times. Faustus' first move after deciding upon necromancy as the field of his research is one of arrogant and impatient lust for power. His absurd egotism is mixed with intellectual and humanitarian impulses. He would resolve all ambiguities, read strange philosophy, rid his country of the foreign domination and fortify it with a wall of brass, clothe the schoolboys in silk. He is prepared, at the end of Act I, Scene I, to take the ultimate risk: "This night I'll conjure, though I die therefore". Kater, in Act I, Scene III, he rebukes the Devil's own messenger, Mephistophilis, whose heart faints as he anticipates Faustus' awful fate. Faustus here speaks of his own "manly fortitude", he scorns Mephistophilis' warning; he rejects all hope of heavenly joys; and offers his soul to Lucifer for twenty-four years of his heart's desires. With this decision come new energy, new power, new command.

By the time of his second conjuring (Act II, Scene I), even before the signing of the bond, he confesses doubts, "Something sounds in mine ears: Abjure this magic, turn to God again!", he says. And he asks himself why he is wavering. He feels like turning to God again, but thinks that God does not love him. The doubts will not vanish, and Faustus lives out his twenty-four years as the first modern tragic man, part believer, part unbeliever, wavering between independence, and dependence upon God, now arrogant and confident, now anxious and worried, justified yet horribly unjustified.

Faustus is forced constantly to renew his choice between two alternatives. In contrast moods, he sees greater heights, and he experiences greatest terror. Soon the gentle voice that sounded in his ears, urging him to give up his magic and return to God, takes the shape of "fearful echoes" thundering in his ears: "Faustus, thou art damned" (Act II, Scene II, Lines 20-21). What he is learning is the truth of his own nature, that he is a creature, as well as a creator, a man and not a god, a dependent and a responsible part of a greater whole. He learns that his soul is not a mere trifle which he can use as a commodity, and that contrition, prayer, repentance, hell, and damnation are not just "illusions" (as the Evil Angel told him).

Between the high-soaring scholar of the first scene and the agonised figure of the final scene, there is a notable difference. In the final scene, Faustus enters with the Scholars, and for the first time in the play he has normal, compassionate discourse with his fellows. His role of demi-god is over; he is human once more, a friend and befriended. "Ah, gentlemen, learn me with patience", says he who had been only recently acting as if he were the lord of all creation. His friends now seem more "sweet" (he uses this word thrice for them) than any "princely delicate", or the "Signiory of Emden". Although the thrill of his exploits still lingers (in his recollection of "the wonders he has done"), he is humble and repentant. He longs to weep and pray but finds himself prevented by the devils from doing so. He confesses to the Scholars the cause of all his misery. Knowing his doom is near, he refuses their help and asks them not to talk to him but save themselves and depart. They retire, leaving him to meet his fate alone.

Faustus reaches levels of perception never gained by less venturesome individuals. He must see things with his own eyes. He does not want so much what power can bring: he never takes the Signiory of Emden, never builds a brass wall around Germany, never clothes the school-boys in silk. He wants what all men, good and bad, have wanted. He wants to conquer time, space, and ignorance. Above all, he wants knowledge: What is hell? Where is it? Who made the world? He wants to know everything about "the plants, the herbs, the trees that grow upon the earth". "He explores this world and also the regions above this world; he tries to understand the secrets of the heavens. He digs into the past, making blind Homer sing to him, and Amphion play the harp for him. What Marlowe dramatizes is not only the terror of the black art as the old legend told about it, but the wonder of it, the wonder of the man who dared to use the black art and the wonder of the mysteries it reveals. But the play also points to the peculiar dilemma of modern times. On the one hand is human limitation: on the other is the compulsion of the modern man to deny his limitations, and to press even further into the mysteries of a universe which appears steadily to yield more and more of its secrets to his enquiring mind. To rest content with his limitations would mean that he refuses to make the fullest use of his own God-given powers; yet to explore the mysteries of the universe is somehow evil and may bring not only the present suffering but the horrors of eternity".

In his last despairing moments, Faustus asks why he was not born a creature lacking in a soul, or why his soul had to be immortal. Medieval theology held that man is because he believes. To this the answer of the Renaissance was that man is because he thinks and acts and discovers. Neither view, as Marlowe presents

Faustus' dilemma, is wholly right or wholly wrong. In the world of tragedy, the hero can only take the road of experiment. He must follow his bent, take action, and live it through.

## 8.13 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

## 8.14 ANSWER KEY

## 8.15 LET US SUM UP

This lesson deals with the important themes of the play. The important aspects to be kept in mind is how Doctor Faustus represents the Renaissance spirit, how his morality disintegrated, how there was fall in his character, and how he met a tragic end.

## 8.16 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Doctor Faustus- Edited by Suroopa Mukherjee
2. The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Literature - R. Beadle
3. Christopher Marlowe: a Biographical and Critical study - F. S. Boas
4. Renaissance Self- fashioning from More to Shakespeare - Stephen Greenblatt
5. English drama before Shakespeare - P. Happe

**SHAKESPEARE AND HIS TIMES****STRUCTURE**

- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 9.3 Shakespeare's Life
- 9.4 Shakespeare's England
- 9.5 The Elizabethan World View
- 9.6 The Theatres and Playwrights
- 9.7 The Writer and His Work
- 9.8 The Early Plays
- 9.9 The Comedies
- 9.10 The Histories
- 9.11 The Tragedies
- 9.12 The Problem Plays
- 9.13 The Romances
- 9.14 Multiple Choice Questions
- 9.15 Suggested Readings

**9.1 INTRODUCTION**

The lesson provides a brief introduction on Shakespeare's life and times.

**9.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES****Objectives**

Learners will:

1. Learn about Shakespeare's personal and professional life in the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods.

2. Identify major works across Shakespeare's career – comedies, tragedies, and histories.
3. Understand the cultural and theatrical context of his writing.

## Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Summarize key facts about Shakespeare's life, including his career and legacy.
2. List major works like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
3. Explain the influence of the political and cultural environment on Shakespeare's writing.

### 9.3 SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

William Shakespeare was born in 1564 at Stratford-on-Avon. He died in 1616. He studied only upto school, and did not have the benefit of university education. The "University Wits" like Marlowe, Peele, Greene, Nashe, on the other hand, were learned scholars. After his schooling, Shakespeare moved to London in search of occupation. He started as a curtain-puller at the first theatre on the outskirts of London. Its name was "The Theatre". Later, he became an actor, then a writer, and rose finally to become a manager of "The Globe" theatre in London. His only son, named Hamnet, died young. His father died about the same time. These two deaths in the last years of the sixteenth century shook Shakespeare. This personal loss gets reflected in his plays like Hamlet and King Lear.

During his career as a dramatist, which was spread over the two decades of 1590's and 1610's, Shakespeare wrote thirty-seven plays, all extant, available in print today. He also wrote 154 sonnets and at least three long poems. He has remained for about four centuries now the acknowledged greatest dramatist of the world. His poems and plays are taught all over the world in original English as well as in translations. Millions of books and articles have been written interpreting his writings. His unparalleled success as a dramatist has led readers and critics to know about his life. Although not much known yet, that has not deterred the readers from making search into his life. Some details have come to be confirmed by common consensus among scholars.

One of the facts of Shakespeare's life that has been established is his baptism on 26 April, 1564. This is a matter of record evidenced by the parish register in which the births used to be recorded. Another fact that has got wide recognition is that he acted relatively minor parts in his own plays. For instance, he played the role of Adam in *As You Like It*, the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and Time in *The Winter's Tale*. He also acted in the first play of Ben Jonson named *Every Man in His Humour*. Shakespeare had not only acted in Jonson's pioneering classical comedy he had also helped the younger dramatist in facilitating the acting of that play. All these little facts only show how humble and genial our great dramatist was as a professional in the theatre business. Unlike most university wits, who have record of involvement in unseemly incidents, Shakespeare maintained a life of grace and honour.

Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, after selling his lands in the village near Stratford, had settled there as a successful wool merchant. His mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of a rich farmer. While both the elder sisters of Shakespeare died in infancy, his four younger brothers survived. His father, besides having roaring

business, rose to become in 1568 bailiff or mayor of Stratford. But something went wrong in the 70's leading to financial trouble, so much so that a warrant of his arrest was issued in 1573 for a debt of 30 pounds. He died in 1601, and his wife, Shakespeare's mother, in 1608. Shakespeare himself was born and died on St. George's day, which is April 23rd. Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, his senior by 8 years, in 1582. They had a daughter, Susanna, five months after their marriage. Then later in 1582 were born the twins, Hamnet and Judith while the son died at the age of 11, the daughter lived until the age of 77. About Shakespeare's education at school not much is known. It is only presumed that since there was a school at Stratford and his father's position entitled him to admission, he must have studied at the school. The greatest evidence is, of course, the great work he produced later in London. A definite evidence is available to the effect that in 1592, Shakespeare was in London, acting and writing plays. We do not know what he was doing between 1582 and 1592, but one thing is certain that he left Stratford because he did not want to remain in his father's business. His success thereafter is well known. He became at a later stage a member of a theatre company known as 'The Lord Chamberlain's Men'. This company became highly successful, so much so that it was allowed to call itself the King's Men. He moved back to Stratford in 1610, and stopped writing altogether in 1613. He died in 1616. His will still exists. One of the stories about his death is that he died of a fever contracted while drinking at a reunion with Ben Jonson.

#### **9.4 SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND**

England of Shakespeare's time did not have much population. But London, even over four hundred years ago, had a population of 150000 people. The death rate was rather high in those days, medical science not being there as we know it today. Plagues ravaged London quite regularly, forcing the authorities to close the theatres for fear of spreading infection. Open gutters used to run in the middle of the streets. Drinking water was drawn from wells which were often polluted. So people thought it safe to drink beer or ale, purified by the brewing process. As a result of all this, the average life span was just a little over thirty years. The largest mortality rate was among children a large percentage of whom would not last a period of eighteen months. Over eighty percent population of England lived in the rural areas, majority of whom were concerned with the production of food. Even Queen Elizabeth, although considered a much-traveled monarch, never went further than the Midlands, there being no transport except a horse coach. Starvation during the severe winter months remained a possibility for many poor people.

The Elizabethan society was highly hierarchical, divided into high, middle, and low classes. At the top sat the king or queen and the nobility at the court, who lived in vast luxury. At the bottom of the social ladder lived the farm workers who lived in severe primitive conditions. In effect, the monarch was not less than a dictator. The key to power in the Kingdom lay in the acquisition of land. No wonder that Shakespeare himself brought to finance his retirement lands and houses. Eligibility for election to Parliament was also based on the possession of land and property. Also, no worthwhile office could be available to people without land or property. The Elizabethans lived closer to nature, there being no other option available to them. They rose with the sun and went to bed at nightfall, because candles and oil lights were both expensive and inefficient. The court of England, like the other courts in Europe, was a heaven for the very best in art, music, and literature. The survival of many fine works of those days has been due to the patronage and support provided by royalty and the noble families. All noblemen and gentlemen were expected to know the court etiquette. They were also expected to be well-versed

in classical and other literature, and have knowledge of the science and medicine of the day. They were also expected to be able to fight, to lead their forces in battle for their monarch, to sing, to write poetry, to dance, besides having a knowledge of the law, history, farming, accountancy, and languages. Sir Philip Sidney was considered an ideal "gentleman" of the Elizabethan age.

In historical and political conditions, the reign of Queen Elizabeth was considered a "golden period" in the history of England. Shakespeare lived during the reign of Elizabeth (1558-1603) and then the reign of James-I (1603-1625). The reign of James-I is called the Jacobean period. Hence Shakespeare was as much a Jacobean as he was an Elizabethan. The two decades of his writing career are evenly spread over the two reigns. Queen Elizabeth came to throne after a period of great upheaval, caused largely by her own father who ruled England from 1509 to 1547. At the time of King Henry VIII's accession to throne in 1509, England was a member of the Roman Catholic Church. Henry himself was married to a staunch Catholic, Katherine of Aragon. But since she failed to produce a son, needed to be the heir after Henry VIII, she had to be divorced. Another reason for Henry's eagerness to divorce her was his having fallen in love with Lady Anne Boyle. He hoped that the Church of Rome would annul his marriage to Katherine. However, facing stiff hostility on the issue from the Royal families of Europe, the Pope declined to do so. Consequently, a furious and impassioned Henry declared himself the Supreme Head of the English church. Thus, he replaced the Pope as the supreme religious authority of England. In his new capacity, Henry declared his marriage invalid and married Anne Boyle. As irony would have it, Anne bore him, not a male, but a female child. This child was Elizabeth, who became the Queen of England.

Perhaps the breach between England and the Roman Church could still have been bridged if the guardians of the new King, the nine-year-old Edward VI (1538-1553) had not sought and succeeded in changing the actual form of church service used in England. Henry VIII had only changed the ownership of the church. Edward's reign changed its nature, into that of a genuinely Protestant as distinct from Catholic religion. Confusion became worse confounded when Edward died in 1553. The next five years saw the reign of the new Queen, Mary I (1516-1558), who was the daughter of Katherine of Aragon, the first wife of Henry VIII. Mary was married to the Catholic King of Spain. She tried to put the clock back and return the authority of the English church to the Pope of Rome. Heretics, so called for their refusal to accept Roman Catholicism, were burnt at the stake. The fierce fight continued between the Catholics and Protestants resulting into the deaths of several thousand and an exodus of even more protestants from England to the newly discovered land of America. It was for this bloodshed that the Queen came to be called "Bloody Mary." So when Mary died in 1558, the only descendent of Henry VIII was Elizabeth. Hence, she took over the reigns of power.

Under the shrewd leadership of Elizabeth, England prospered in all areas of life. In the absence of a Civil War or a major European war the country began to grow in confidence. The middle classes of England, the traders in particular, shared this prosperity more than the others. Although the early spirit of enthusiasm for adventure did not last long, the symbols of her reign in our memory are still the great Elizabethan sailors like Francis Drake (1545- 1596) and Walter Raleigh (1552 - 1618). They sailed to the corners of the earth and brought from abroad both fame and wealth back to their nation. They also helped discover colonies for England including India. Elizabeth herself sponsored their voyages. The rise of the middle class, consisting of merchants, clerks, lawyers, civil servants, changed the social structure of society. The queen had to use both carrot and stick to keep the majority in the Parliament on her side. It was not long after the end of Elizabeth's reign in 1603 that

the same Parliament rose in rebellion against the King in 1642, and, after beheading Charles I, took over the reigns of power in 1649.

## 9.5 THE ELIZABETHAN WORLD VIEW

Each age in history is marked by a peculiar culture, a world view, and a literary style of its own. The age of Shakespeare, or the Elizabethan age, drew its inspiration from a mixture of ancient and medieval sources. While Plato and Aristotle constituted the main ancient source of inspiration for the Elizabethan reading public, the medieval writers, in particular, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, provided the Elizabethans with the medieval source of literary material. They found exciting ideas and tales to work upon in these ancient and medieval sources. Their existence, however, remained precarious, at least in physical terms. The Elizabethans felt more at the mercy of their natural as well as political environment than we do today. Threatened by the uncertainties of both nature and politics, they remained in anxiety and strived for a certain stability in personal as well as public life. They believed that everything in the world had its natural mode of functioning, and its natural place in the scheme of things. In the Elizabethan view, before the creation of mankind and the world there was chaos, by which they meant an actual physical state in which no single particle of matter was able to bond to another. Consequently, all things were in a permanent state of anarchic conflict and hostility. God then imposed his own law of matter and formed the world out of chaos.

As everything was created by God, the whole cosmos was a grand order in which different parts of Earth and Heaven, Nature and Humanity, were linked with each other. Disorder in one of these affected the working of others. The most commonly noted expression of this belief in Shakespeare's work occurs in Troilus and Cressida. The speech begins with a prime image of disorder. The planets are kept in their respective orbits by God's will. Then follows the breaking loose and random careering of the planets, causing death and destruction. Since the Elizabethans believed in the influence of the planets on the events on Earth, so Earth is shown suffering, too :

*But when the planets  
In evil mixture to disorder wander,  
What plagues and what portents, what mutiny,  
What raging of the sea, shaking of earth,  
Commotion in the winds! Frights, changes, horrors,  
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate,  
The unity of married calm of states  
Quite from their fixture !*

After drawing this horrific picture of destruction and disorder, Shakespeare then talks about order in which all have their positions in society. Here, the equivalent of social order is degree. Without it society will disintegrate, civilization would become impossible. Schools will vanish, and so will all learning. All will go topsy turvy, making governance impossible;

*Oh, when degree is shak'd*

Which is the ladder of all high designs,  
*The enterprise is sick! How could communities,*  
*Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,*  
*Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,*  
*Prerogative of age, crowns, scepters, laurels,*  
*The primogenity and due of birth,*  
*But by degree, stand in authentic place?*

Thereafter follows the climax of the dramatic speech. An appalling vision of Chaos is presented, where Nature, unrestrained by order, rises up against itself and destroys the world, where madmen and lunatics come to capture power and rule the sane, where sons kill their fathers :

*Take but degree away, untune that string,*  
*And hark, what disorder follows! Each thing melts*  
*In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters*  
*Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,*  
*And make a sop of all this solid globe;*  
*Strength should be lord of imbecility,*  
*And the rude son should strike his father dead.*

Thus, order is seen here as the frame upon which the fabric of civilized life is woven. The Elizabethans were strongly committed to the idea of order, which they saw as the informing spirit of the universe. Whoever made attempt to disturb that order by committing unnatural deeds, by violating this order, invited the wrath of nature. Macbeth does it, and so does Claudius, and so do the daughters of King Lear, all inviting death and destruction.

## 9.6 THEATRES AND PLAYWRIGHTS

Perhaps there were no theatres in England before 1576. But acting was certainly there. Wandering groups of actors would visit towns and villages. They would fix up temporary stages with poles and planks, and perform crude comedies. It were these groups who left some legacies to the Elizabethans. It seems true that Shakespeare was recruited from Stratford by one such group. The design of the regular theatre that came up later was, in a way, a copy of what these wandering troupes would create as a temporary structure. They used to often set up their stage in the yard of an inn or a pub. Most inns were used to be built on three sides of a square, with a large entrance for horses, carts, and wagons forming the fourth side of the square. Thus, a large floor space was available for the audience directly in front of the back wall. The more elegant people of the town could see the play in the inn yard from the rooms that would ring the stage area on three sides. The inn itself would have its people who would be the basic audience, with others added to them.

When asked to build a theatre in London, the designer turned, quite reasonably, to this model in vogue. So, the first theatres were practically no more than recreations of such yards. The earliest theatres were 'The Theatre' and 'The Fortune'. In 1598, 'The Theatre' was dismantled and reconstructed on the south bank of the river Thames in London, where it came to be known as 'The Globe'. It was here that many of Shakespeare's plays were first performed. By 1608, however, Shakespeare's company had moved to Blackfriar's Theatre. This one had greater indoor space with more sophisticated stage than was there at The Globe. Shakespeare's later plays King Lear, Macbeth, The Tempest, Cymbeiline, etc., did require more elaborate stage effects than did his earlier plays. Perhaps this explains the shift from one to the other theatre. The Elizabethan society that saw the first performance of Shakespeare's plays and the theatre where they were staged were both very different from our own. The capacity of 'The Globe' was as high as two thousand, although the actual space inside was rather small. Actors used to be in close proximity to the audience. Plays used to be performed in the afternoons, generally starting at about 2 p.m. The early theatres had to rely on natural light. The opening was announced by three trumpet blasts, with a flag hoisted earlier to show that play was to be staged that day. The audience ranged from the upper class, the high-ups, sitting in their private boxes, to the poor rabble standing in the pit, the open area before the stage. The standing crowd was called the "groundlings." These latter would crack nuts and drink ale during the performance. They even frequently rioted or engaged in drunken brawls. They clapped whenever they liked a scene, and hissed or mewed whenever they did not. In extreme cases, they would even hurl rotten fruit and abuse the actors.

A black hanging at the back of the stage was meant to announce that a tragedy will be played. A coloured or embroidered hanging would indicate a comedy. Once started, the play would be over in about two hours. There were no acts or scenes as divisions of the play. These are later innovations or impositions. The next scene was to begin as soon as the actors for the previous one left the stage. The plays were acted on the bare stage. Where a scene was located would be informed by the actors by working the information into the dialogue itself. The acting at the time was less natural and more stylized. Costumes were rich, extravagant, and expensive. The entry of any royal character would be accompanied by the sound of trumpets. Also there will be a whole procession following the royal personage. Wind, thunder, and cannon firing were simulated on the stage. All in all, it was an interesting place for entertainment.

We find this Elizabethan society, its world view, its way of living, all reflected in the plays of Shakespeare, which are comic, tragic, romantic, and historical. No other writer can claim as comprehensive representation of his age as is available in the plays of Shakespeare.

## 9.7 THE WRITER AND HIS WORK

Shakespeare, without any disagreement, is universally acclaimed as the greatest dramatist of the world. While Marlowe is known for tragedies, Ben Jonson for comedies, Shakespeare is known for tragedies as well as comic, histories as well as romances, tragi-comedies as well as comi-tragedies. Besides, the superiority of his tragedies, comedies, and romances has not been challenged by any of his contemporaries or any of those in subsequent ages. He remains an undisputed crowned king of dramatists all the world over in all the many languages. It is a misnomer to think that Shakespeare first wrote comedies, then histories, then tragedies, and last of all the romances. In point of fact, he wrote all of these forms of drama simultaneously without any such clear-cut phases. The only division that can be usefully made among his thirty seven plays is that of early, middle, and later. And on that basis stylistic and thematic peculiarities of the three phases can be traced, that too broadly and

not in any water-tight compartments. One can surely trace the development of the dramatist in a chronological study in terms of his growing maturity of thought, increasing sophistication of dramaturgy, and growing complexity of style. Never do the authors develop, of course, so logically as critics tend to demand. However, some traces of growth will always be there in the works of great artists as they go along in their writing careers.

Edward Dowden, a late Victorian Shakespeare critic, invited scorn from subsequent modern critics for his doctrine of four periods in the dramatic career of Shakespeare. Dowden made these periods as (i) the "workshop" period, or the experimental period; (ii) the "in-the-world" period, when he was reveling in human life and writing the histories and happy comedies; (iii) the "out of the depths" period, when he wrote his great tragedies and the problem plays; (iv) the "on-the-heights" period, when he wrote the mature comedies, tragedies, histories, topped with romances. Dowden is accused of sentimentalism in his approach to Shakespeare. What need to be careful about, however, is not to trace any link between the happenings in Shakespeare's life and the subject-matter and atmosphere of his plays. We conveniently do that in the case of the Romantics and certain other writers, but it is just not possible in the case of a writer like Shakespeare.

## 9.8 THE EARLY PLAYS

Shakespeare's early period, as dramatist can be said to begin in 1591 and end in 1596. His earliest plays are the three parts of *Henry VI*. Both in terms of poetry as well as plot, these plays do not measure up to the standard of even *The Comedy of Errors* or *Love's Labour's Lost*, not to speak of *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, although all of these plays belong to the same period of his early phase. These plays display many features which typify Shakespeare's mature work. For instance, his insight into human nature, his powerful verse, a vast sense of comic enjoyment. But these features appear in flashes in these plays, and do not consistently and continuously present themselves. The over-all impact is not as strong and deep as that of the later work. At times, we come across clumsy lines of verse, or the verse just going on for too long. Similarly, plots quite often become too intricate or go out of control. When all is said and done, these plays suffer only because we tend to compare them with the plays of Shakespeare's mature phase. Otherwise, they are as good, even better, as their counterparts by any other Elizabethan or Jacobean dramatist.

The three *Henry VI* plays are historically inaccurate. But we do not read them to know the history of England. We read them because they dramatize or represent men, women and their affairs with an insight of a writer as great as Shakespeare. *The Comedy of Errors* has an intricate plot. It presents two identical twins, creating confusion of identity, made worse by disguises. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, is a relatively straightforward as well as superficial comedy. *Richard III* is part history, part tragedy, and part comedy. Very inaccurate in history, it presents a villain hero of tragedy who overshadows even regular villains like Iago and Edmund. Although Brutus, *Macbeth* and *Othello* are criminal tragic heroes, they cannot be called villains in the sense in which we use the term. It is only *Richard III* who more than qualify the test of villainy. *Titus Andronicus*, is a tragedy that ends in blood bath. *The Taming of The Shrew*, is a comedy. It is the story of Kate, a loud-mouth, vicious tongue, and spiteful girl. She is finally tamed, she loses her wild character of a shrew, and is made into a good wife by Petruchio. It is more in the vein of classical comedy than in the typical Shakespeare mould. *Love's Labour's Lost*, is a more sophisticated and gentle comedy of love. It may have been written for performance at court. What is decidedly clear about the early plays of Shakespeare is (i) that his comedies are festive rather than satirical; (ii) and that his histories offer human interest more than the historical.

## 9.9 THE COMEDIES

As Aristotle defines it, comedy is a play that has a happy ending, as tragedy has an unhappy ending. While a comedy culminates in marriage or meeting or reconciliation, a tragedy climaxes in death or destruction. Shakespeare's comedies are festive. They make us laugh. But they also go beyond laughter. They deal with themes of serious social bearing or political repercussions. In any case, they touch upon deeper human chords. Certain humourous situations are created only to cause laughter; such as someone's trousers falling down in public, or someone slipping on a banana skin. But there are also other situations which cause laughter only to raise serious questions of life; for instance, someone's mimicking the role of a King to bring out the hollowness of pomp and pride, or someone's falling into love with a father-like or mother-like spouse underlining the folly of mismatched marriage. Such comic situations point to serious social ills or vices, which finally disturb the social order.

Just as Shakespeare's four tragedies are considered his greatest, so are his four comedies which are considered his best. These comedies are *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*. His female characters dominate his comedies, just as his male characters dominate his tragedies. They show greater intelligence and wit, greater warmth and humanity. These women, the leading lights, show the power of love, which transforms even villainous characters into good or noble ones. The case of Oliver in *As You Like It*, is an outstanding example of this type. Although villainous in the beginning, who grows jealous of his younger brother just because he is good and is liked by people. He intrigues against this younger brother of his, usurps his share of property, and pushes him into exile. But once in the forest of Arden, his transformation starts. He comes into contact with Celia, falls in love with her, and becomes a better person, purged of all evil tendencies. In Shakespeare's comedies, such escapades into Nature are meant to wean away men from the corrupt world of the court, bring them into contact with the mother earth, and thus rejuvenate or regenerate them into improved human beings.

While the lovers do find fulfilment in their union or marriage, there is always someone in Shakespeare's comedies who does not get assimilated into this romantic world of wish-fulfilment. There is, for instance, Jacques in *As You Like It*, and Osino in *Twelfth Night*. These characters are unable to change, or get redeemed, and therefore cannot achieve the lover's happiness in life. The happiness of the lovers at the end of these comedies is given flavour and sharpness by the realization, brought on by these "outsiders" (like Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*) that things do not always end happily. We are made to see the value of happiness by being shown a case of unhappiness. Of course, this is done not to spoil the dish, but only to make its flavour welcome. At the same time, cases like that of Jacques balance our perspective on life by providing us with a view of real life as against that of romance.

The central thing in the thematic scheme of Shakespeare's comedies is self-knowledge. Beginning with false image of themselves, the leading characters reach the end of their dramatic journey discovering truth about themselves, gaining in the process a better view of themselves as well as of others. The humour in these comedies assumes different guises. Even the Clown or the Fool falls into two distinct types. There is the low comedy of characters such as Touchstone in *As You Like It* and Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These characters belong to lower class of society; quite often they are even coarse and crude. But quite as often they are also very skilled with words. At the other extreme of the scale, stand characters such as Jacques in *As You Like It* and Feste in *Twelfth Night*, whose humour is tinged with melancholy and even cynicism. Such characters are intellectual and refined. With them, word-play and punning are essential to their style of humour. Another element

of humour in these comedies is disguise, which, in fact, is both theme as well as a source of comedy. We have the female Rosalind in *As You Like It* posing as a boy. On the Elizabethan stage, where there were no female actors and the boys played the roles of girls, the device of disguise acquired a greater potential for mirth. Viola in *Twelfth Night* also disguises as a boy, which leads to various situations of comedy. These comedies are, therefore, festive as well as searching. They deal with surfaces as well as they look behind disguises. What the disguises conceal comes out as quickly as the surfaces show through mere encounters. The *Merchant of Venice*, is a supreme example of how Shakespeare successfully combines comic and serious intents in the contours of a coherent plot. Shylock and Antonio, in their social and commercial rivalry, Portia standing in the middle, looking taller than both, constitute the frame, holding the fabric of Shakespeare's most mature comedy.

### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. William Shakespeare was born in \_\_\_-on-Avon in 1564.
2. His acting company was called the \_\_\_ Men, later known as the King's Men.
3. Shakespeare's plays were performed in the famous \_\_\_ Theatre.
4. *Macbeth* and *Othello* are two of his famous \_\_\_.

### Answers

1. Stratford
2. Lord Chamberlain's
3. Globe
4. tragedies

## 9.10 THE HISTORIES

Since Kings and Princes, Dukes and Duchesses, throng the pages of Shakespeare's comedies, the condition of the royal courts is decidedly one of the themes of these plays. But the political plot gets overshadowed in the comedies by the love plot. Love gets the better of envy or jealousy. These royal personages show more of their private lives in these plays than they do their public or political. The plots of the plays are so designed that while love theme comes to occupy the centre stage, the political theme gets pushed into the background. It is in the history plays that the situation gets reversed. While politics in the histories holds the center stage, love and other private concerns are pushed into subsidiary plots. Among the histories, four can easily be singled out as the best of Shakespeare. *Richard II*, *Henry IV- Part I*,

*Henry IV-Part II*, and *Henry V*. In the Elizabethan society, the role of the monarch was of the greatest consequence. It was his role that defined the order to prevail in society both real and ideal. Shakespeare's history plays examine some crucial questions involved in the growth of monarchy in England as well as its relevance to other societies at the time. The sequence opens with *Richard II*. Although a rightful heir to the throne, Richard is unpredictable and is not a good human. He rules through favourites, ill-treats people, and fails to become an effective ruler. He alienates his cousin Bolingbroke, whom he banishes. The latter returns to England to claim back his position and his lands. In the process, he succeeds in deposing the King and becoming himself the King of England. He is crowned as *Henry IV*. He proves a more successful king than Richard. However, his crown is procured by force, not by legitimate rights. The play dwells upon the paradox of a rightful bad king and the

unlawful good kingomb The two parts of Henry IV examine the other aspect of the problem. Henry has some personal qualities to make a good King. But he as King lacks legitimacy. He has, in the Elizabethan world view, committed a sin against God by taking in his own hands the power of electing a King. In the public eye, he remains a usurper. He has to face rebellion after rebellion, which finally drives him to death. The clear message of the play is that no individual or personal quality can give you lasting peace and success unless you get your authority by rightful means. It is no surprise that it is in this play Shakespeare makes the King utter the home truth, "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown."

The comic plot in *Henry IV* Part - I and Part II, in which the main actors are Prince Hal, who later becomes Henry V, and Sir Falstaff, outgrows its original role and overtakes the main plot. Although the main political plot takes its course on its meditated lines, the life of the play largely flows from the comic sub-plot. Sir Falstaff is considered the greatest comic character ever created in the English drama. The sub-plot carries the greater weight of the play's meaning also, for it is through this plot that Shakespeare shapes in the character of Prince Hal, a model king. Prince Hal gets the benefit of living among people on the ground. He becomes conversant with the problems of the populace, which normally the Princes remain ignorant about because of the lone eminence in which they are allowed to live by the royal dicta. Whereas marriage is the final symbol of harmony and reconciliation in a comedy, rebellion is the symbol of diseased kingdom in a history play. Military success in Shakespeare symbolizes successful reign in Henry V. The climax of the play reaches in Henry's victory over the French at Agincourt. Thus, in his histories Shakespeare combines opposing interest, to the advantage of both comedy and history, making available to the reader a more mature and complex vision of politics in particular and of life in general, showing how politics, too, is to be viewed in the larger context of human life.

## 9.11 THE TRAGEDIES

The tragedies of Shakespeare are perhaps the best known of his plays, and are also considered his greatest achievement both as a poet and dramatist. Although he wrote a number of tragedies, the four universally acclaimed as his greatest are: *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*: It was A. C. Bradley, who in 1904, made this claim for these tragedies. Thereafter, the judgement has only been reiterated by subsequent critics; it has never been disputed by any great critic. In three out of these four tragedies, the theme of usurpation of kingship is the central concern. These plays do not, however, confine their horizons to the political theme of succession alone. The real issues raised by all the four are those in human and moral terms rather than political. In fact, the horizons reach even beyond the human and moral circles to touch the cosmic and spiritual. The influence of cosmic forces is strongly felt in all of these plays, except perhaps in *Othello*, where the tragedy comes down to the domestic level of a jealous husband and beautiful wife. It becomes more a study in villainy, its origin and its operation, best illustrated by the case of Iago, than a larger tragedy of man's destiny in an indifferent or hostile universe. As Bradley so beautifully illustrates, in these four great tragedies, there is a fierce struggle between good and evil, between the hero and the villain. No doubt, the evil succeeds in destroying good. The villain becomes an agent or instrument for the death of the hero. But even though the hero dies, in his capacity to fight the evil, to stoically take suffering, and to gain wisdom through experience, leaving us sadder but wiser, he rises in our esteem, gains a status out of the reach of common humanity.

Although not directly about religious themes as were some of the Greek tragedies, Shakespeare's great tragedies deal with the basic moral issues of significance to all societies. They look into the nature and destiny of man in the larger context of the cosmos. The final effect of these plays is ennobling, lifting the audience above the mundane level of everyday living, making them see the spectacle of life in relation to forces larger than both

individual and society. Faced with the grand struggle of man against the forces stronger than him, we come to see the triviality of our pursuits which keep us engrossed in the world of contingency and ignorant about the stark reality of human existence. It is only a great work of art like a Shakespearean tragedy which raises us above the contingent and brings us face to face with the ultimate questions of life and death.

## 9.12 THE PROBLEM PLAYS

The term "Problem play" is used for some of the plays of Shakespeare, such as *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*. These plays are neither tragedies nor comedies in terms of the commonly accepted aspects of the two genres. They seem to fall, rather awkwardly, between the two. Considering, for illustration, the first of these, one finds that the play provides excitement, also tension, and makes a searching exploration of moral issues, out of which no one comes out unsoiled. The problem is that the play is too serious to be a comedy, and too comic to be a tragedy. It remains on many counts rather confusing. Similarly, *Troilus and Cressida* is quite dark in tone. No character attains the tragic stature, nor anything great or noble appears un-spared. While the action remains rather slow, the philosophic debate overwhelms whatever action there proceeds. Not in any way is different *All's Well That Ends Well* from the other two just discussed. Here again, there is utter confusion about the moral status of certain characters. If we are asked or supposed to admire them in onescene, we are asked or supposed to condemn them in another. The only significance of the problem plays is perhaps their signals about the progress of Shakespeare's thought and art. Maybe Shakespeare, ignoring the Aristotelian or classical prescriptions for different forms of drama, was trying to experiment with a new form not constrained by these rigid forms. Considered as experiments, one may see the fruits of this experiment in the subsequent romances where Shakespeare successfully blends tragedy and comedy in an integrated form.

## 9.13 THE ROMANCES

Shakespeare's last plays, namely *Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*, are called romances. Here, more than elsewhere, Shakespeare uses the elements of romance, such as supernatural agency, improbable events, even magic, and uncommon characters. Half the action in these plays is almost tragic, where even deaths occur, tragic events take place, but the later half of the action ends on a happy note, where reunion of brothers takes place, lovers are united and married, reconciliation takes place between rivals, even enemies. In the case of *Cymbeline*, even gods descend from the ceiling to sort out the mess created by human beings. The element of fancy is equally prominent in *The Tempest*, which is considered the culmination of Shakespeare's art. These plays successfully combine in one unified whole the disparate elements of tragedy, comedy, history, and romance. They are decidedly superior in every respect to the problem plays, where similar attempt was made to mix different genres in a single plot.

## 9.14 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. In which century did William Shakespeare live and write his plays?
  - a) 15th century
  - b) 16th century
  - c) 17th century
  - d) 18th century

2. What is the approximate birth year of William Shakespeare?

- a) 1540
- b) 1564
- c) 1601
- d) 1623

3. In which English town or city was Shakespeare born?

- a) Stratford-upon-Avon
- b) London
- c) Cambridge
- d) Oxford

4. What theater company did Shakespeare become a shareholder in and write many of his plays for?

- a) The King's Men
- b) The Lord Chamberlain's Men
- c) The Globe Players
- d) The Royal Troupe

5. Which monarch was ruling England during most of Shakespeare's career?

- a) King Henry VIII
- b) Queen Elizabeth I
- c) King James I
- d) Queen Victoria

6. Which of Shakespeare's plays features the character Hamlet?

- a) "Othello"
- b) "Macbeth"
- c) "Romeo and Juliet"
- d) "Hamlet"

7. What is the name of the character known for the famous line "To be or not to be, that is the question"?

- a) Macbeth
- b) Othello
- c) Hamlet
- d) Romeo

8. In which play do the characters Rosalind and Orlando fall in love in the Forest of Arden?

- “Twelfth Night”
- “As You Like It”
- “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”
- “The Taming of the Shrew”

9. Who is the main antagonist in “Othello” who manipulates Othello into believing falsehoods about his wife, Desdemona?

- Iago
- Cassio
- Tybalt
- Mercutio

10. Which Shakespearean comedy centers around a shipwrecked set of twins, Viola and Sebastian, who are mistaken for each other?

- “The Tempest”
- “Twelfth Night”
- “Much Ado About Nothing”
- “The Comedy of Errors”

**Answers:**

1. b) 16th century	2. b) 1564
3. a) Stratford-upon-Avon	4. b) The Lord Chamberlain’s Men
5. c) King James I	6. d) “Hamlet”
7. c) Hamlet	8. b) “As You Like It”
9. a) Iago	10. b) “Twelfth Night”

## 9.15 SUGGESTED READINGS

King Lear.cliffnotes.com

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**IMPORTANT SCENES IN *KING LEAR*****STRUCTURE**

- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 10.3 The Beginning in a Drama
- 10.4 Opening Scene of *King Lear*
- 10.5 A Critic's View
- 10.6 Opinion of Critics
- 10.7 Disarmament : A Criticism
- 10.8 Storm Scene
- 10.9 Stage Presentation of *King Lear*.
- 10.10 The rise of storm to its greatest pitch
- 10.11 The Reconciliation scene
- 10.12 Rebirth of Lear
- 10.13 Cordelia's Selfless love for Lear
- 10.14 Let Us Sum Up
- 10.15 Examination Oriented Questions
- 10.16 Suggested Reading

**10.1 INTRODUCTION**

Shakespeare was seriously concerned with a few important scenes **and their dramatic effects**. The first scene, which is considered dramatically significant is the **opening scene**. It is sometimes considered as the basis of the main plot, but you should remember that this is not something unique to *King Lear* only. In almost all the plays of Shakespeare the opening scene sets the story in motion.

## 10.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Understand the significance of the opening scene in drama, with reference to *King Lear*.
2. Analyze key scenes – the storm and reconciliation – for their dramatic and thematic impact.
3. Examine critical perspectives on the play's structure and emotional power.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Interpret how the opening scene sets the tone and conflict of *King Lear*.
2. Analyze how the storm scene reflects Lear's inner turmoil and descent into madness.
3. Evaluate the emotional depth and resolution in the reconciliation between Lear and Cordelia.

## 10.3 THE BEGINNING IN A DRAMA

The beginning of a play is more important than the beginning of a novel. With only about two hours at his disposal the dramatist has not a moment to lose. He must at the outset explain the existing situation with whatever antecedent action is necessary to our understanding of the plot, introduce his characters, get his story under way, and arrest the immediate attention of the audience. In times gone by, a dramatist could drag into his play subordinate characters, the servants or guests of the family, who would discuss the principal characters and explain the situation to the audience.

## 10.4 OPENING SCENE OF KING LEAR

*Hamlet* has a masterly opening scene with the bitter cold night, the shivering sentries ready to start at the slightest sound, the dark shadow of the castle, and the sense of impending, supernatural, disaster. The first scene of *Macbeth*, if well acted, holds the imagination of the audience spellbound and at the same time strikes the key note of the play. *Othello* opens on a dark night in a deserted street with two men plotting in the shadows, thus giving at once an atmosphere of treachery. *Romeo and Juliet* opens with the sudden violence of a street brawl between the Capulets and the Montagues a significant suggestion of a drama of quick passions.

The opening scene of *King Lear* is simply the court ceremony in which the formal transfer of the kingdom is to be made. Lear is already handing over to his daughters, the carefully drawn maps which mark the boundaries of the provinces, when he suddenly pauses, and with the yearning of age and authority for testimonies of devotion, calls upon his daughters for declaration of affection, the easiest of returns for the substantial gifts, he is giving them. Goneril and Regan pour forth in glib eloquence. Then, Lear turns to Cordelia thinking delightedly of the special prize he has marked out for the pet of his old age. He asks her :

*"What can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?"*

But Cordelia has been revolted by the fulsome flattery of the sisters whose hypocrisy she knows so well. She, therefore, bluntly refuses to be drawn into any declaration of affection at all. Cordelia might well have found some other method of separating herself from her false sisters, without thus flouting her father, before his whole court in a moment of tenderness of herself or if carried away by the indignation of the moment, a sign of submission would have won her a pardon. But Cordelia, sweet and strong, as her character is in great things, has inherited a touch of her father's temper, and the moment's sullenness is protracted into obstinacy. Cordelia thus, commits an offence of manner, but Lear's passion vents itself in a sentence proper only to a moral crime.

## 10.5 A CRITIC'S VIEW

Nicoll says something radically different about the opening scene. Whatever eulogies have been cast upon the exposition of Lear the fact is that this first scene is a failure. It is easily the most uninteresting long scene of drama and must strike any actor as an almost impossible scene to play satisfactorily. In endeavouring to secure his effect, Shakespeare, for once, seems to have overreached himself. (Shakespeare might not have been able to weave a tragedy out of the material presented to him there, but he at least provided his main characters with normal, appreciable motives.) To find an explanation for Lear's decision and demeanour in this first scene we need to know the subsequent development of the plot.

The king's doting old age is evident from the fact that he must have public protestations of filial love from his daughters before he passes on his power and authority to them. His hasty impatience about Cordelia's insincerity, which makes her reticent, first finds expression in a simple "nothing" and then bursts forth unexpectedly in a language which is as vehement as it is unnatural. We are very naturally led to suspect that something terrible is sure to follow and are kept in suspense till the effects gradually unfold themselves in the subsequent scenes and acts beginning with the third scene of the first act. The dramatic element of the first scene of the first act becomes all the more forceful when we bear in mind that the king had actually already divided the kingdom into three equal parts for his three daughters ("Give the map there. Know that we have divided in three our Kingdom") and anticipates that each of them will be equally profused in her profession of love. But Cordelia's simplicity and truthfulness wound the vanity of the fond father and, as a result, the audience is treated to a masterly dramatic-cum-psychological stroke.

## 10.6 OPINIONS OF CRITICS IN FAVOUR OF FIRST SCENE

The following points will reflect that the scene is not strange :—

The situation is strange, like so many of the stories on which romantic dramas are based, Shakespeare has done much to soften the improbability of the original legend. "The oft repeated judgement that the first scene of *King Lear* is absurdly improbable, and that no sane man would think of dividing his kingdom among his daughters in proportion to the strength of their verbal protestations, of love, is much too harsh and is based upon a strange misunderstanding." This scene acts effectively, and to imagination the story is not at all incredible. "It is merely strange, like so many of the stories on which our romantic dramas are based. Shakespeare, besides, has done a good deal to soften the improbability of the legend ; and he has done much more than the casual reader perceives. The very first words of the drama, as Coleridge pointed out, tell us that the division of the kingdom is already settled in all its details, so that only the public announcement of it remains" : says A.C. Bradley.

Improbable as the conduct of Lear is in the first scene, it was an old story rooted in popular faith a thing taken for granted already, and consequently without any of the effects of the improbability. Even in the first scene we get an idea of the era or historic time to which the play refers. *King Lear* represents as an era of uncultivated simplicity and the primitive nature of early society. In *Macbeth*, we have the mystic and imaginative side of the Celtic temperament described. But in *King Lear*, the other aspect of Celtic nature namely, wild and wayward passion is reflected. In the atmosphere of primitive society, it is easily conceivable that such apparently improbable incidents as the partition of the kingdom might well take place. The opening scene strikes the keynote of Lear's character, namely, fickleness and fundamental error it leads to, out of which the tragedy of the drama arises. It also reveals Gloucester's utter disregard of all moral obligations, and want of steadiness and principles as the two attributes of life in court and at home.

According to Dr. Johnson, there is something of obscurity or inaccuracy in this 'preparatory scene.' The dialogue between Kent and Gloucester shows that the King has already divided his kingdom. "And yet when he enters he examines his daughters, to discover in what proportion he should divide it. Perhaps Kent, and Gloucester only were privy to his design, which he still kept in his own hands, to be changed or performed as subsequent reasons should determine him".

#### 10.7 DISARMAMENT : A CRITICISM

Marvellous indeed is the skill with which Shakespeare turns an old nursery tale with all its improbability to a fine dramatic purpose. He is an old hand at this sort of thing. Recall the cunning with which he transforms in *The Merchant of Venice*, the story of the pound of flesh, and makes the Trial Scene look like a real trial, though no court known to history can show the like of such a trial and such an award as Portia's. But Shakespeare's art can disarm criticism and does so here. The division of the kingdom is the artist's make-believe; and bids us forget the accidental elements and fix our attention on what is universal.

Shakespeare's opening scene are often a kind of postulate, which the spectator or the reader is asked to grant. At this juncture, improbability is of no account; the intelligent reader will accept the situation as a gift and will become alert and critical only when the next step is taken, and he is asked to concede the truth of the argument that has given these persons in these situations such and such events will follow. It must be granted that an old King divides his realm among his three daughters, exacting from each of them a profession of ardent affection. The play opens with this postulate. Before appealing to the sympathies and judgement of his audience, Shakespeare in the opening scene acquaints them with the situation.

If this be so, it makes some kinds of criticism idle. Why, it is often asked, did not Cordelia humour her father a little ? She was so stubborn and rude, where tact and sympathetic understanding might, without any violation of truth, have saved the situation. It is easy to answer this question by enlarging on the character of Cordelia and on that touch of obstinacy which is often found in very pure and unselfish natures. But this is really beside the mark, and those, who spend so much thought on Cordelia, are apt to forget Shakespeare. If Cordelia had been perfectly tender and tactful, there would have been no play. The situation would have been saved, and the dramatist, who was in attendance to celebrate the sequel of the situation, might have packed up his pipes and gone home. This is not to say that the character of Cordelia is drawn carelessly or inconsistently. But it is a character invented for the situation, so that argument from the character to the plot is to invert the true order of things in the artist's mind. To go further and discuss Cordelia's childhood, as a serious question of criticism, is

to lose all hold on the real dramatic problem, and to fall back among the idle people, who ask to be deceived and are deceived.

#### **10.8 STORM SCENE :**

Another important scene in the play is the storm scene. S.T. Coleridge once explained in awe at the imaginative power of Shakespeare which could fuse such diversity into the unity of the heath storm, "Where the deep anguish of a father spreads the feeling of ingratitude and cruelty over the very elements of heaven." Granville Barker's magnificent *Preface to King Lear* observes the fusion of the man and the storm, a process by which Lear transcends the weakness of a wretched old man to become a titanic, apocalyptic figure endowed with all the fury, power, and awesome grandeur of the storm. Edith Sitwell has added another illumination to the scene by designating Lear as Time who is more than old age and who becomes a fifth element like the other four, viz. earth, air, fire and water.

The metaphor of cosmic chaos seems a particularly fitting way to represent imaginatively the unnatural character of ingratitude. Renaissance moral philosophy and courtesy literature contain many references to the enormous evil of this vice; the dominant note, however, seems to be that of un-natural, monstrous villainy which severs the bonds among kinsfolk, friends and members of civil society. Most of these ideas made their appearance in Renaissance ethical literature as restatements, translations, or comments upon classical ideas from Greek and Latin authors. Ingratitude was an enemy of human concord and deserving therefore, of the strongest reapproach. We consider that the Renaissance horror of the vice contains also overtones from the traditional concept of feudal loyalty, in which gratitude had originally been the quality sealing the relationship of lord and vassal and hence the fundamental bond of feudal society.

The aptness of cosmic chaos in the Empedoclean sense to symbolize the effect of ingratitude can perhaps be seen again as the play draws to a close. In the cosmology of Empedocles, the universe passes through a series of cycles in which first Love and then, Strife predominates. Although strife destroys the world, a new cosmos is born as love returns. The reappearance of Cordelia, even for a short time, the victory of Albany and the reinstatement of Edgar perhaps announce the return of love, and create the "restoration of tranquillity" which is integral to the tragic effect. Lear and Gloucester have perished in the upheaval, but also has the evil which destroyed them.

#### **10.9 STAGE PRESENTATION OF KING LEAR**

One of the reasons that led Charles Lamb to say that *King Lear* cannot be acted was that no stage would be capable, no stage machinery adequate to bring out the full effect of the storm scene. When Bradley remarked that *King Lear* was too huge for the stage, he had this storm scene, among others, in view. According to Bradley, "the dramatic centre of the whole tragedy" is the storm scene. The play, presented on the stage, does poor justice to the play as it is visualized in our imagination. As Bradley remarks, the temptation of Othello and the scene of Duncan's murder in *Macbeth* may lose upon the stage, but they do not lose their essence and gain as well as lose. But the storm Scenes in *King Lear* gain nothing and their very essence is destroyed. The theatrical storm, not to drown the dialogue, must be silent whenever a human being wishes to speak—thus defeating the very purpose of the storm, which seeks to produce effect through sound.

As Lamb puts it, to see *King Lear* acted, is to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy stormy night. The contemptible machinery by which the storm is mimicked is absolutely inadequate to bring out the horrors of the real elements. The explosions of Lear's passion are terrible as volcano, they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea-which is the mind of Lear. The storm is symbolic of the storm that rages within the mind of Lear. The burst of rain and thunder, and the storm within Lear's breast are not two things, but manifestations of one thing. The storm outside is a projection of the storm within Lear's mind. In the groans of roaring wind and rain, we see and hear the groans of a tormented soul. The storm scenes further show that nature herself is convulsed by the same horrible passions, and that Nature, the common mother of all created beings, turns savagely on her own children to complete the ruin they have wrought on themselves.

### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. The play begins with Lear's decision to divide his \_\_\_\_.
2. The storm scene reflects Lear's \_\_\_\_ state.
3. Critics often describe the reconciliation scene between Lear and Cordelia as deeply \_\_\_\_.
4. The opening scene introduces the theme of appearance versus \_\_\_\_.

### Answers

1. kingdom	2. mental / emotional ( <i>accept either</i> )
3. moving / tragic ( <i>accept either</i> )	4. reality

## 10.10 THE RISE OF STORM TO ITS GREATEST PITCH

The first speech in the second scene is Lear's (III, ii, 1-9). It is crowning speech of the first part of the play, in a sense the Keynote. Only a few lines later, Lear says, "My wits begin to turn." His speeches in scene ii show the last traces of his already vanishing sanity, and in scene iv he is "far gone." His prayer in scene iv :

*Take physic, pomp;  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,  
And show the heavens more just.*

This is the first step in the regenerative process, showing as it does sympathy towards man and an incipient willingness to admit an error. But it is also the last sane utterance, if not indeed an expression of a mind already deranged.

In the first nine lines of the scene, the storm and the style rise to their greatest pitch. It is in fact only through the rise in the style that the audience comes to feel the full extent of the storm. In these lines, Shakespeare reaches the point for which he has been preparing in the preceding two scenes. The report which the gentleman makes in scene i first announces the condition of the King, as he was with himself and the elements. This is followed by a digression of thirty five lines during which the conversation shifts to the fortunes of Cordelia and

the activites of the British Dukes, Kent recalls the storm hastily before his exit and immediately in the person of the King it breaks in full fury :

*Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! Blow!*  
*You cataracts and hurricanes, spout*  
*Till you have drenched our steeples, drown'd the cocks!*  
*Singe my white head! and thou all shaking thunder*  
*Smite flat the thick rotundity o'th'world,*  
*Crack nature's moulds, all germens spill at once,*  
*That make ingrateful man!*

### **Inner crisis of Lear's mind**

This scene may be regarded as the crisis of the play. The meeting with Edgar brings on in Lear, the first positive symptoms of insanity: and through the incoherence of Lear's thoughts we see the profound change that has come over his character. His sorrows rouse in him a great compassion for the sufferings of the poor. He can conceive of only one cause for any man's affliction-namely, the unkindness of his daughter "What have his daughters brought him to this pass ?" Which makes Hazlitt exclaim "What a bewildered amazement, what a wrench of the imagination, that cannot be brought to conceive of any other cause of misery than that which has bowed it down, and absorb all other sorrows in its own."

The scene illuminates another aspect too, of Lear's mind. It has come to puzzle itself with the essential and fundamental nature of man "Unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art." And Lear thinks he has found the philosopher who could enlighten him about ultimate causes of thunder, about the composition of Regan's heart, and the cause in nature that makes such hard hearts. The madness of Lear serves the same purpose to Shakespeare that dreams do to psycho-analyst-the purpose of interpreting a man's deepest instincts, impulses and obsession. But Shakespeare uses it also for a higher purpose to show character development.

### **Connection between Storm and Lear's madness**

The storm sets in, just at the psychological moment, to convert Lear's mental strain into actual madness. The storm and the madness are thus connected. A sentence from Dr. Bucknill's *The Mad Folk of Shakespeare* throws light on this point : "Insanity arising from mental and moral causes often continues in a certain state of imperfect development ..... a state of exaggerated and perverted emotion accompanied by violent and irregular conduct, but unconnected with intellectual aberration until some physical shock is incurred, bodily illness, or accident or exposure to physical suffering, and then the imperfect mental disease is converted into perfect lunacy. We cannot doubt that Shakespeare contemplated this exposure and physical suffering as the cause of the first crisis in Lear's malady.

The storm in *King Lear*, as in *Julius Caesar*, is recognised as the dramatic background to the tempest of human emotions. It is the signal that we have entered upon the mysterious centrepiece of the play in which the gathering passions of the whole drama are to be allowed to vent themselves without check or bound. It is no

ordinary storm. It is a night of bleak winds sorely ruffling of cataracts and hurricanes. No words can tell the imaginative greatness of the scene on the bleak and lonely moor and in Lear's bleak and lonely heart. To conceive it as it is conceived was a splendid imagination.

### **10.11 THE RECONCILIATION SCENE :**

This is one of the greatest scenes not only of the play but of all the plays of Shakespeare. So far as its relations to the action of the drama is concerned, it is less important than the fourth scene of the First Act where, Lear meets a changed Goneril or the fourth scene of the second act where, he meets a changed Regan. But it ranks with these scenes in dramatic power. *King Lear* does not contain any other scene as affecting and pathetic as this one in which Cordelia's care for her old father is revealed and which gradually passing through Lear's restoration to reason, brings us to the climax where he recognises her, kneeling in front of her and admits his foolish fondness.

The scene opens in the French camp. Lear is sleeping in bed with music playing to help him sleep soundly. Cordelia, Kent and the Doctor are standing round his bed. Cordelia thanks Kent for his goodness and asks him to give up his shabby disguise; but Kent refuses on the ground that the proper time for it has not yet come. Cordelia laments piteously and lovingly because her old father has been so ungenerously treated by her sisters. Lear gradually wakes up and at first cannot recognise Cordelia. But when he does, he kneels and is almost about to ask her forgiveness. Though stopped by Cordelia at that time, he does ask her to forgive him when he is led away by her. Towards the end of the scene we learn from a conversation between Kent and the Gentleman that Edmund is leading the British army and that a decisive battle is going to be fought on that very day.

### **10.12 REBIRTH OF LEAR**

The old Lear died in the storm. The new Lear is born in the scene, in which he is reunited with Cordelia. His madness sparked the end of the wilful, egotistical monarch. He is fully resurrected as a human being. We can tell from his protest that the awakening into life is a painful happening. After the reconciliation, Lear makes only two more appearances. In the scene, in which he is being led off to prison he has apparently overcome the desire for vengeance: he has left behind him all those attributes of kingship which had prevented him from attaining his full stature as a man. He has even passed beyond his own pride. At the beginning of the play, he is incapable of disinterested love, for he uses the love of others to minister to his own egotism. His prolonged agony and his utter loss of everything frees his heart from the bondage of the selfhood. He unlearns hatred and learns love and humility. He loses the world and gains his soul.

In this state, when his eyes light on Cordelia, she seems to him a blessed spirit of Heaven : "Thou art a soul in bliss." He is still in a state between dream and wakefulness; but it tells us much about his thoughts for months. How must they have hovered round Cordelia, as round an angelic spirit of love ? But to Cordelia, to be spoken of as 'a spirit' or 'a soul in bliss' is a sign of lingering delirium. How can it be otherwise ? In the following lines, Shakespeare lights up the hidden recesses of Lear's mind as well as Cordelia's character.

*You do me wrong to take me out o' the grave*

*Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound*

*Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears*

*Do scald like molten lead.*

### **10.13 CORDELIA'S SELFLESS LOVE FOR LEAR**

While Lear doubts the sanity of his vision, Cordelia who has been anxiously waiting for the recognition, cries in joy and love and thankfulness : “So I am,” Space forbids us to dwell on the full psychological content of these words. Hazlitt, however, comes near the mark when he says : “The words ‘so I am’ of Cordelia gush from her heart like a torrent of tears; relieving it of a weight of love and of supposed ingratitude which had pressed upon it for years.” When we think we have reached the climax of Shakespeare’s power in the scene, the great wizard has another master stroke up his sleeve in Cordelia’s “No cause, no cause”. It is negatively stated, yet it expresses more than any eloquent protestation could, Cordelia’s grief for what Lear has suffered from her sister.

As an exercise of creative imagination this scene bears, in every line and phrase, the stamp of genius that plunges the depths of man’s nobler nature. Spontaneity, simplicity and profundity mark its great moments. No mood befits our deepest yearning for another’s recovery from illness or for his happiness as the mood of prayer. Hence, Shakespeare could not have begun better than with Cordelia’s ‘O kind god’. There is the same sureness of touch, selective power and naturalness in the way in which Cordelia expresses her sense of shock at children who could be brazenly cruel to an old, revered father.

### **10.14 LET US SUM UP**

Each Act and each Scene in King Lear is important as each scene gives space and time to reveal the inner thoughts and feelings of characters. Spontaneity, simplicity and profundity mark great moments.

### **10.15 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. Who is the author of the play “King Lear”?
  - a) William Shakespeare
  - b) Christopher Marlowe
  - c) Ben Jonson
  - d) Thomas Kyd
2. Which historical figure is believed to have inspired Shakespeare’s character of King Lear?
  - a) King Arthur
  - b) King Henry VIII
  - c) King Lear of Britain
  - d) King Richard III
3. “King Lear” is widely believed to be based on which earlier work?
  - a) “The Canterbury Tales” by Geoffrey Chaucer
  - b) “Leir of Britain” by Raphael Holinshed
  - c) “The Faerie Queene” by Edmund Spenser
  - d) “The Divine Comedy” by Dante Alighieri

4. In the play, which of King Lear's daughters is the most loyal and loving?

- a) Goneril
- b) Regan
- c) Cordelia
- d) None of the above

5. Which famous Akira Kurosawa film is a loose adaptation of "King Lear" set in feudal Japan?

- a) "Seven Samurai"
- b) "Rashomon"
- c) "Throne of Blood" (Kumonosu-jô)
- d) "Yojimbo"

6. The modern-day film adaptation of "King Lear" starring Al Pacino is titled:

- a) "Lear's Legacy"
- b) "Looking for Lear"
- c) "The Merchant of Venice"
- d) "The Humbling"

7. Which animated television series features an episode that adapts the story of "King Lear" with a sci-fi twist?

- a) "The Simpsons"
- b) "South Park"
- c) "Futurama"
- d) "Rick and Morty"

8. Which famous playwright wrote a sequel to "King Lear" titled "Cordelia"?

- a) Tom Stoppard
- b) Tennessee Williams
- c) August Wilson
- d) Edward Albee

9. In "King Lear," what powerful natural phenomenon symbolizes the chaos and turmoil in the kingdom?

- a) Thunderstorm
- b) Earthquake
- c) Tornado
- d) Eclipse

10. The motif of blindness and vision is prevalent in “King Lear.” Who becomes physically blind in the play?

- a) King Lear
- b) Gloucester
- c) Cordelia
- d) Kent

11. What is the significance of the recurring image of the “storm” in “King Lear”?

- a) It represents the madness of King Lear.
- b) It symbolizes the chaos in the kingdom.
- c) It foreshadows Cordelia’s death.
- d) All of the above.

12. The play frequently refers to the concept of “filial ingratitude.” Which character is accused of this by King Lear?

- a) Goneril
- b) Regan
- c) Cordelia
- d) Gloucester

13. The motif of the “fool” or “jester” in “King Lear” serves as both a comic relief and a symbol of:

- a) Wisdom
- b) Madness
- c) Deception
- d) Loyalty

14. Which character in “King Lear” utters the famous line, “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child”?

- a) King Lear
- b) Gloucester
- c) Goneril
- d) Kent

15. The play’s imagery often draws parallels between the state of the kingdom and the state of nature. Which character speaks extensively about the natural world?

- a) Edgar
- b) Kent
- c) Cordelia
- d) Oswald

16. What animal is frequently used as a symbol to describe King Lear's vulnerability and suffering?

- a) Lion
- b) Wolf
- c) Serpent
- d) Bear

17. In "King Lear," what item does Gloucester use to disguise himself?

- a) A mask
- b) A cloak
- c) A crown
- d) A sword

18. Which character's death is foreshadowed by the imagery of birds of prey, such as vultures?

- a) Cordelia
- b) King Lear
- c) Regan
- d) Goneril

19. What event in "King Lear" is compared to "judgment day" in terms of its significance?

- a) The storm on the heath
- b) The blinding of Gloucester
- c) The division of the kingdom
- d) The death of Cordelia

20. The play's final scene contains an eerie image involving Cordelia. What happens to her at the end of the play?

- a) She is crowned queen.
- b) She is reunited with King Lear.
- c) She is hanged.
- d) She marries Edmund.

**Answers:**

1. a) William Shakespeare	2. c) King Lear of Britain
3. b) "Leir of Britain" by Raphael Holinshed	4. c) Cordelia
5. c) "Throne of Blood" (Kumonosu-jō)	6. b) "Looking for Lear"
7. c) "Futurama"	8. a) Tom Stoppard

9. a) Thunderstorm	10. b) Gloucester
11. d) All of the above.	12. a) Goneril
13. b) Madness	14. a) King Lear
15. b) Kent	16. c) Serpent
17. b) A cloak	18. b) King Lear
19. b) The blinding of Gloucester	20. c) She is hanged.

#### **10.16 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. What are the important scenes in *King Lear*?
2. What is the importance of Storm Scene?
3. Discuss the regeneration of Lear.

#### **10.17 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- King Lear.cliffnotes.com
- “Complete scene by Scene Outline.” [kinglear.org/scene-outlines](http://kinglear.org/scene-outlines).
- Shakespeare, William. King Lear. Harvard Colleges. 1608 Library
- Edwards, P. (1986) *Shakespeare: A Writer’s Progress*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Hope, J. (1994) *The Authorship of Shakespeare’s Plays: A Socio-Linguistic Study*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge

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## **AN ANALYSIS**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 11.1 Introduction to Lear as a Protagonist
- 11.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 11.3 Language of Passion
- 11.4 Lear as Noble King
- 11.5 Tragic Flaw in Lear
- 11.6 Negative Traits in Lear's Character
- 11.7 Role of Circumstance
- 11.8 Theme of Madness in Shakespeare
- 11.9 King Lear as Scientific study of Mental Disease
- 11.10 Lear : "More Sinned Against than Sinning"
- 11.11 The Redemption of Lear
- 11.12 The Significance of Cordelia in the Play
- 11.13 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.14 Examination Oriented Questions
- 11.15 Multiple Choice Questions
- 11.16 Suggested Readings

### **11.1 INTRODUCTION TO LEAR AS A PROTAGONIST**

It is high time now for me to give you a critical insight into the character of the protagonist or the central figure in *King Lear*. Here, you will find answers to such questions as character is destiny in Shakespeare's plays and Lear is more sinned against than sinning.

In all his tragedies, Shakespeare has created grand memorable figures. King Lear is an impressive and dominating figure. He is aged, and he speaks of himself 'as about to crawl toward death' (Act. I., Sc I.). Yet, in Act I Scene iv, we find him coming back from hunting, a strenuous pursuit, and calling with hearty appetite for dinner. There is no fatigue here. In the centre of the play he is grievously afflicted by exposure to the fury of the tempest: yet he survives it and after his ordeal, he has the strength, near the very end, to kill Cordelia's hangman. His physical stamina is indeed extraordinary and any producer who thought of presenting him as (in Lamb's phrase) 'an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick', would be inappropriate. And Lear's aspect is indeed royal. The disguised Kent is assuredly using no flattery when he speaks of Lear as having 'authority' in his countenance that is, in his bearing. Lear, we see in Act I Sc. i, is a monarch of great age, of powerful physique, of compelling personality. But at the same time he is a foolish man.

With all his outbursts of passion, and even in his savage invective against his daughters-an invective surely unequalled in all literature for its terrible violence, Lear is never undignified. Note, for instance, his kingly astonishment, when Goneril first dares to criticise his followers :

\ "Are you our daughter" ?

and again :

"Doth any here know me ? This is not Lear".

or again his almost inarticulate rage, when Gloucester makes excuses for the fiery quality of the Duke.

Vengeance, plague, death, confusion, Fiery

What quality ? Why, Gloucester, Gloucester

*I'd speak with the Duke of Cornwall and his wife.*

The tone being always to the last, that of a man used to command, and to be obeyed. Even in his madness we catch glimpses of this heroic spirit shining through his incoherence, notably in the final passage, when he is recognised by Gloucester.

## 11.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Analyze King Lear's complex personality as a noble yet flawed ruler.
2. Understand the causes of Lear's downfall including personal flaws and external forces.
3. Explore the themes of madness and injustice in the play.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Identify Lear's tragic flaws, including pride and rashness.
2. Discuss the role of fate and circumstance in intensifying Lear's suffering.
3. Interpret the quote "more sinned against than sinning" in light of Lear's journey.

### 11.3 LANGUAGE OF PASSION

In a Shakespearean tragedy, the lot of the tragic hero seems to be that he discovers through suffering, the secret wealth of his imagination. The greater the man and the greater his suffering, the greater is the secret wealth of his imagination. The note of grandeur begins to be heard in Lear's speech to Goneril. 'I am ashamed that thou hast power to shake *my* manhood thus; and it is heightened, as by degrees, his wits unsettle. His intelligence, which in the opening scenes has been blinded, now sees all the 'injustice of the world" and the indecency of man and womankind, now awakens, and is actually at its strongest however jaundiced when he is on the verge of madness and beyond. His passion, and personally his hallucination break into apostrophe. He conjures the elements, the gods, the poor naked wretches, the 'rascal beadle,' and the joint stool that he mistakes for Goneril. Language, in this brainstorm, is churned up from the depths; the rhythm follows every change of mood, marking the greater or less coherence of Lear's musings, as it slips from wonderfully modulated, but normal verse into broken lines and hence downward into prose. When he recovers calm, and awakens a different kind of pity, no longer mixed with terror, his speech is simple and the verse runs evenly.

### 11.4 LEAR AS A NOBLE KING

All Shakespeare's kings are surrounded by a certain halo of prestige. Shakespeare's fervent royalism is seen in his preference for reverence for superiors. His Lear has a greater endowment of this kind of majesty than any other figure in his plays. For this reason, the blows of Fate that inflict such cruel wounds on his pride are infinitely more painful to him than acts of ingratitude and baseness would be to an ordinary mind. But the more his pride is wounded, the more clearly does it show its unconquerable nature; it will perish only with the life of the king himself. Even in his madness this pride remains unshaken. He arises more majestic where others would be in danger of lapsing into ridicule. Thus, we may indeed, say of Lear, keeping the Shakespearean conception of highness in view, that he is "every inch a king." This characteristic phrase, again, is uttered by the king with reference to himself. "Ay, every inch a king" (iv, vi, 110). The significance of the words is not greatly affected by the fact that they are spoken in a state of madness. His exalted attitude is very strongly emphasized throughout the play. The man who says of himself that he is 'every inch a king' radiates 'greatness'.

As was inevitable for such a man as Lear, who is not accustomed to look before he leaped, is only gradually brought, by his own sufferings and his ill-treatment at the hands of Goneril and Regan, whom he had not wronged, to feel some remorse for the wrong he did to Cordelia. Perhaps, we see the first symptoms of his altered attitude of mind in Act I, Scene II, where he cries out to the elements. "Here I stand your slave, a poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man." This is the note he strikes when Cordelia's forgiving tenderness brings his short comings home to him, towards the end of the play he implores :

*Pray do not mock me,  
I am a very foolish fond old man,  
Fourscore and upwards; not an hour more or less And to deal plainly,  
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.*

### 11.5 HAMARTIA OR TRAGIC FLAW IN LEAR

In Shakespeare's plays, a tragic hero has some fatal weakness (Hamartia) in him. He makes some fatal mistake, which brings about his tragic fall. It is true with Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth. But Lear differs from the

other tragic heroes of Shakespeare, in that he seems to be a sufferer, hardly at all an agent. Whereas, the other tragic heroes of Shakespeare are active agents of their own doom, Lear is mostly a passive sufferer. As Bradley puts it, Lear's sufferings are so cruel and our indignation against those, who inflicted, those sufferings on him is so intense that we are inclined to forget and even forgive his act of folly and the wrong he did to Cordelia and Kent. Lear inspires in us not only pity, but also much admiration and affection. His frankness and generosity, his heroic efforts to be patient, his shame and repentance, the ecstasy of his re-union with Cordelia, melt our hearts. The following are the main traits of his character which led to the fall of Lear.

### **Hypersensitive**

Uncontrollable excitability is a negative trait in Lear's personality. This is evident throughout the play. Words fail to express the full force of the volcanic outbursts of love and hatred that take sovereign possession of the proud, sensitive, passion ridden mind.

### **Lack of Judgement**

Lack of judgement is another great limitation of this great king. This is a natural consequence of unbridled passion and is exemplified in Lear's blindness towards the true worth of Cordelia and Kent as well as in his failure to detect the crisis in the Kingdom was a single act of poor judgement, since internal strife would certainly result from the setting up of three rival kings in one kingdom.

### **His love for dignity**

Lear has great love of retinue and homage. He bitterly resents the falling off in deference in the two sisters and in Oswald, especially in the diminution and final cutting of his retinue. Thus, his first complaint to Regan against Goneril is, "She hath abated me of half my train" and Regan is commended as not likely to expose him to such bitter indignity. When Regan further reduces his train, he detests her. Goneril seems to offer better conditions with respect to his train, he quickly has a reversal in her favour, unmindful of his previous protestation to "abjure all roofs."

Cordelia shows how much alive she is to this conspicuous weakness when she carefully addresses him in almost fulsome language. Kent, when disguised, by the same device secures his desired position as servant, by remarking, certainly not by accident, that the king had that in countenance, viz. authority, which he (Kent) would fain call master. And lastly, the king does not forget even in his moments of complete delusion, that he is "every inch a king."

Lear's imperviousness is very obvious. At the very commencement of the play, one sees what manner of man Lear is. The bare idea of a public abdication and a public assessment of his daughter's affection for him, sounds like the silly whim of a man accustomed to bend others to his rule. His words to Cordelia on her plain avowal of her feelings fully reveal it.

*"How, how, Cordelia ? mend your speech a little. Lest it may mar your fortunes "*

Lear is a man of towering passions. His passionate hatred is well displayed in his speech to his daughter Cordelia, when in an outburst of fury he declares that she shall have nothing from him. The same trait is characteristic of him throughout the play.

*The barbarous Scythian,  
Or he that makes his generation messes  
To gorge his appetite, shall to my bosom  
Be as well neighbour'd, pitied and relieved,  
As thou my sometime daughter.*

When the Earl of Kent, his faithful counsellor, attempts to defend Cordelia, Lear in anger, banishes him from his Kingdom :

*If on the tenth day following  
Thy banish'd trunk be found in our dominions,  
The moment is thy death, Away! By Jupiter,  
This shall not be revok'd.*

and when angry at his daughter Goneril, the same wrath is vented forth upon her :

*Blasts and forge upon thee!  
The untented woundings of a father's curse pierce every sense about thee;*

Lear's division of the kingdom among his daughters, and the manner of the division, the mock trial of the affections of his daughters, are the first acts of his approaching madness, and he is unable to distinguish between the flattery of his elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, and the genuine expressions of his younger daughter Cordelia.

At times, his affection towards his three daughters is most marked. When the King of France learns of the banishment of Cordelia, he presses his suit more eagerly, although urged by her father :

*To avert your liking a more worthier way  
Than on a wretch whom nature is ashamed  
Almost to acknowledge hers.*

but King of France in reply reminds him of his former affection for his daughter :

*This is most strange,  
That she, that even but now as your best object,  
The argument of your praise, balm of your age,  
Most best, most dearest. Should in this trice of time  
Commit a thing so monstrous, to dismantle  
So many folds of favour.*

When Cordelia is taken captive with her father he again shows his passionate affection for her :

Come, let's away to prison :

*We two alone will sing like birds in the cage :  
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,  
And ask of thee forgiveness : so we'll live, as gilded butterflies,*

### **Craving for flattery**

Lear's inordinate craving for flattery is responsible for all his suffering and misery. He is fond of pomp, homage and outward attention from his servants, and shows great respect to his daughters Goneril and Regan on account of allowing him to live alternately with them, attended by a few hundred knights. For their supposed love, he divides between them the share of kingdom previously intended for his daughter Cordelia. For himself he decides;

*By monthly course,  
With reservation of a hundred knights  
By you to be sustain'd shall our abode  
Make with you by due turn.*

When Goneril tired of her father's company, deprives him of his attendants, he bitterly resents the falling off in her regard for him. He first complains to Regan of the conduct of Goneril :

*This not in thee  
To grudge my pleasures, to cut off my train.*

but later, when Regan makes a further reduction of his attendants than Goneril did, he says :

*What ! must I come to you  
With five and twenty? Regan, said you so ?*

His youngest daughter Cordelia sees plainly her father's weakness for pomp, as is shown in the careful manner in which she addresses him, "How does my royal lord ? How fares your majesty ?"

### **11.6 NEGATIVE TRAITS IN THE CHARACTER OF LEAR**

Lear's speech to his daughter Goneril brings out four distinct traits in his character; irritation and sadness, which are followed by an outburst of rage and hate, and finally an effort to be patient with her. Determined to retain the title status and prerogatives of a king, he nevertheless, wishes to relinquish the actual task of ruling. He decided to divide his kingdom amongst his three daughters, who with their husbands will govern their respective regions under his titular authority. In the first scene of the play, he ostensibly holds an auction : the best portion of the kingdom will go to that daughter who by her words indicates that she loves her father best. But he has already made his division. Before the play has begun he has decided to give Goneril and Regan exactly equal portion of the realm, and to give Cordelia a portion richer than these.

If Lear has made his decision already, why should he ask his daughters to speak of their love for him before he formally presents them with their portions ? It might be suggested that he wants to corroborate in his own mind, or publicly to display as sound, his previous judgement as to their degrees of affection for him. But

this will hardly do. For when the first daughter has spoken, Lear gives her portion before hearing the second; and when the second has spoken, he gives her portion before hearing the third. His real reason for making his daughters speak of their love is just that he likes to hear himself praised on a ceremonial occasion. He knew that Goneril would flatter him, that Regan would flatter him, and he enjoys their flattery. He was confident that Cordelia-his particular favourite would excel them both. His own words give him away.

'Now, our joy', he says.

*What can you say to draw*

*A third more opulent than your sisters ? Speak.*

The matter is already decided. Lear leans back to enjoy the culmination of the performance he has staged. But the words do not come and he immediately castes her off. And to his fault of vanity is added the fault of rashness. When his pride receives an affront, he reacts intemperately. He lacks self control. Passion usurps the place of reason. And this is not merely the result of old age but of vanity also.

It may be wondered why, since Lear is of such an autocratic disposition, he should have taken it into his head to abdicate at all in favour of his daughters. Possibly we may see in this act of his-and, it must be remembered he had always been eccentric, -a sudden fancy that a resolution must be acted upon. And what is more, his daughters must repay him by their public protestations of affection. Goneril, and Regan, with their insincere and extravagant expressions of love are well enough, but the king waits for something more from his darling daughter Cordelia. One can picture his annoyance when he is met by her somewhat cool answer.

*I love your majesty,*

*According to my bond, nor more nor less.*

It is then that Lear's uncontrollable wrath bursts out, the wrath that is to be followed by such disastrous consequences, both to himself and to others. Just as Lear's abdication is the basis of all the actual incidents of the play, this outburst of ungovernable rage is the beginning of his moral downfall, culminating in his madness and all the miseries it entails.

## 11.7 ROLE OF CIRCUMSTANCE

Circumstances also contribute to the tragedy in many significant ways. There are various examples which illustrate this point. (i) When Lear is driven out to the heath by the cruelty of his daughters, a violent storm breaks out. But for this storm at this juncture, the king would not have suffered so' much physically or lost his wits. (ii) The presence of Edgar disguised as Tom bedlam in the cottage is a significant coincidence that stimulates and hastens the madness of Lear. (iii) Just when the King goes to sleep and there is a good chance of the king recovering his wits as the result of refreshing sleep, Gloucester comes with the news of a plot against Lear's life and the need to take Lear to Dover. So the King's sleep is broken and his disorder has no opportunity to recover balance. This is an unfortunate coincidence in the play that aggravates Lear's tragedy. (iv) Cordelia's army is defeated and Cordelia and Lear are taken prisoner : otherwise the play would have ended happily for Lear. Defeat in battle may be ascribed to the accidents of war but why is it that the reprieve of Cordelia comes too late to prevent her hanging ? Albany wants to set Cordelia free and restore Lear to his throne. Edmund also repents and wants to save Cordelia; but his confession comes too late to save Cordelia. The hanging of Cordelia is a tragic incident which gives us the impression that the mysterious forces of fate, are working against Lear and Cordelia. When Cordelia is hanged, Lear naturally dies broken-hearted. So, we find that circumstances also contribute largely to the tragedy of Lear.

It is, therefore, wrong to say that character is destiny as far as Lear's fortunes are considered; both character and circumstances or fate are jointly responsible for his tragedy. But the primary responsibility rests with his own character.

### 11.8 THEME OF MADNESS IN SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare has many portraits of madness, real, and assumed. Titus Andronicus is driven mad by his sufferings; Hamlet is unbalanced as he feigns madness, and Ophelia is driven mad by grief; Constance is driven distracted by her loss of Arthur; Lady Macbeth commits suicide because of an unsound mind; and in *The Tempest*, the three men of sin are maddened by the workings of conscience, so that their brains are as useless as a tumour. It says much for Shakespeare's powers of observation, or for his intuitive understanding of the human mind that his depiction of madness, though based on sixteenth-century theory, has satisfied medical opinion of later ages, J.C. Bucknill in his remarks on the medical knowledge of Shakespeare and H. Somerville in *Madness in Shakespearean Tragedy* illustrate the fact that our increasing knowledge of madness during the past century has served only to justify Shakespeare's intuitions.

The groundlings of the Elizabethan theatre loved to see mad characters on the stage. It was part of the mob's love of sensationalism. Shakespeare never, disdained to exploit the tastes of the audience if he could raise it to a high dramatic purpose. He had always, watched the phenomena of insanity in some of its forms, and possessed a deeper understanding of them than any of his contemporaries. He loved to take some of his characters, for instance Hamlet, Othello and Lady Macbeth to the border of insanity, and it is the borderland that fascinates the student of psychology even more than the land itself. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare shows both the outer shadow and the inner darkness dotted with spots, and sometimes with pools of light. As a study in insanity Lear is his prize specimen. But as a dramatic method, it can become a medium for revealing the abysses and recesses of the human mind. When the controls of reason are absent, things lonely and things dark in the underworld of personality become, significant. The insanity of Lear makes the workings of his unconscious and subconscious self luminous in diverse ways. It is a radiograph of his mind, enabling us to see firstly, the thoughts and impulses of Lear in years gone by; secondly, his obsessions during the days of mental strain that brought on the collapse; thirdly, the expansion of his human sympathies and the awakening of the moral greatness that had lain dormant within him; fourthly, his remorse; and lastly, the growth and change of the inner man, Lear. Insanity itself is shown as changing and as a process with phases.

#### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. Lear's tragic flaw is often identified as excessive \_\_\_\_.
2. His misjudgment of Cordelia and trust in Goneril and Regan shows his poor \_\_\_\_.
3. Lear gradually descends into \_\_\_\_ as the play progresses.
4. Lear claims he is "more sinned against than \_\_\_\_."

#### Answers

1. pride
2. judgment
3. madness
4. sinning

## 11.9 ‘KING LEAR’ AS A SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF MENTAL DISEASE

It is significant that experts in mental diseases consult and quote *King Lear* as though it were the history of an actual case of insanity. Essays and treatises on the subject are numerous. That Shakespeare should have entered so perfectly into the consciousness of insanity as thus to project, not a mere likeness of the thing, but the very thing itself, is one of the mysteries of his genius. The methods used for the recovery of the old king anticipate those employed as the result of modern scientific study and experience. Dr Brigham remarks, “Although nearly two centuries and a half have passed since, Shakespeare wrote this, we have very little to add to his method of treating the insane as thus, pointed out to produce sleep, to quiet the mind by medical and moral treatment, to avoid all unkindness, and when the patients begin to convalesce, to guard, as he directs, against everything likely to disturb their minds and cause a relapse. It is now considered the best and nearly the only essential treatment.”

## 11.10 LEAR : “MORE SINNED AGAINST THAN SINNING”

Coleridge states : “All his faults increase our pity for him. We refuse to know them otherwise than as means of his sufferings and aggravations of his daughters’ ingratitude.” Lamb also endorses Coleridge’s view. In fact, Lear is a tragic character whose sufferings emanate from the flaws which are inherent in his character. We see that these serious defects of Lear’s character are, revealed in the opening scene of the drama. His want of understanding of his daughter’s nature; his absurd desire to hear their declarations of love for him, his unnatural outburst of rage against his dear daughter Cordelia and loyal Kent reveal his basic mental and moral weakness. His reckless and cruel discarding of Cordelia and banishing of Kent supplement his rash folly in giving away his kingdom to his daughters. His tragic sufferings follow, inevitably, from his rash actions. Lear has “sinned”, and has to reap “superflux” of sufferings and the intensity of his sufferings is more than his faults or “sins”. Sympathy is certainly evoked by Shakespeare’s representation of his character and his suffering.

Granted that he has done injustice to Cordelia, why should Goneril and Regan ill-treat him ? He has given them the whole kingdom reserving to himself the symbols of sovereignty and the attendance of a hundred followers. Even if, he has some defects of temper, he deserves gratitude and affection on their part in his triple capacity of king, father and old man. It is to be noted that Goneril instructs her servants to practise a deliberate neglect towards Lear and his followers. If Lear strikes Oswald and Kent trips him, it is because the fellow is rude in behaviour. Consider how rude Oswald’s answer that Lear is his lady’s father. Nor should we forget that Goneril and Regan are wicked hypocrites who only want excuses to reduce the king to lonely and helpless existence. They play with him as a cat does with a mouse, progressively reduce his brain, and with triumphant malice ask why he needs any servant at all. The aged king kneels before Regan, begging for raiment, food and shelter, but she brushes this aside as the unsightly trick of his dotage, and asks him to go back to Goneril. Whatever be his faults, Lear does not deserve to be humiliated like this. Ultimately the king rushes out into the wild stormy heath, and Goneril and Regan close the doors of the castle, to protect themselves from the raging storm. What monstrous ingratitude and pitiless cruelty! Surely Lear does not deserve this from his own daughters.

But though Lear suffers grievously and unjustly, his sufferings have one compensatory relieving feature. Sufferings purge his soul, expand and elevate his mind and heart, and give him lofty spiritual vision. The Lear at the end of the play is a redeemed Lear. And though his sufferings are monstrously out of proportion to his offences, we do not feel crushed at the spectacle of his tragedy.

## 11.11 THE REDEMPTION OF LEAR

It is because of the purgatorial effect of suffering on Lear's mind that the play is called the Redemption of King Lear. Suffering forces him to realize his own humanity and awakens the philanthropic disposition which was the attitude the stoics cultivated towards their fellow men. Lear expresses his conversion to this ethical position in the following famous lines :

*Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,  
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm  
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,  
Your loop's and window'd raggedness, defend you  
From seasons such as these ? O, I have taken  
Too little care of this! Take physic pomp;  
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,  
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them  
And show the heavens more just.*

A.C. Bradley says that these lines mark the redemption of Lear. But they report only his first hesitant step in that direction, for the old man's moment of humility is fleeting; it has no immediate effect upon his conduct or upon his madness.

The real redemption of Lear comes when he awakens from the delusions of his frenzied mind to discover Cordelia and her unselfish enduring love. The mere sight of her kills "the great rage" in him the unsocial emotional turmoil from which all his sins and sufferings have sprung. Now he is calmly receptive to the healing power of Christian love. For he has now arrived to utter indifference to external events, that complete freedom from emotion, the disease of the intellect, which produces true stoic content. On the contrary, Lear finds his peace in an active emotion, in all absorbing love which at last renders him independent of circumstances. Even shut within the narrow walls of a prison, he can now find utter peace and happiness if only Cordelia and her love be with him there :

*Come, let's away to prison;  
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage;  
.....  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies  
.....  
And take upon's the mystery of things,  
As if we were God's spies; and we'll wear out,  
In a wall'll prison, packs and scets of great ones*

*That ebb and flow by the moon*

.....

*Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,  
The gods themselves throw incense,*

## 11.12 SIGNIFICANCE OF CORDELIA IN PLAY

This speech shows that Lear's ideals have come full circle. In the first scene of the play, he showed himself so exclusively devoted to the external shows of his position that he has come to value even love only in so far as it augmented his earthly glory. But his passage through purgatory has made him realize that beside love all the baser uses of this world seem utterly unprofitable. Even the packs and sects (conspiracies and factions) of great ones, to which he used to pay all his allegiance, seem wholly insignificant. If Lear's reunion with Cordelia brings about his salvation, one may well ask why Shakespeare snatches her so suddenly from him. And why does he put Lear to death so soon ? The answers to the two questions are closely related. It is not what the earthly creature Cordelia is, but what she represents that is important for the meaning of the play. It is her spirit, not her bodily presence, that redeems her father. And like the third friend in the sermons, she is hanged, as Christ was crucified, so that mankind might be saved.

Since this is a sublime morality play, its action prepares Lear not for a life of stoic tranquility on this earth, but for the heavenly joy of a redeemed soul. The meaning of Cordelia's execution comes to Lear slowly and painfully. At first he is filled with despair at losing her.

*Thou'is come no more,  
Never, never, never, never, never!*

But, suddenly he makes the blessed discovery that Cordelia is not dead after all, that the breath of life still trembles on her lips :

*Do you see this ? Look on her, look her lips,  
Look there; look there!*

In the joy of this discovery, the old man's heart breaks in a spasm of ecstasy. For only to earthbound intelligence is Lear pathetically deceived in thinking poor Cordelia alive. Those familiar with the pattern of the morality play realized that Lear has discovered in her unselfish God-like love and the one companion who is willing to go with him through Death up to the throne of the Everlasting Judge. This knowledge enables Lear to meet Death in a state of rapture.

It was Bradley who suggested that the play might be called "The Redemption of King Lear", Schucking, however, argues that it is not "really consistent with Shakespeare's philosophy to see in this sequence of events and ascent of the character to a higher plane; a process of purification and perfection." Lear in his madness "does little more than follow the beaten track of the melancholy type." His attacks on society, however profound they may seem are the result of his mental derangement; and at the end of the play he is not purified by suffering, but rather "a nature completely transformed, whose extraordinary vital forces are extinguished or about to be extinguished." Schucking concludes, therefore that it shows a complete misunderstanding of the play "to regard Lear as greater at the close than at the beginning." It is true, of course, that some of Lear's most impressive critical views of

society are expressed in his madness; that he becomes progressively more feeble; and that in the last scene there are signs of his approaching dissolution; yet the three moments in the play crucial to Bradley's theory of Lear's development-his recognition of error, his compassion for the poor, and his kneeling to Cordelia occur either before or after his madness. His resemblance to the melancholic type is superficial, though other dramatists had criticized society through the mouth of a malcontent as Shakespeare did through the mouth of a madman. Schucking seems to be, only partially, aware of the paradox that Lear when ostensibly sane cannot distinguish between Cordelia and her wicked sisters: he acquires wisdom by going mad, and his wildest speeches are a mixture of matter and impertinency "reason in madness".

For these reasons, it is impossible to accept the view that Lear at the end of the play is only an enfeebled Lear. Actually his character undergoes a process of regeneration and ennoblement. Like gold in fire, his character becomes purified through suffering.

### **11.13 LET US SUM UP**

The story of King Lear revolves around the character King Lear, his mistakes, weaknessess and the process of his regeneration and ennoblement. Cordelia, however, innocent has to pay for others' sins by giving up her life. The storm in the play is metaphor of Lear's madness.

### **11.14 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Lear as protagonist of the play.
2. Highlight the tragic flaw in Lear.
3. Write a note on the role of Cordelia.

### **11.15 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. Which of the following best describes the tragic flaw that leads to King Lear's downfall in the play?
  - A) Greed
  - B) Vanity
  - C) Gullibility
  - D) Ambition
2. Who is the main antagonist and source of conflict in "King Lear"?
  - A) Cordelia
  - B) Gloucester
  - C) Albany
  - D) Edmund
3. What is the relationship between Regan and Goneril in "King Lear"?
  - A) Sisters
  - B) Mother and daughter

- C) Cousins
- D) Step-sisters

4. How does Gloucester's tragic flaw contribute to the overall tragedy in "King Lear"?

- A) His ambition leads to betrayal and conflict.
- B) His loyalty to Lear causes his blindness and suffering.
- C) His greed for power drives the plot's tragic events.
- D) His lack of empathy results in Cordelia's death.

5. Who becomes the voice of reason and wisdom in the latter part of the play, advising Lear on his actions?

- A) The Fool
- B) Cordelia
- C) Edgar
- D) Goneril

6. Which character serves as the primary comic relief in "King Lear"?

- A) Kent
- B) Cordelia
- C) Edgar
- D) The Fool

7. What is the significance of the storm scenes in "King Lear"?

- A) They symbolize Lear's internal turmoil and madness.
- B) They represent the forces of nature against Lear's kingdom.
- C) They mark the changing of the seasons in the play.
- D) They serve as a backdrop for Cordelia's wedding.

8. Which character seeks to destroy his legitimate half-brother and illegitimately gain his father's favor?

- A) Kent
- B) Gloucester
- C) Edgar
- D) Edmund

9. How does Cordelia die in the tragedy of "King Lear"?

- A) She dies in battle.
- B) She is poisoned.
- C) She is hanged.
- D) She dies of natural causes.

10. In the final scene of “King Lear,” what is the outcome for King Lear and his loyal servant Kent?

- A) They both die in battle.
- B) They reconcile and live in exile.
- C) They are executed by Regan and Goneril.
- D) They return to the throne together.

**Answers:** 1C, 2D, 3A, 4B, 5C, 6D, 7A, 8D, 9A, 10B.

### **11.16 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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- McDonald, Mark A. *Shakespeare’s King Lear with The Tempest*. University Press of America, 2004
- Taylor, G. “The Canon and Chronology of Shakespeare’s Plays.” In S. Wells and G. Taylor.
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## **AN ANALYSIS OF MAIN CHARACTERS IN LEAR**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 12.3 Cordelia
  - 12.3.1 A dutiful and truthful daughter
  - 12.3.2 Her honest nature
- 12.4 Critics
- 12.5 Categories of Fool
- 12.6 Role of Fool in Elizabethan Drama
  - 12.6.1 Fool in King Lear
  - 12.6.2 Role of Fool in the Drama
- 12.7 Edgar
  - 12.7.1 Edgar's assumed madness
- 12.8 Kent
- 12.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.10 Examination Oriented Questions
- 12.11 Multiple Choice Questions
- 12.12 Suggested Readings

### **12.1 INTRODUCTION**

Cordelia, Kent, Edgar and the Fool form a remarkable group of characters in *King Lear*. They represent abundance of extreme good, selfless devotion and unconquerable love. We approve these characters, admire them, love them; but we feel no mystery. We do not ask in bewilderment, "Is there any cause in nature that makes these kind of hearts." First of all, I would like to discuss the character of Cordelia. According to A.C. Bradley, "the character of Cordelia is not a masterpiece of invention or subtlety like that of Cleopatra; yet in its own way

it is a wonderful creation. Cordelia appears in only four of the twenty-six scenes of *King Lear*; she speaks—it is hard to believe it—scarcely more than a hundred lines; and yet no character in Shakespeare is more absolutely individual or more ineffaceably stamped on the memory of his readers.”

## 12.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Examine Cordelia’s role as the moral center and dutiful daughter in *King Lear*.
2. Understand the symbolic and dramatic functions of the Fool.
3. Analyze the loyalty and significance of characters like Edgar and Kent.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Describe Cordelia’s virtue, honesty, and contrast with her sisters.
2. Explain the Fool’s role in critiquing Lear and offering wisdom through irony.
3. Analyze Edgar and Kent as examples of loyalty and disguised virtue.

## 12.3 CORDELIA

All learners of Shakespeare have agreed in enthroning Cordelia high, if not, highest amongst lovable and loving ladies. She is, by no means, expressive in her affection, indeed she is rather lacking in demonstration, but not unpardonably so, when, as in the first act, a public display of her affection is demanded, and that for a mercenary reason. When, however, her father is restored to her after his barbarous experiences at the hands of her sisters, we find a lovely touching demonstration of love without alloy.

Although the character of Cordelia is painted with but few touches, it is none-the-less distinct in its characteristics of perfect womanhood. All the critics have expressed their hesitation in even speaking of “the heavenly beauty”, (as Schlegel puts it) of Cordelia’s character. She presents a strong contrast to the general ‘savagery of the age’ as evidenced in all the other characters, with the single exception of Edgar.

This exceptional trait of Cordelia’s character comes out most strongly, as is suitable and fitting, in her dealings with her stricken father, whose restoration she strives hard to accomplish. She will not allow that she has any cause whatever by reason of the hard fate meted out to her, for abating her affection towards him one jot. When Lear says :

*“I know you do not love me; for your sisters*

*Have, as I do remember, done me wrong,*

*You have some cause, they have not.”*

*Cordelia’s reply is brief as it is emphatic,*

*“No cause, no cause,” She prays :*

*Restoration, hang*

*Thy medicine on my lips, and let his kiss*

*Repair those violent harms that my two sisters*

*Have in thy reverence made !*

### 12.3.1 A dutiful and truthful daughter

Lear is “Your Highness,” “My Royal Lord.” “Your Majesty” to his daughter, who knows that this accustomed homage, will solace the battered old heart. Even towards her sisters she bears no malice, although her quiet condemnation of them is even more effective than all the passionate denunciation of Lear. In Cordelia, we have the personification of duty and truth.

*Since what I well intend*

*I'll do it before I speak,*

Cordelia is her own simple description of her cardinal rule of conduct. There is to be no excess of promise over performance, but rather the reverse, hence, another reason why she could not make loud protestations of what her filial affection would prompt her to do. She recognises that wifely affection would have to be allowed for as well as love for her father. She neither has nor desires “that glib and oily art” to which her sisters owed their advancement.

She sees through the hollow affection of her sisters as through the mercenary love of Burgundy. She recognises the hollowness of the prosperity that comes from hypocrisy and is glad not to have “such a tongue.”

*Though not to have it*

*Hath lost me in your liking.*

A boisterous woman is not pleasant to contemplate, and when Lear tells us that

*Her voice was ever soft,*

*Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman,*

One feels that nothing could have been better in keeping with her quiet, earnest and undemonstrative nature. Again, what could be more truly scathing than her condemnation of Burgundy :

*Peace be with Burgundy :*

*Since that respects of fortune are his love,*

*I shall not be his wife*

In conclusion, the self-control and decision of Cordelia’s character stands out in sharp contrast with that of the uncontrollable and vacillating king.

If one tries to sum up her character in one word, the word “restraint seems most appropriate. This note is evident at the very beginning of the play, such an ordeal as the public declaration of her love to her father was most offensive to one of Cordelia’s temperament. She seems to have been one of those to whom any violent

expression of feeling is repellent; this trait is shown not merely by her disappointing answer (Act. I, Sc. i), “Nothing my Lord,” to her father’s eager question; but towards the close of the play (Act. IV, Sc. iii), when the messenger is recounting her reception of Kent’s news about her father’s plight. It is the reserve and reticence of all true deeper natures that we see typified in Cordelia.

### 12.3.2 Her honest nature :

Cordelia’s honesty is remarkable. She is truth-loving even to a fault. Many commentators have gone so far as to remark that her cool and the matter of fact attitude in meeting her father’s demand for a protestation of love with blunt truth was merely obstinacy; and it is possible she may have inherited, or imbibed from her surroundings, some of the obstinacy of her father. Yet it is more to the point to regard her attitude as, the natural revulsion from the hypocrisy of her sisters. Notice the following examples of this trait.

(i) Her satirical comments spoken aside (Act. I. Sc. i), while her sisters are making their hollow protestations:

*What shall Cordelia do ? Love and be silent” and  
And yet not so; since I am sure my-love’s  
More richer than my tongue.*

These remarks are a running commentary on her sisters’ extravagance and show her own appreciation of it all at its true worth.

Also (II) her clear reading of a half hearted suitor, Burgundy (Act I. Sc. I) :

*“Peace be with Burgundy :  
Since that respects of fortune are his love  
I shall not be his wife”.*

Again, notice the gentle humour of her farewell to her sisters in Act, I. Sc. I. Or again her quiet

*Ye jewels of our father, with wash’d eyes Cordelia leaves you..... Use well our father;  
To your professed bosoms I commit him;*

and again her quiet expression of bitterness in Act V. Sc. iii

*We are not the first  
Who with best meaning have incur’d the worst,  
For thee, oppressed king, am I cast down;  
Myself could else out frown false fortune’s frown,  
Shall we not see these daughters and these sisters.*

### 12.4 CRITICS

Mrs. Jameson in *Shakespeare’s Heroines* particularly notes the beautiful simplicity and tenderness of Cordelia in Act IV Sc. vii, where she meets the father who had disinherited her. We feel that her tender humouring of him might have restored his mind, especially as the doctor tell us “the great rage” has passed, had she not met before his very eyes the violent death, which shatters his reason again and strikes him down also.

Cordelia can be most fittingly compared with the Antigone of Sophocles. In both, we see the same devotion to a blind and aged father and with these are unmerited sufferings which provoke our pity; but whereas in Antigone we see a masculine energy, proud to fight her own battles and fully able to withstand Greon; Cordelia suggests rather to us the gentle feminine type of quiet suffering. About Cordelia's behaviour, when receiving from Kent an account of her sister's conduct towards their father, Mrs. Jameson remarks : The, subdued pathos and simplicity of Cordelia's character, her quiet but intense feeling, the misery and humiliation at the same time sustained with such a deep intuitive knowledge of the innermost working of the human heart, that there is nothing that can be compared to it in any other writer." Finally, Mrs. Jameson compares Cordelia, with *Antigone*, daughter of Oedipus. "As poetical conceptions, the two characters rest on the same basis : they are both pure abstractions of truth, piety and natural affection; and in both love, as a passion, is kept entirely out of sight. The filial piety of Antigone is the most affecting part of the tragedy of *Oedipus Coloneus*. Her sisterly affection and her heroic self-devotion to a religious duty, form the plot of the tragedy called by her name."

## 12.5 CATEGORIES OF FOOLS

Of the various types of Fools, the domestic fool, often called a clown, is generally a born idiot, silly by nature but still cunning. The clown is generally a country booby or a witty rustic. He is generally a servant who takes liberties with his master. Then we have the female Fools. The City and Corporation Fools are another variety of the tavern Fool who amuses customers. Ben Jonson introduces such Fools in his plays. Then we have the ancient Fool of Mysteries or Moralities, technically called The Vice. He generally takes delight in having a dig at the Devil on the stage and his delight is to tease and torment the fiend to his heart's content. The Vice disappears from the drama towards the end of the sixteenth century. Other varieties are the Dumb show Fool at Fairs and Inns, the Dancing Fools, the Merry Andrews and others.

The theatrical fool or clown came down from the morality plays and was beloved of the groundlings. His antics, his songs, his dances, his jests delighted them and did something to make the drama, what the vulgar, poor or rich, like it to be, a variety entertainment. Even if he confined himself to what was set down for him, he often disturbed the dramatic unity of the peace. Shakespeare makes *Hamlet* object to it in emphatic terms. The more learned critics and poets went further and would have abolished the fool altogether. His part declines as the drama advances, diminishing markedly at the end of the sixteenth century. Johnson and Massinger exclude him. Shakespeare used him-as he used all other popular elements of the drama; but he abstained from introducing him into the Roman plays and there is no fool in the last of the pure tragedies *Macbeth*.

## 12.6 FOOL IN ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

Before one attempts to make up his mind as to the character of the fool one should consider just what an Elizabethan fool was and what privileges his position implied. The fools were household servants whose purpose was to create fun for their masters. In order to give them free rein, they were considered immune from punishment under ordinary circumstances, and at liberty to speak their minds freely without fear of consequences. Hence, Lear's threat to have the fool whipped is equivalent to saying that the king has almost forgotten what is due to a Fool. And it will be noted throughout that the Fool makes remarks, without the least hesitation, that no one else would have dared to make in the presence of the tempestuous king. Enid Welsford rightly argues that

like “others of his profession, he is very ready to proffer his coxcomb to his betters but in doing so he does not merely raise a laugh or score a point, he sets a problem, WHAT AM I? What is madness? he seems to ask. “The world being what it is, do I necessarily insult a man investing him with motely.”

According to A.C. Bradley, “Fool is one of Shakespeare’s triumphs in King Lear. It has been ingeniously suggested that the fool represents, in embodied form, the conscience of Lear. If this be so, one wonders at the fact that Lear’s conscience has no effect upon him. Perhaps what is really meant is that the fool represents what would have been Lear’s conscience, if he had one. This would, perhaps, explain the fact that he speaks only to Lear and that there is no more of him when Lear has lost his mind.

There may be another explanation of the function of the fool. Recall the tempestuous character of the king. We are always looking for an explosion greater than the one before. Now the fool throughout is saying things that would cause such an outbreak of temper had they been said by anyone else in the play. It is only because they originate from the fool that Lear is able to control himself. Yet we are constantly wondering how long the king will be able to exercise a slender self-control which hangs by such a trifling thread. The great moment comes on the heath. And after this, there being no further need of the fool, he does not appear again.

### 12.6.1 Fool in ‘King Lear’

It takes a wise man to make a Fool. Paradoxical as it may seem, it is nevertheless, true. At first, the Fool was attached to the court with a licence to indulge in gibes at his own master. A Fool is safe because nobody would think of retaliating, for if you give it to the Fool he gives back to you very badly and rudely. To make a Fool, one should have more than ordinary observation, judgement and wisdom. Viola in *The Twelfth Night*, fulfils all the conditions of the Court Fool, while Jacques in *As You Like It*, glorifies the office of a Fool. Rough jesters usually are not gentlemen, but we have several instances of gentlemen-jesters also. Some times he is a ‘simpleton’ that lends point to his jests. Each Court has its Fool who is preacher and admonisher of kings.

The Fool is one of the most important characters in *King Lear*. It has been often said, upon our estimate of the part he plays, depends to a large extent, on our estimate of the play as a whole. As Kent very truly says of him (Act I Sc. iv) “This is not altogether fool my Lord.” Regan expresses something like this towards the end of the play when she remarks, “Jesters do oft prove prophets.” There is great sage counsel running through all his fooling; and he exhibits the most touching loyalty and affection for his master. Notice his buoyant chatter-an endeavour to cheer the King in his misery throughout the terrible storm scene. Doubtless, in the introduction of the Fool, one must recognize a good deal more comic relief or contrast to the tragedy of Lear’s position.

On the heath, there is a strange assemblage of the Fool and the king and a strange effect arising from their union and position. It seems hardly possible that Lear’s character could be properly developed without him. Indeed, he serves as a common gauge and exponent of all the characters about him, the mirror in which their finest and deepest lineaments are reflected. Though a privileged person, with the largest opportunity of seeing and the largest liberty of speaking, he everywhere turns his privileges into charities, making the immunities of the clown subservient to the noblest sympathies of the man. He moves in vital intercourse with the character and passion of the drama. He makes his folly the vehicle of truths which Lear will bear in no other shape, while his affectionate tenderness sanctifies all his nonsense.

How better can the Fool be described than as the soul of pathos in a sort of comic masquerade ? One in whom fun and frolic are sublimed and idealized into tragic beauty.

## 12.6.2 Role of Fool in the Drama

Undoubtedly, our estimate of this drama as a whole depends very much on the view we take of the Fool; that is, on how we interpret his part or in what sense we understand it. Superficially considered, his presence and action can hardly seem other than a blemish in the work, and a hindrance to its proper interest. Accordingly, he has been greatly misunderstood, indeed totally misconstrued, by many of Shakespeare's critics. And it must be confessed that the true meaning of his part is somewhat difficult to seize; in fact is not to be seized at all, unless one gets just the right point of view. He has no suffering of his own to move us, yet, rightly seen, he does move us, and deeply too. But the process of his interest is very peculiar and recondite. The real key to his character lies in that while his heart is slowly breaking, he never speaks, nor even appears so much as to think, of his own suffering. He seems indeed quite unconscious of it. His anguish is purely the anguish of sympathy, sympathy as deep and intense as to induce absolute forgetfulness with the words. "And I'll go to bed at noon" which means simply that the poor fellow is dying, and this, too, purely of other's sorrows, which he feels more keenly than they do themselves. She, who was the light of his eyes is gone, dowered with her father's curse and stranger with his oath. Kent and Edgar have vanished from his recognition, he knows not the victims of that wrong and crime; the wicked seem to be having all things their own way, the elements have joined their persecution to the cruelties of men; there is not pity in the heavens, no help from the earth : he sees nothing but a "world's convention of agonies" before him, and his straining of mind 'to play assuagement upon other's woes' has fairly breached the citadel of his life. But the deepest grief of all has now overtaken him: his old master's wits are shattered. To prevent this he has been toiling his forces to the utmost, and now that it has come in spite of him, he no longer has anything to live for. To the last, he masks his passion in a characteristic disguise, and he breathes out of his life in a play of thought.

As the Fool represents truth in the guise of humour, he cannot be brought forward until the rupture with the moral law has taken place; the disguised truth waits; the king has not for two days seen the Fool. In his grief for Cordelia's banishment, the Fool has almost forgotten his part, and this affords us a pledge that, under the guise of humour, the deepest earnestness is concealed. Only in slight allusions does he touch the fault of the king, for roughly to waken up the injury done were the office not of love but of scorn. Hence, the Fool makes the folly of the king the target of his humour; the harmless words he throws out conceal a deep and penetrating significance. For example, immediately after Goneril's first rude speech to her father, the Fool breaks out with the apparently random words, 'Out went the candle and we were left darking' highlighting the folly Lear committed in banishing Cordelia. Gradually such words grow fewer. From now onwards, he indulges in some harmless, jesting remark to cheer the suffering of his master and to lighten the burden of his own grief. The whole depth and power of his sorrow he crowds into a little song, for he has become thus rich in songs since the king, as he says, has made his daughters his mothers. In a similar way, he expresses his impregnable devotion to the king in those deeply significant verses in which he promises not to desert the king in the storm, and the particular theme of which is that the wise are fools before God, but the fools in the eye of the world are justified by a higher power. The Fool has his place in the tragedy only so long as the king is able to perceive the truth veiled by the Fool's humour. There is no longer room or need for him after the king becomes crazed. This crisis is the end of the fool. He vanishes, goes to bed at mid-day, when his beloved master is hopelessly lost.

The Fool in Lear fulfills two functions corresponding with his two fold character : he emphasises the tragedy of the events and relieves it. He emphasises the tragedy because in his character as Jester (and it is his

main character) he exposes, with something more than the freedom of speech usually accorded to his class, the folly of his master's action and its consequences. His aim seems to be to induce Lear to "resume" his power; hence, he harps continually on the folly of what Lear has done and expresses the regret to what his master is ashamed to give vent. For at first, Lear tries to hide the truth from himself; but the fool, acting as the King's "Conscience," forces the truth on his notice. All through the earlier part of the piece, pursuing this futile aim of urging the king to attempt to undo his work, the Fool puts into words what Lear himself is thinking, and those about him are thinking though afraid to say. Thus, he keeps the tragedy of the King's position vividly present and does this under the guise of a fantastic levity-which relieves the tension. From the close of the Second Act, the note of his sallies changes. Lear's cause is irredeemably lost, his mind is tottering; and now the Fool seeks to divert his master, "to out-just his heart struck injuries." And in his jesting there is less of bitterness and cleverness, less of pungent allusion to the king's mistake and of satirical worldly wisdom masquerading as "folly." But Lear's "injuries" are beyond the Fool's power to alleviate, and he ceases to be necessary to the scheme of the play. No words of his are wanted to emphasise its self-evident tragedy. The King's madness is emphatic enough; nothing can relieve its sheer horror. So, the Fool drops out of the action.

One can sum up the discussion by quoting A.C. Bradley's words when he writes, "*But the fool is one of Shakespeare's triumphs in King Lear. Imagine the tragedy without him and you hardly know it. To remove him would spoil its harmony, as the harmony of a picture would be spoiled if one of the colours was extracted. One can almost imagine that Shakespeare, going home from an evening at the Mermaid where he had listened to Jonson fulminating against fools in general and perhaps criticising the clown in Twelfth Night in particular, had said to himself; "Come my friends, I will show you once for all that the mischief is in you, and not in the fool or the audience. I will have a fool in the most tragic of my tragedies. He shall not play a little part. He shall keep from first to last the company in which you most object to see him, the company of a king instead of amusing the king's idle hours, he shall stand by him in the very whirlwind of passion. Before I have done you shall confess, between laughter and tears that he is of the very essence of life, that you have known him all your days though you never recognised him till now, and that you would as soon go without Hamlet as miss him."*

#### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. Cordelia refuses to flatter Lear and is thus \_\_\_\_.
2. The Fool in *King Lear* often speaks in \_\_\_\_ to reveal truths.
3. Edgar disguises himself as \_\_\_\_ Tom to survive.
4. Kent remains \_\_\_\_ to Lear despite being banished.

#### Answers

1. disowned	2. riddles / irony / wit (any of these acceptable)
3. Poor	4. loyal

## 12.7 EDGAR

Edgar is another important character who is important in the dramatic construction of King Lear. The scheme of the play makes Edgar the counterpart of Cordelia. He is the son of Earl of Gloucester. Being an upright and honourable man he fails to see evil in others, and readily falls into the trap laid by Edmund who seeks to deprive him of his rights, and so succeed his father. He is described by Edmund as

*a brother noble,  
Whose nature is so far from doing harms  
That he suspects none;*

He seems to accept readily Edmund's feigned story of his father's ill-will towards him, and is even persuaded by Edmund to flee from home, thus, giving ground for suspicion, instead of first ascertaining from his father the cause of any ill-will. In this condition, he first meets the mad King Lear, and afterwards his father, Gloucester. Like Cordelia, he does not allow any feeling of hatred to predominate against those who have wronged him, but tenderly cares ones for his father. When after the blinding of Gloucester they meet on the heath, he endeavours to give comfort to him in his physical and mental anguish. When Gloucester contemplates suicide, it is Edgar who saves him from it. Even after all his troubles which he briefly, though eloquently, relates he behaves charitably towards Edmund. Even when his business is exposed following the well-known words, he half apologises for him.

*The gods are just and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us.*

Edgar's much-to-be admired conduct stands out in bold relief to the treachery of Edmund, his half-brother. If the best grace and happiness of life consist, as this play makes us feel that they do, in forgetting of self and a living for others, Kent and Edgar are those of Shakespeare's men whom one should most wish to resemble. Strikingly similar in virtues and situation, these two persons are, notwithstanding, widely different in character. Brothers in magnanimity and in misfortune; equally invincible in fidelity, the one to his king and other to his father, both are driven to disguise themselves, and in their disguise both serve where they stand condemned. Kent, despite his generosity to control himself is always quick, fiery and impetuous. Edgar, controlling himself even because of his generosity, is always calm, collected, and deliberate. For, if Edgar be the more judicious and prudent, Kent is the more unselfish of the two; the former disguises himself for his own safety, and then turning his disguise into an opportunity of service; the latter disguising himself merely in order to serve, and than perilling his life in the same cause whereby the other seeks to preserve it.

According to A.C. Bradley, "There is in Edgar, with much else that is fine, something of buoyancy of spirit which charms us in Imogene. Nothing can subdue in him the feeling that life is sweet and must be cherished. At his worst, misconstrued, condemned, exiled, under sentence of death, the lowest and most dejected thing of fortune, he keeps his head erect. The inextinguishable spirit of youth and delight is in him ; he embraces the unsubstantial air which has blown him to the worst for him 'the worst returns to laughter. 'Bear free and patient thoughts,' he says to his father. His own thoughts are more than patient, they are free, even joyous, in spite of the tender sympathies which strive in vain to overwhelm him.'" This ability to feel sympathy with those in distress is a noble quality, sometimes found in souls like Edgar's—naturally buoyant and also religious. It may even be

characteristic of him that, when Lear is sinking down in death, he tries to rouse him and bring back to life 'Look up, my lord' he cries.

As stated earlier, the scheme of the play makes Edgar the counterpart of Cordelia, and he is worthy of this position; what higher praise could be given to him ? There is something very touching in the tenderness with which his strong nature deals with his father's weakness. He is generous in his peculiar relation to Edmund and the latter's taunt (II.I.67) is the very last that Edgar would use. His only practical mistakes are that, like Gloucester, he accepts too implicitly Edmund's story and afterwards takes to flight instead of seeking some explanation from his father. But he has no special reason to distrust Edmund, of whom he can know but little, and his own nature "is so far from doing harms." that he instinctively trusts others, unsuspecting, underserved confidence in others is the natural error of such men. After his flight, Edgar manifests a nerve and versatility which carry him through many great difficulties and enable him as Gervinus says, to play many parts successfully. There is about him a "royal nobleness" of bearing and character of which, none can be insensible. Had he too fallen a victim at the last it would have been exceedingly hard to dispute the alleged pessimism of *King Lear*.

Just as Cordelia is the beautiful ideal of the heroine, so is Edgar the very type of the hero. The modern fictionist would have expressed this by marrying these two kindred spirits by way of a happy denouement. Himself upright, honourable, and affectionate, he thinks evil of no man. Like Cordelia, he does not permit the smart of underserved hatred to poison his mind against his father, whom he tenderly cares for when after the blinding of Gloucester, they meet on the heath. Even after all his woes, which are related so eloquently, and yet so tersely, he is ready to exchange charity and Edmund, for whom indeed he half apologises in the oft-quoted words.

*The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us:  
The dark and vicious place where thee he got  
Cost him his eyes.*

Edgar's admirable conduct throughout the play shows, only the villainy of Edmund in a more heinous light.

In Edgar, we have a character in, some respects, as grand as that of Kent, though perhaps hardly as unselfish and lovable. At the outset, indeed, we are scarcely prepared for the nobility of character which event after event bring out. It strikes us as strange that he should be so ready to accept Edmund's story of his father's ill-will towards him and should not at once have sought that father's presence to ascertain the possible grounds of his distrust. Described by Edmund as one :

*"Whose nature is so-far from doing harm  
That he suspects none."*

He not only by his advice avoids a father by whom he must know himself to be loved and to have deserved to be loved, but is shortly afterwards persuaded to take a step, in itself as suspicious as that of fleeing from home instead of facing inquiry. Possibly, aware of his father's credulity, he believes it to be impossible to establish his innocence in the teeth of such a plot against him as that at which Edmund has hinted.

### 12.7.1 Edgar's assumed madness :

Edgar pretends to be a mad man, a poor Tom O'Bedlam, hiding himself in a hovel on the heath. He pretends to be followed by a foul friend with jaw-breaking names. Lear is persecuted by his two daughters and rightly he suffers from a persecution mania. But Edgar's persecution mania is pretended.

Edgar plays a role of a mad man rather badly and none but the wilfully blind could be deceived by it. As a mad man, he should talk incoherently without any sense. But Edgar's talk is coherent and logical and only sometimes when he goes far, he breaks the coherence mechanically, and utters some deliberate nonsense like : Tom's cold 0' do de, do de, do de, etc.

Lear projects his own feelings into Edgar's case and remarks that he, too, must have been betrayed by his ungrateful daughters to whom he must have given away his all. Lear looks upon Edgar as a philosopher, who teaches him what a poor, bare, forked animal is unaccommodated man. Edgar continues his assumed madness even when he meets his blinded father and saves from intended suicide. It is, however, curious that he talks in various dialects and tones without exciting anybody's suspicion. Edgar casts off his madness to meet his bastard brother in a duel to settle his account with him at last and Edmund dies at the hands of Edgar.

The delineation or Edgar's assumed madness is not as well done by Shakespeare as Lear's is. But besides serving a dramatic purpose in the under-plot, Edgar's assumed madness served as a contrast to Lear's real madness even as Hamlet's feigned madness served as a contrast to the real madness of Ophelia.

Edgar's philosophy co-exists with his faith in the gods of his race. His philosophy has taught him to endure and to endure in a manly way, the 'Strange mutations' of the world ("To be weak is miserable, doing or suffering,...."). He therefore, in his deep sympathy and affection, saves his wretched father from killing himself in despair and by a show-as it were as supernatural intervention and grace-converts him to his own manly creed which calls upon to "Bear free and patient thoughts." He blames Gloucester for getting into "ill thoughts," and tells him :

*"Men must endure*

*Their going hence, even as their coming hither*

*Ripeness is all"*

These words of Edgar recall Hamlet's own philosophy "readiness is all." Besides this philosophy, Edgar has his faith also in the gods of his society. He thus, tells Gloucester about the divine grace that has saved him from death :

*"therefore, thou happy father,*

*Think that the dearest gods, who make them honours*

*Of men's impossibilities, have preserved thee".*

Edgar's clear faith converts his old father to a belief in the "ever gentle gods". We see Edgar's deep faith in his accusation of Edmund, just before their combat.

*... Thou art a traitor*

*False to thy gods, thy brother, and thy father....*

*And in the fall and death of Edmund, Edgar sees the justice of the gods.*

K. Deighton rightly says that Lear's suffering calls out the most adorable and lovable aspect of Edgar's personality and his deepest sympathies, though it is beyond his power in any way to remedy them. With his father it is different. Roused out of himself and the sorrows which had seemed almost too great to be borne, he sees before him a task prescribed by love, and calling for the exercise of all the patience, tenderness, and tact that he can command. As we watch him in his endeavour to solace the mental no less than the physical anguish of the father whose distrust of himself has been so grievous, as we have proof of the courage with which he defends him and the skill whereby he wins him from the determination of suicide to a calm acceptance of the will of the gods, as we listen to his relation of the peaceful close of life which his ministrations have made possible, witness his noble distance of his treacherous brother and the still more noble forgiveness which he grants to his fallen foe, we feel that Edgar is no unworthy 'yoke-fellow in arms' with Kent in the fierce struggle against evil wherein their fate has involved them.'

To conclude the discussion about Edgar, I quote from A.C. Bradley. He writes, "of these four characters (Cordelia, Kent, Fool, and Edgar), Edgar excites the least enthusiasm, but he is the one whose development is the most marked. His behaviour in early part of the play, granted that it is not too improbable, is so foolish as to provoke one. But he learns by experience, and becomes the capable person in the story, without losing any of his purity and nobility of mind. With his religiousness, on the other side, is connected his cheerful and confident endurance, and his practical helpfulness and resource. He never thinks of despairing; in the worst circumstances he is sure there is something to be done, to make things better. And he is sure of this, not only from temperament, but from faith in 'the clearest gods.' He is the man on whom we are to rely at the end for the recovery and welfare of the state : "We do rely on him."

## 12.8 KENT

Kent is the most striking and most noble character in *King Lear*. His devotion to his master, from whom he has received such harsh treatment, is unwavering, untiring, and utterly regardless of the dangers he may bring upon himself. For such devotion, we are prepared from almost the first words he speaks. None but a brave man would have ventured as he did to come "between the dragon and his wrath," none but a resolute one to persist in opposition to despotic will and power. His championship of Cordelia makes it manifest to us that when determining to follow the fortunes of the unhappy king he will do so with no halting step, that whatever sacrifices may be demanded of him, he will gladly pay. As the troubles around him increase, his great qualities stand out all the more strongly. He displays not only a rare fidelity, but large resource, wisdom, and foresight. His equanimity under the insults put upon him by Regan is unruffled; amid the sufferings which he shares with his master his cheerfulness abates no with while the tender care with which he watches over Lear is what we perhaps might not have expected from one so blunt of speech and impetuous of manner.

*O thou good Kent, how shall I live and work  
To match thy goodness? My life will be too short  
And every measure fail me,*

are Cordelia's words of no exaggerated acknowledgement and are uttered by one who justly says of herself.

*what I will intend  
"I'll do it before I speak."*

And when all his sacrifice of love is fruitless, when he for whom it has so cheerfully been made is unable to profit by it, or even to recognize to whom he owes such loyal tendance, but passes away, his mind still clouded with its sad disease and his heart broken by the last awful blow of Cordelia's death, for Kent there is no further tie to earth, no other hope but that of following his master elsewhere as here. To Albany's entreaty that he will share with Edgar the government of the realm his answer is,

*"I have a journey, sir, shortly to go;  
My master calls me, I must not say no.*

## 12.9 LET US SUM UP

It is generally acknowledged that the role played by Cordelia in *King Lear* is a symbolic one. She is a symbol of good amidst the evil characters within the play. Cordelia reply does not intiate the tragedy, Lear's misguided question does that. When Cordelia, Lear's only well-intentioned daughter, is banished from the kingdom, Fool immediately assumes her role on Lear's protector. The fool is the king's advocate, honest and loyal and through his use of irony sarcasm and humour he is able to point out Lear's faults. Edgar is the chorus of the play and can also be seen as a positive commentator and a philosopher. He has faith in the triumph of goodness over evil and he is able to see beyond mere luck to some higher grand design.

## 12.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

- Q1 Draw a character sketch of Cordelia.
- Q2 What is the importance of assumed madness of Edgar.
- Q3 Discuss the character sketch of Kent.

## 12.11 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

- 1. Who is King Lear's youngest and most beloved daughter?
  - A) Goneril
  - B) Regan
  - C) Cordelia
  - D) The Fool
- 2. Which character remains loyal to King Lear throughout the play and disguises "Caius" to serve Lear in secret? himself as
  - A) Cordelia
  - B) Goneril
  - C) Kent
  - D) The Fool
- 3. What is the role of the Fool in "King Lear"?
  - A) A loyal servant and advisor to King Lear

B) A jester who provides comic relief

C) A treacherous character who betrays Lear

D) A nobleman who vies for Lear's throne

4. Which character in "King Lear" disguises himself as "Poor Tom" and feigns madness to escape danger?

A) Kent

B) Edgar

C) Cordelia

D) Goneril

5. Who is the character who initially refuses to flatter King Lear to gain a share of the kingdom and is subsequently banished?

A) Kent

B) Goneril

C) Cordelia

D) Edmund

6. What is Lear's relationship with his other two daughters, Goneril and Regan, at the beginning of the play?

A) He deeply loves and trusts them.

B) He is indifferent to them.

C) He is suspicious of their intentions.

D) He has disowned them.

7. What punishment does King Lear impose on Kent after Kent speaks out in Cordelia's defense?

A) Banishment from the kingdom

B) Execution

C) Stripping him of his noble titles

D) A public flogging

8. Who delivers the prophecy about the "Wheel of Fortune" in "King Lear"?

A) Goneril

B) Regan

C) Cordelia

D) The Fool

9. In “King Lear,” which character experiences a tragic transformation from a nobleman into a homeless and mad beggar?

- Kent
- Cordelia
- Edgar
- Goneril

10. What advice does Cordelia give to King Lear in Act I of the play, leading to her banishment?

- To divide the kingdom among her and her sisters equally
- To retire and live a life of luxury
- To trust Goneril and Regan without question
- To seek forgiveness for his past mistakes

**Answers :** 1C, 2C, 3B, 4B, 5C, 6A, 7A, 8D, 9C, 10A.

## 12.12 SUGGESTED READINGS

- Muir, Kenneth, and Stanley Wells. *Aspects of King Lear*. Cambridge UP, 1982
- Ram Bilas Sharma. *Essays on Shakespearean Tragedy*. Anamika Publishers, New Delhi, 1998.
- Wolfgang Clemen. *The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery*, Mathew and Co. Ltd. London 1977.
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**AN ANALYSIS  
'KING LEAR' AS A TRAGEDY**

**STRUCTURE**

- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 13.3 *King Lear* is more tragic than other tragedies
- 13.4 Universal appeal of the Play
- 13.5 Effect of Suffering on Lear
- 13.6 *Lear & Othello* as Tragedies
- 13.7 Comic Elements in the Play
- 13.8 Role of Cordelia
- 13.9 Popular Superstition in the Play
- 13.10 Christian World View
- 13.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.12 Examination Oriented Questions
- 13.13 Multiple Choice Questions
- 13.14 Suggested Readings

**13.1 INTRODUCTION**

*King Lear* is sometimes referred to as the most pessimistic of the four tragedies written by Shakespeare. Commenting upon the pessimistic atmosphere of the play Caroline Spurgeon comments. “We are conscious all through of the atmosphere of buffeting strife, and moments of bodily tension to the point of agony”. Granville Barker says, “the main truth about life, to Shakespeare that wrote *King Lear*, is its capricious cruelty.”

*King Lear* is, by common consent, our greatest poet's greatest creation. It follows, therefore that the world of which Shakespeare delivered himself in this stupendous drama, though admittedly the most painful of all his tragedies, should have a better right to be called in Sidney's sense, 'golden' than any other we can name, whether among his own works or in the whole galaxy of poems that glorify English literature. It is only another way of putting what Hazlitt said when he observed of *King Lear* that "it is the best of Shakespeare's plays, since it is the one in which he is most in earnest," and is "fairly caught in the web of his own imagination."

Caroline Spurgeon gives a vivid description of the prevailing atmosphere of "very Night heresays" in *King Lear*. The picture that is constantly kept before us is that of "a human body in anguished movement, tugged, wretched, beaten, pierced, stung, scourged, dislocated, flayed, gashed, scalped, tortured, and finally broken on the rack. Lear, in his agonized remorse, pictures himself as a man wrenched and tortured by an 'engine,' beating "at the gate (his head) that let his folly in", Goneril has power to shake his manhood; he complains that she has struck him with her tongue, his heart will break into a hundred thousand flaws. Albany wonders how far Goneril's eyes may pierce, Gloucester's flawed heart is cracked and finally it bursts."

### **Pagan and barbaric atmosphere in the play :**

It indicates that the play is concerned with a primitive age. In fact, it is saturated with the barbaric and pagan atmosphere. The incidents that form the framework of the play can happen in royal families only in barbarian times. To quote Gervinus : "We know from the authenticated history of the Burgundian and Merovingian houses, that such times and such men did exist, that family horrors, as we read them in Lear, have abounded for centuries, even among Christian races. The poet places us in the very centre of such an age and brings actively before us a whole race endowed with that barbaric strength of passion, in which almost without exception, the resistance of reason and conscience to the emotions of passion is powerless or dead."

The pervading pagan atmosphere; the radiant goodness of the few, the volcanic passions of others, the teeming references of nature and animal life, the frequent references to physical torture and mental agony, the terrific storm on the heath, and brutal monstrosities of character that render the human landscape of *King Lear*, as dark and gloomy as the convulsions in nature, make it one of the most elemental and primeval of Shakespeare's tragedies. John Holloway categorically states that *King Lear*, a play set (unlike *Macbeth*) in the legendary prehistory of Britain, depicts a world which is what follows from having the quality of legend, and the primeval as subject. In conformity with the 'splendidly barbaric and temper of the play *King Lear*'s is a church-less and a priest-less world. Its political organisation is a simple scheme of monarchy wherein the King's authority is uncontrolled and unlimited in its absoluteness. A robed man of justice may appear sporadically, but he is a mere appendage of the regal household and an interpreter of the royal will. The impression that the atmosphere here is in a pronounced manner, pagan, is substantiated when Lear swears by Apollo, by Jupiter, by the sacred radiance of the sun, by

*The mysteries of hecate and the night.*

*By all the operation of the orbs*

*From whom we exist and cease to be*

He prays to his ‘dear goddess’ Nature to strike Goneril’s womb with sterility. So too, does Edmund, ironically enough he dedicates himself to her services, expecting to draw from her the evil energies he needs for the furtherance of his career. In her most prayerful mood, Cordelia invokes the “Kind gods” to cure the great breach in her father’s ‘abused nature’. Edgar, reflecting upon the woes brought on his father by Edmund, attributes the working of nemesis to the gods;

*The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices*

*Make instruments to plague us.*

To Lear as well as the Duke of Albany, they are the fountains of justice: while to Gloucester, in his agony, they are the wanton and reckless inflictors of cruelty on helpless human beings. He says,

*As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods:*

*They kill us for their sport.*

These stars, gods, nature, the sun and the sacred orbs, Hecate and her mysteries govern the lives and fortunes of the characters in *King Lear*.

With the help of a large number of hints in the play, Shakespeare creates the impression that mankind has reeled back to the beast. The air reeks with savage animal nature. When Edgar describes himself as “false of heart, light of ear, bloody of hand; hog in sloth fox in stealth, wolf in greediness, dog in madness, lion in prey,” it is man himself that Shakespeare is thinking of. “The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to ‘t with a more riotous appetite”, is Lear’s view of man’s sensuality. “Goneril is a kite; her ingratitude has a serpent’s tooth : she has struck her father most serpent-like upon the very heart, her visage is wolfish. She has tied sharp toothed unkindness like a vulture on her father’s breast, for her husband she is a gilded serpent : to Gloucester her cruelty seems to have the fangs of a bear. She and Regan are dog-hearted : They are tigers, not daughters : each is an adder to the other : the flesh of each is covered with the fell of a beast”. Bradley has summed up the cruelty of the times very lucidly. To quote him, “As we read, the souls-of all the beast in turn seem to us to have entered the bodies of these mortals; horrible in their venom savagery, lust, deceitfulness, sloth, cruelty, filthiness; blindness; and man, ‘consider him well’, is even what they are.”

So far, Shakespeare had spared us crude physical horrors, Lear has suffered beyond endurance for the wrong done to Cordelia, but Nature has mercifully taken away his sanity. To Gloucester, no such mercy is shown. Cornwall and Regan have sent Edmund away with Goneril, and they wait impatiently for their victim. When he comes they turn on him and abuse him. They bind him to a chair and then put out his eyes. On the stage, the physical horror of this scene is and should be unendurable, for if play is to be acted it must neither be mitigated nor softened or the stark pity and terror of the tragedy, is lessened. Nevertheless, some immediate vengeance is at hand when one of the servants unable to endure the cruelty of his master tries to save Gloucester, and in the fight Cornwall is fatally wounded. So Gloucester, like his master, is turned out of doors to smell his way to Dover. He, too has been justly but brutally punished, first for the original sin which began with Edmund and secondly for the nasty injustice of his treatment of Edgar.

## 13.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Understand the classical and Shakespearean elements of tragedy in *King Lear*.
2. Analyze how suffering transforms Lear and drives the tragic arc.
3. Explore the roles of comic relief, Cordelia's virtue, and superstitions in the play's emotional and thematic depth.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Identify *King Lear* as a tragedy based on character flaws, fate, and suffering.
2. Discuss the universal appeal of themes such as loyalty, justice, and redemption.
3. Interpret the role of Cordelia and comic elements in shaping the tragedy.
4. Explain how popular superstitions are reflected in characters' beliefs and actions.

## 13.3 LEAR MORE TRAGIC THAN OTHER TRAGEDIES

*King Lear*, is more terrible than *Macbeth*, more piteous than *Othello*, more profound than *Hamlet*, but less human than any of them. And it is too sublime for terror; too profound for pity, and almost too vast for thought. It is bewildering in its intensity and it's breath: the mind refuses to grasp it as a whole. It can never be as popular on the stage as the other great tragedies are. *Hamlet* is a part in which no great actor has failed; but no one can act Lear, for Lear is more than a man. Everything is fused in this drama: folly and wisdom, madness and sanity, pity and rage, are one.

A few small points may also be noted. Regan and Goneril with their barbaric energy and ruthless passions are the vivid pictures before our eyes. Is the scene, in which Gloucester's eyes are torn out, good art? Would the hanging of Cordelia be less intelligible without it? Some shrink from the blinding and some from the wholesale slaughter at the end. It may at least be pointed out that it would have been utterly unlike Shakespeare to leave Regan and Goneril triumphant. It is significant that, unlike Hamlet and Macbeth, the play does not end with any note of triumph or of hope. On the horizon of Shakespeare's tragic fatalism we see no such twilight of atonement, such pledge of reconciliation as this. Requital, redemption, amends, equity, explanation, pity and mercy, are words without a meaning here.

### Key note of the Play :

*As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;*

*They kill us for their sport.*

The words just cited are not casual or episodical; they strike the keynote of the whole play; the keystone of the whole arch of thought.

The playwright of *King Lear*, adhering to the letter of his text, left Cordelia happy with her father at the end of the drama. We shall never know who moved Shakespeare to drop that pall of darkness upon the mystery of inscrutable woe at the very moment when there dawned a brighter day for Lear on being united to his blameless daughter. For once, it would appear, he chose to sound the deepest depths of the world's suffering, a depth deeper than of Aeschylean or Sophoclean tragedy, deeper than the tragedy of *Othello*, a story of black despairing depth of voiceless and inexplicable agony.

There is no drama in the whole range of modern literature, perhaps of ancient as well, which can equal *King Lear*, in the tragic imagination which has clothed with chaotic darkness and godless sorrow, not only Lear and the characters that make its mighty train, but also the whole of humanity, even the gods themselves. The eternal justice whom we trust lives beyond and above our sorrow and our crime; which the Greek drama permits us to feel as holding in its hands of far off pope-is-not to be *King Lear*. The gods have not only forgotten man; the gods seem dead. The stars alone – the destroying planets-rule supreme.

The principal characters here are not those who act, but those who suffer. We have a fall from the highest elevation into the deepest abyss of misery, where humanity is stripped of all external and internal advantages and given up a prey to naked helplessness. Threecold dignity of a king, an old man and a father is dishonoured by the cruel ingratitude of his unnatural daughters. The old Lear, who, out of a foolish tenderness, has given away everything, is driven out to the world as a wandering beggar; the childish imbecility to which he was fast advancing changes into the wildest insanity; and when he is saved, from the disgraceful destitution to which he was abandoned, it is too late. The kind consolations of filial care and attention and true friendship are now lost on him; his bodily and mental powers are destroyed beyond all hope of recovery; and all that now remains to him of life is the capability of loving and suffering, beyond measure. What a picture we have in the meeting of Edgar and Lear in a wretched hovel. The meeting of the exiled and disguised Edgar with the blind Gloucester is equally heartrending; nothing can be more moving than to see the rejected son become the father's guide, and the good angel, who under the disguise of insanity, by an ingenious and pious fraud saves him from the horror and despair of suicide.

Everything is woeful in this woeful world. The whole scene is like the remembrance of some wild prescribing scene from real life. The charge of pessimism in *King Lear*, is substantiated by the way in which Shakespeare might have saved both Cordelia and the aged King, her father, if he had so chosen. In support of this contention, they point out the sudden and unprepared way in which the catastrophe is made to take place. Some go even to the extent of imagining that if Shakespeare had written this play later on, in what Professor Dowden would call, the fourth and the final period of dramatic composition, he would have ended the play happily. Though this is not the place to discuss elaborately whether Shakespeare could not have ended this play happily, it can be stated unhesitatingly, that the death of Cordelia and Lear do not leave us crushed, rebellious or hopeless.

### 13.4 UNIVERSAL APPEAL OF THE PLAY

*King Lear* may be regarded as more universal in its scope than either *Othello* or *Macbeth*. For the king, there is no murderer, nor is he the victim of an almost incredible malice and extreme credulity, but rather a hero of inherent largeness of soul, who partly by his own errors of judgement, suffers exceptional calamity. Because the suffering of Lear is not unconnected with his character, it is tragic and not melodramatic, but because it is out of proportion to his fault. It raises the whole problem of evil. The perennial appeal of tragedy, to the human mind,

lies in its presentation in the artistic form of the eternal question of evil and suffering. Is there justice in the world, or in the heavens ? It is mainly because questions like this crop up persistently before us in Lear than the other tragedies that the drama may be spoken of as more universal. Lear goes further than in the other tragedies of Shakespeare in answering the problem by insisting on the value of endurance, and by showing us the hero purged through suffering. If *King Lear* is a tragic reading of life, it is not a cynical one for it goes as far as tragedy can go, without ceasing to be tragedy. But apart from the hint which some may find (with Bradley) of something beyond death, all sensitive readers are left with the feeling that it is quality and not quantity of life that matters.

### **Religious appeal of the Play :**

Thus, *King Lear*, though not a religious work is compatible with religion. 'For all those who cannot go beyond the moral interpretation of life to the religious interpretation, it might easily be held that Shakespeare is the most precious of thinkers'. And nowhere in Shakespeare are 'integrity, loyalty, patience, love, forgiveness, humility' more powerfully presented than in *King Lear*. *King Lear* bears it out even to the edge of doom' is true of Cordelia, Kent, and Edgar. But a dramatist is neither a preacher nor a moralist; and what we can draw from the play of Shakespeare's judgement of value are important to us just because he is a supreme poet. He is a supreme dramatist because he surpasses his fellows in the insight and sympathy with which he can present a vast variety of characters of every age and condition of life, a range which makes the work of Elizabethans like Marlowe, Johnson, Webster, or Ford look narrow and stilted.

Lear's journey towards enlightenment begins before the storm. But it is not until his sufferings have reached a climax in the storm, when he is driven insane, that we feel really confident that he is ultimately going to reach the spiritual goal. At the start, Lear was literally speaking, sane; but his folly was great enough to be spoken by Kent as 'madness'. But when he goes completely mad in the storm he is certainly on the way to true wisdom; he can speak 'reason in madness'. It is an amazing moment when Lear, in his madness, expresses his lately acquired awareness of the humanity common to himself and to the lowest of the low. Hailing poor Tom as the thing itself he continues; "unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you lendings. Come, unbutton here."

We are touched by the gentle courtesy of his words. This is a tone of which he was incapable at the start. Now 'undo this button' echoes the 'Come, unbutton here' which he shouted out in the storm at the later point and enables us to compare and contrast. When he cries 'Come unbutton here': Lear has attained knowledge of truth. But he is frenzied and is moreover dramatizing himself. When he says 'Pray you. Undo this button. Thank you, sir', he has the knowledge of the same truth but he is quiet and humble. Thus, Shakespeare subtly suggests that Lear learns wisdom, comes to full spiritual regeneration not in madness but through madness. The lesson he learns in the storm have their full effect only when he regains his sanity towards the end. Thus, the end of the play does not make us pessimistic.

According to Dowden, Shakespeare opposes the presence and the influence of evil not by any transcendental denial of evil, but by the presence of human virtue, fidelity, and self-sacrificial love. "As we draw near to the awful close of *King Lear* or of *Othello* and feel the fibres of our being almost torn asunder, the comfort that comes to us when quiet falls on the desolate scene is the comfort, of the sure knowledge that Shakespeare is with us; that was he who saw these things felt them as we do, and found in the splendours of courage and love a remedy for despair says Raleigh. Edmund and Cornwall, Goneril and Regan can exist in any age in the world's history.

### 13.5 EFFECT OF SUFFERING ON LEAR

A.C. Bradley is of the opinion that there is nothing more noble and beautiful in literature than Shakespeare's exposition of the effect of suffering in reviving the greatness and eliciting the sweetness of Lear's nature. The occasional recurrence, during his madness, of autocratic impatience or of desire for revenge serves only to heighten this effect, and the moments when his insanity becomes merely infinitely piteous to not weaken it. The old King, who in pleading with his daughters, feels so intensely his own humiliation and their horrible ingratitude, and who yet at fourscore and upward, constrains himself to practise a self-control and patience so many years disused; who out of old affection for Fool, and in repentance for his injustice to the Fool's beloved mistress, tolerates, incessant arid cutting reminders of this own folly and wrong; in whom the rage of "the storm awakes a power and a poetic grandeur surpassing even that of Othello's anguish; who comes in his affliction to think of others first, and to seek, in tender solicitude for his poor boy, the shelter he scorns for his own head; who learns to feel and to pray for the miserable and houseless poor, to discern the falseness of flattery and the brutality of authority, and to pierce below the difference of rank and to the common humanity beneath; whose sight is so purged by scalding tears that it sees at last how power and place and things in the world are vanity except love; who tastes in his last hours the extremes both of love's rapture and of its agony, but could never, if he lived on or lived again, care a jot for aught beside there is no figure, surely, in the world of poetry at once so grand, so pathetic and so beautiful as his. Well, but Lear owes the whole of this to these sufferings which made us doubt whether life were not simply evil, and man like the flies which wanton boys torture for their sport. Should we not be at least as near the truth, if we called this poem *The Redemption of King Lear*; and declared that the business of "the gods" with him was neither to torment him, not to teach him a "noble anger" but to lead him to attain through apparently hopeless failure the very end and aim of life? One can believe that Shakespeare had been tempted at times to feel misanthropy and despair, but is quite impossible that he could have been mastered by such feelings at the time when he produced this conception."

*King Lear* is often at the apex of Shakespeare's achievement, and by many judges at the head of the dramatic literature of the world. The story was as old as Geoffrey of Monmouth, the medieval chronicler, and like so many of the themes which Shakespeare handled, had already been made the subject of a play, a crude effort by some nameless playwright during the experimental stage of Elizabethan drama. Here, as was his constant custom, Shakespeare followed the main lines of the story given to him and incorporated into his grand edifice every bit of usable material from the building of his predecessor. Here, too, as always in Shakespeare, if we pierce to the core of his meaning, the real tragedy is a spiritual one. Lear is an imperious self-government by long indulgence of his passionate whims. At the opening of the play, we see him craving to find a refuge from himself by surrendering all his wealth and power in exchange for absolute love. The heart of the old King demands love; love is the element upon which it subsists and age, instead of abating this hunger, has made craving more imperious. He demands love not only in the spirit but in the letter, and throws away his youngest daughter, Cordelia, far from him with cruel briskness when she refuses to use the terms of extravagant hyperbole to describe her affection for him. This brisk and hasty spirit of the King precipitates upon his old head the enmity of his remaining daughters, Goneril and Regan. Before he has recovered from the shock of Cordelia's defection, this awful pair of daughters lays bare, little by little, their monstrous soul to their father's gaze. As in *Othello*, the result of the revelation is to unhinge the sufferer from the order of nature. As is in sympathy with the chaos in Lear's soul, the elements break loose; and in the pauses of the blast we hear the noise of violent crimes, curses, heart-broken jesting, the chatter of idiocy, and the wandering tongue of madness. The sentimental phrase, "poetic

"justice", has no meaning for Shakespeare. The ruin wrought in the old King's heart and brain is irreparable, and the tornado which whirls him to his doom carries with it the just and the unjust. The little golden pause of peace when Lear and Cordelia are united, is followed by the intolerably piercing scene in which he bears her dead body out of the prison, muttering that they have hanged his "poor fool". The consequences of rash action, heartlessly taken advantage of, were never followed to a grimmer end.

### 13.6 KING LEAR AND OTHELLO AS TRAGEDIES

*King Lear*, which Swinburne called, "the most elemental and primeval" of Shakespeare's plays, is in sharp contrast to the concentrated domestic tragedy of *Othello*. The main story goes far back into ancient British mythology; Lear himself as originally the old Celtic sea-god, and the folk tale of the king and his three daughters was attached to this character by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century. The story, as Geoffrey told it, was repeated several times in English literature before Shakespeare (by Holinshed and Spenser among others), and there was an older play on the subject which Shakespeare used as one of his sources; With the main story Shakespeare combined the tale of Gloucester and his two sons-the substance of which he found in Sidney's *Arcadia*, to achieve an extraordinary double plotted tragedy where the main action is echoed and commented on, as it were, by the sub plot. Instinctively recognizing the mythological and folk elements in the original story, Shakespeare fills his play with archetypal images and ideas which combine and reverberate to produce a large cosmic view of man's fate at the same time as the individual tragedies of Lear and his daughters; and Gloucester and his sons are played out. *King Lear* is thus, the largest in conception and implication of all Shakespearean tragedies; it is a poetic drama heightened to a grand symbolic level without losing that uncanny insight into ordinary human psychology that continues to astonish us in Shakespeare. The play is thus, a happy hunting ground for those who are interested in discovering the symbolic pattern of imagery in Shakespeare, for in his handling of images of nature, of sex, of astronomy, of order, in the paradoxical counter pointing of symbols of light and dark, of sight and blindness, of knowledge and ignorance, of good and evil, Shakespeare brings his highest poetic and dramatic powers to bear. It is an immense play, immense in power and meaning in the weight of tragic knowledge which it conveys. Both, poetically and dramatically, it goes as far as poetic can go.

*King Lear*, is in depth, less individual than is *Othello*. Although it starts with the family and the innermost circle of human relations, it reaches out through the state and through nature itself to the ultimate and unchangeable in man's life. Lear is one that hath even but slenderly known himself and is therefore, at the opposite pole from Hamlet. If a man will not enter into the solution of his problem, nature can be counted on to solve it for him. Nature is seen here as power of generation, regeneration and cohesion. Left alone, it is chaos; subdued and shaped by God's law and man's law, it is order, civilization, justice, and mercy. When Lear gives over the sovereignty of his kingdom, he commits an act against nature and the law of God. His behaviour as a father is equally subversive, and throughout the play he reaps the consequences of the violation of natural fundamentals. The stresses and strains of the external world finally destroy Lear's sanity itself. The moment can be marked exactly. When Lear in the storm before the hovel on the heath, has seen the wild spectacle of disorder reinforced suggestively by the terror of his own suffering and the suffering of the fool and the ravages of Tom o 'Bedlam', he goes crazy himself in a burst of lucid reasoning. *King Lear* thus, pictures in the tragedy of a king who is also kingship, and of a father who is also fatherhood, the return to chaos in a kingdom and family-the ruin of the centres and, therefore, of the whole body politics. This is the ultimate idea of calamity in the ethics of the Renaissance. The play is notable also for its perfect handling of the plots. In universality, *King Lear*, rivals Hamlet, although two plays occupy

different fields—*Hamlet*, represents the innermost life of all men; *Lear* portrays man in his social relations leading to the cosmic problems. In *Lear*, too huge, too vague, too fearful for the stage, though Shakespeare's greatest imaginative creation, we have the spectacle of aged fathers tortured in mind and body by unnatural children; and the storm that rages through the play seems to shake the very universe to its foundations.

### 13.7 COMIC ELEMENTS IN THE PLAY

There is present, in this play, besides the sublime, the beauty of the comic also. Of the great tragedies *King Lear*, alone contains a Fool to whom an important part in the action is assigned. His main function, dramatically, is to emphasize the folly, as contrasted with the majesty, of his royal master. This Fool is by common consent one of the most beautiful characters that Shakespeare ever created. As soon as he enters upon the scene, an immediate alteration takes place in our imaginative attitude towards the chief sufferer and to the world of which he is at once the centre and the symbol the change is thus proverbially described as the single step from the sublime to the ridiculous. The storm, for instance, for which 'man's nature could not carry the affliction and fear, is instantly stripped of its dreadfulness and becomes mere 'rain-water out of door'. The titanic figure of the aged king in his agony, contending, as it were, on equal terms with the "oak cleaving thunderbolts", dwindles absurdly to our 'good uncle' whom he advises to ask his daughters' blessing". But this does not mean that with the entrance of the Fool, the world of *King Lear* has ceased to be beautiful. It merely signifies that the beauty of the sublime has opened out into the beauty of its opposite. But forms of beauty have their source in the same power. When contemplating the sublimity of suffering, we felt that this power lay in the nature of suffering itself, and when awe struck by the seeming paradox, we now through the agency of the Fool realize with a shock of surprise-note, of course, by reflection, but intuitively that in feelings so, we were the victims of an illusion.

If, on the other hand, in the act of experiencing the world of *King Lear*, there are moments, when by means hard to analyse we are suddenly made aware of being confronted with suffering made divinely beautiful, because felt to be in itself a victory over evil, won by a love that sticks to the entire point, 'nor bends with the remover to remove,' than we must suppose that Shakespeare (who was in fact a Christian, though he was here imagining a purely pagan world) was unconsciously inspired by a story taken from Greek, but from Christian mythology and explains the golden effect of the play relating it to some such myth as the Harrowing of Hell, which was of course, familiar enough to the dramatist.

#### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. The play *King Lear* is considered a \_\_\_ tragedy.
2. Suffering leads Lear to gain \_\_\_ into human nature.
3. The Fool provides \_\_\_ relief and speaks truth in disguise.
4. References to eclipses and unnatural events show the influence of \_\_\_.

#### Answers

1. Shakespearean
2. insight
3. comic
4. superstition

### 13.8 ROLE OF CORDELIA

Divine love, symbolized by Cordelia enters a kingdom already divided against itself, which is Christian definition of hell. And, though we normally rightly think of love as a harmonizing power-it is indeed, ultimately the only one there is. However, Shakespeare here reminds us that', when it descends into hell, enters there first as a disorganizing force, it must make the confusion yet confounded before it can restore all things to order, as in the end it certainly will. That is, in fact, Cordelia's function in the 'brazen' world of *King Lear*. As symbol of love, she must be regarded as an alien power in hell, a power which can never be at home there, its very presence bringing ruin to such a realm. Nevertheless, it is by her suffering and death for other's sake (she like her prototype, was hunged) that she not only rescues her chosen ones from the dominion of evil, but also redeems nature from the general course, just as, were she to return from hell to the world she has saved, live again thereby to reap, in due course, the full fruits of her victory, her resurrection would redeem all sorrows that even man has felt. If Bradley be right, it is not the change, but the certainty that she does indeed so love which causes even Lear's hitherto indomitable heart to break, and the great sufferer dies at last, not of sorrow, but in an ecstasy of joy."

The horrors that have gone by, seem to fade into insignificance as the white haired king totters into the midst of the petrified onlookers, with his daughter dead in his arms, and the long drawn monotone of lamentations of his lips. There is a momentary thrill of hope as he bends down to catch a fancied murmur of that still small voice, but it is hushed for ever, and the silence on the loved one's lips, more potent than all the thunders of heaven, cracks the heart of Lear. As his gazing eyes 'take their last look of the form in his arms, the whole riddle of life and death is compressed into the anguished cry.

*No, no, no life*

*Why should a dog a horse, a rat, have life,*

*And thou no breath at all ? Thou, 'it come no more,*

*Never never, never, never, never*

No, this most representative of Shakespeare's tragedies is not born of pessimism that despairs of all things human nor of the facile optimism that thinks everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds, it is, as Kreyssing has called it 'the tragedy of the categorical imperative'. It boldly recognises that in the sphere neither of outward circumstances virtue is not always triumphant nor vice cast down amidst the clash of the iron forces of the universe, love and purity are often crushed.

*Screams will not curb their pride*

*The just man not entomb.*

*Nor lightning go aside*

*To give his virtue room;*

Nor is that wind less rough which blows a good Mans' barge.

And may we not venture to interpret Lear's own words as a prophetic salutation, and to think of Cordelia as a soul in bliss.

Another fascinating aspect of the play relates to the relationship between mankind and the power or powers which govern the universe ?

### 13.9 POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS IN THE PLAY

We hear much in the play about astrology. That man's fate lies not in his own keeping but under the control of the stars was, of course, a commonly held medieval view. It is part of an old established tradition which, as we see in Act I scene ii, Gloucester accepts, Edmund, the 'new man' rejects it. Professor Bradley speaks of Shakespeare's attitude. While he would have hesitated to deny that the stars could affect men's lives, there is nothing to suggest that he had no such faith in their influence as to deny the freedom of the will. Free will is the essence of tragedy, which cannot exist under determinism, and astrology is only a crude form of determinism. As an explanation of the tragic mystery, the inadequacy of Kent's belief: "It is the stars, The stars above us, govern our conditions" is discernible even in the play in which it occurs. Gloucester too, in a memorable passage, says; "As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; They kill us for their sport."

But can we convincingly argue that this is the philosophy that Shakespeare wants us to take away from the theatre when the performance is over. There are some who think it is. Professor G.B. Harrison speaks of Shakespeare transmitting' an old tale in which evil is punished and good restored' into a tremendous and pessimistic drama, of which Gloucester's words (quoted above) form the most fitting motto'. But do they do so ?

All the evil characters are dead before the end, and we cannot but relate this to the exercise of divine justice. When Albany is told of how a servant has killed Cornwall, he exclaims:

*This judgement of the heavens, that makes us tremble,  
Touches us not with pity,  
and This shows you are above,  
You justicers, that these our nether crimes  
So speedily can venge!*

There is no ground for pessimism here. The sufferings of Lear and Gloucester are terrible to behold. But before we are tempted on this score to speak of pessimistic tragedy, we should do well to remember two things. First: their sufferings are to some extent, though certainly not entirely, brought about through their own errors, so that the conception of divine justice is valid here also :

*The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us.*

It is true that here the 'just' dealings of the gods make us more uneasy than does their treatment of villains. If admittedly it was 'the dark and vicious place' where Gloucester begot Edmund that 'cost him his eyes' there is much more to be sad. Gloucester has to suffer beyond his deserts, as has Lear-a common enough phenomenon amongst humanity: we sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. But, if tempted by the appalling sufferings of Lear and Gloucester to regard this as a 'pessimistic' drama, we must bear in mind a second point. The gods are merciful. If, after all their agony, Lear and Gloucester died uneducated, unregenerate, then we should indeed have to speak of pessimism. But both, as they die, are wise, and redeemed. Nothing is here for tears-unless we weep for the salutary outcome. We must do so; and the conclusion of the play has indeed a sober colouring. How apt are the words of Albany in the last scene when he offers to reign the life of the old majesty and declares :

*All friends shall taste  
The wages of their virtue, and all foes  
The cup of their deservings.*

Yet the unassailable fact remains that the gods, in benignity, permit Lear and Gloucester to die in a state of spiritual health. Their sufferings are redemptive. There is no ultimate ground for pessimism here. But of the death of Cordelia ? It troubles us all, as it troubled. Dr. Johnson who, in a well-known passage, declared. "It was many years ago, so shocked by Cordelia' death, that I knew not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor."

The gods allow the totally innocent Cordelia; to be done to death. Does not this at least, it may be asked, spell a final pessimism, even if nothing else does ?

### 13.10 CHRISTIAN WORLD VIEW

*King Lear* is a Christian play about a pagan world. The author's viewpoint is Christian. Now the Christian outlook is, of course, the reverse of pessimistic. To the Christian, God is, paradoxically at once just, merciful, and in his dealings bewildering. Almost every day the Christian has to take account of happenings which seem to mean that God at least acquiesces in the incomprehensible destruction of the pure and the good. The temptation is strong to cry out, why does God allow this kind of thing or is there a God at all ? But the true Christian, if agonized by such things, is nevertheless unable to let them over-turn his faith. God overthrows the absolutely evil-he destroys the Cornwalls, the Gonerils, the Regans: He is a just God who chastens those who err "but who can be regenerated"-the Lears, the Gloucesters-and in mercy he redeems them: he is just and merciful. But again, God moves in mysterious ways-he deals strangely with the Cordelias of this world. His methods are inscrutable. Shakespeare presents the whole picture-the mysterious as well as that which is plain. This, however, can mean 'pessimistic' drama only to those who cannot agree that the play is Christian.

Of the four people in *King Lear* who react to adversity within the traditional sense, two show Christian patience and two defective patience. The group is meticulously balanced: Cordelia is the perfection of Christian patience. Her father is an instance of extreme falling off first into rage and then into madness. Gloucester and Edgar occupy a middle region between these two limits. The son is steadily patient. The father wavers on the edge of grace and despair and is only saved in the end by the ministration of his son. Cordelia stands in the light of a clear Christian doctrine. The discussion of her conduct in the first scene is a good example. Almost everyone has strained to detect in her a trace of her father's pride. Cordelia, when she says nothing, is the sheep before the shearers that must be dumb. She is quite simply the truly patient woman and daughter, yet she has that patience which does not exclude passion-the passion of grief and the passion of compassion. Throughout the play Cordelia is the model of perfect patience and the charity it connotes.

As is already noted, *King Lear*, is a gruesome tragedy as the picture of cruelty in nature is pervading through and through. The end of the play may be studied keeping in view the handicaps of the human beings. Evil is not permanently triumphant. Thus, the play presents the revelation of righteous omnipotence. "It may be frankly stated at once that *King Lear* does not contain a revelation of righteous omnipotence or heavenly harmony or even a promise of the reconciliation of mystery and justice." But if we consider the real course of the play and the ultimate powerlessness and end of evil, we may conclude that the world has been given over totally to

darkness. The ultimate impression that is left on our minds, as we rise from the study of the play, is that evil triumphs for a while in this world, that it is a working principle of death and isolation, that it tries to destroy its opposite that is, good but ends up in destroying itself. It looks as if the world is full of evil and that evil is potent everywhere and that goodness is rare and though good seems not to avail outwardly, it has an ultimate victory in this world as certainly as evil in spirit of its apparent victory, is ultimately vanquished. The lessons that we learn from the play are: (i) that the victory of evil is at best temporary; (ii) that the defeat of good is not after all the worst thing that can happen in this world where there are much worse things than this.

The poet's conception of virtue and goodness, as worked out in this drama is thoroughly of the Christian type-steeped indeed in the efficacy of the Christian ideal. The old Roman conception of human goodness, extol courage, patriotism, honesty, and justice whereas the proper constituents of the Christian ideal are besides these, and higher than these: mercy, philanthropy, self-sacrifice, forgiveness of injuries and love of enemies. It is in this sense that Shakespeare gives us the best expressions of the Christian ideals that are to be met within the poetry and art.

### **13.11 LET US SUM UP**

*King Lear* is a brutal play, filled with human cruelty and follies, seemingly meaningless. The play's succession of terrible events raises in obvious question for the characters namely, whether there is any possibility of justice in the world, or whether the world is fundamentally indifferent or even hostile to human kind.

### **13.12 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1     Discuss King Lear as a Tragedy.
- Q2     What is the Christian value taught by the play?
- Q3     What role superstition play in the drama?

### **13.13 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

- 1.     Who is the author of the play "King Lear"?
  - a) William Shakespeare
  - b) Christopher Marlowe
  - c) Ben Jonson
  - d) Thomas Kyd
- 2.     Which historical figure is believed to have inspired Shakespeare's character of King Lear?
  - a) King Arthur
  - b) King Henry VIII
  - c) King Lear of Britain
  - d) King Richard III

3. “King Lear” is widely believed to be based on which earlier work?

- “The Canterbury Tales” by Geoffrey Chaucer
- “Leir of Britain” by Raphael Holinshed
- “The Faerie Queene” by Edmund Spenser
- “The Divine Comedy” by Dante Alighieri

4. In the play, which of King Lear’s daughters is the most loyal and loving?

- Goneril
- Regan
- Cordelia
- None of the above

5. Which famous Akira Kurosawa film is a loose adaptation of “King Lear” set in feudal Japan?

- “Seven Samurai”
- “Rashomon”
- “Throne of Blood” (Kumonosu-jô)
- “Yojimbo”

6. The modern-day film adaptation of “King Lear” starring Al Pacino is titled:

- “Lear’s Legacy”
- “Looking for Lear”
- “The Merchant of Venice”
- “The Humbling”

7. Which animated television series features an episode that adapts the story of “King Lear” with a sci-fi twist?

- “The Simpsons”
- “South Park”
- “Futurama”
- “Rick and Morty”

8. Which famous playwright wrote a sequel to “King Lear” titled “Cordelia”?

- Tom Stoppard
- Tennessee Williams
- August Wilson
- Edward Albee

9. In “King Lear,” what powerful natural phenomenon symbolizes the chaos and turmoil in the kingdom?

- a) Thunderstorm
- b) Earthquake
- c) Tornado
- d) Eclipse

10. The motif of blindness and vision is prevalent in “King Lear.” Who becomes physically blind in the play?

- a) King Lear
- b) Gloucester
- c) Cordelia
- d) Kent

11. What is the significance of the recurring image of the “storm” in “King Lear”?

- a) It represents the madness of King Lear.
- b) It symbolizes the chaos in the kingdom.
- c) It foreshadows Cordelia’s death.
- d) All of the above.

12. The play frequently refers to the concept of “filial ingratitude.” Which character is accused of this by King Lear?

- a) Goneril
- b) Regan
- c) Cordelia
- d) Gloucester

13. The motif of the “fool” or “jester” in “King Lear” serves as both a comic relief and a symbol of:

- a) Wisdom
- b) Madness
- c) Deception
- d) Loyalty

14. Which character in “King Lear” utters the famous line, “How sharper than a serpent’s tooth it is to have a thankless child”?

- a) King Lear
- b) Gloucester
- c) Goneril
- d) Kent

15. The play's imagery often draws parallels between the state of the kingdom and the state of nature. Which character speaks extensively about the natural world?

- a) Edgar
- b) Kent
- c) Cordelia
- d) Oswald

16. What animal is frequently used as a symbol to describe King Lear's vulnerability and suffering?

- a) Lion
- b) Wolf
- c) Serpent
- d) Bear

17. In "King Lear," what item does Gloucester use to disguise himself?

- a) A mask
- b) A cloak
- c) A crown
- d) A sword

18. Which character's death is foreshadowed by the imagery of birds of prey, such as vultures?

- a) Cordelia
- b) King Lear
- c) Regan
- d) Goneril

19. What event in "King Lear" is compared to "judgment day" in terms of its significance?

- a) The storm on the heath
- b) The blinding of Gloucester
- c) The division of the kingdom
- d) The death of Cordelia

20. The play's final scene contains an eerie image involving Cordelia. What happens to her at the end of the play?

- a) She is crowned queen.
- b) She is reunited with King Lear.
- c) She is hanged.
- d) She marries Edmund.

**Answers :**

1. a) William Shakespeare	2. c) King Lear of Britain
3. b) “Leir of Britain” by Raphael Holinshed	4. c) Cordelia
5. c) “Throne of Blood” (Kumonosu-jō)	6. b) “Looking for Lear”
7. c) “Futurama”	8. a) Tom Stoppard
9. a) Thunderstorm	10. b) Gloucester
11. d) All of the above.	12. a) Goneril
13. b) Madness	14. a) King Lear
15. b) Kent	16. c) Serpent
17. b) A cloak	18. b) King Lear
19. b) The blinding of Gloucester	20. c) She is hanged.

**13.14 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- *King Lear*. Sparknotes.com
- *Muir, Edwin. The Politics of King Lear*. Arderd Media, 1947
- Kahan, Jeffrey. *King Lear : New Critical Essays* Routledge, 2008.
- *King Lear*, ed, K. Deighton, Macmillian & Co. Ltd. New York 1962
- *King Lear* ed. G.K. Hunters, Penguin Books

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## POETIC JUSTICE IN KING LEAR

### STRUCTURE

- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 14.3 Ending of the Play
- 14.4 Poetic Justice
- 14.5 Moral Order in the Play
- 14.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.7 Examination Oriented Questions
- 14.8 Multiple Choice Questions
- 14.9 Suggested Readings

#### 14.1 INTRODUCTION

This lesson introduces the concept of poetic justice in context of *King Lear* and the moral order in the play.

#### 14.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

##### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Understand the tragic resolution and emotional impact of *King Lear*'s ending.
2. Analyze the concept of poetic justice and its partial or absent fulfillment.
3. Examine how the play restores or questions moral order.

##### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Reflect on the emotional power of Cordelia and Lear's deaths.
2. Debate whether poetic justice is achieved or denied in the play.
3. Discuss how the ending reflects on justice, morality, and human suffering.

### 14.3 ENDING OF THE PLAY

The ending of the *King Lear*, is another issue on which the critical opinion is divided. There are two distinct schools of thought regarding the end of the play. There are some critics who are in favour of the happy ending of the play. The second school of thought is in favour of the inevitability of the tragedy in *King Lear*. It is true that the tragedy of *King Lear* is very painful and horrible. That is the way, the theory of the happy ending of this play has remained very popular for a certain period of the English drama. Now let us take these schools of thought one by one and come to the conclusion about the end of the *King Lear*.

From the theatrical revival at the Restoration down to the end of the last century many of Shakespeare's plays were acted in adaptations that is, in versions (one should say perversions) which introduced new, and omitted the original, character and incidents exactly as the adapter thought would suit the taste of the public. *King Lear* was no exception. It was adapted by a minor dramatist Nahum Tate in 1680, and his perversion of Lear was "the only acting copy" down in 1838, when Macready restored Shakespeare's tragedy to the stage. All the great actors of the period (1690-1838) Betterton, Garrick, Kemble, Edmund Kean-appeared in Tate's Lear. The two great features of this daring composition are that Edgar is made from the outset the lover of Cordelia. The character of "France" being dropped altogether and the piece "ends happily" with Lear's restoration to his Kingdom and the union of the lovers. Now the impertinence of this sentimental element of love-making needs no comment, but some sympathy is possible with Tate's desire of making the tragedy conclude in a success to the innocent distressed persons. One can scarcely resist a superficial wish that the tragedy did end differently; but it could not; catastrophe was inevitable.

Dr. Bradley is of the opinion that the play can be given a happy ending. But he has also stressed that if the play is a tragic poetic drama, it is bound to be completed with the death of King Lear and Cordelia. The ways in which the deaths of Cordelia and Lear are brought about are anything but fair dismissals from the stage of life. The double calamity is singularly unprepared for. When Bradley speaks of the possibilities of a happy ending for the play he is not arguing that the aged and wearied monarch should once more be burdened with the responsibilities of Government. He is not recommending that the gilt robe and sceptre should be handed over to him. Bradley would like to see fulfilled the expressed wish of Lear himself : "We two alone will sing like birds; when thou dost ask me blessing I will kneel down and ask of thee forgiveness". So, it was not impossible for Shakespeare to have given King Lear peace and happiness at Cordelia's fireside.

Charles Lamb has pooh-poohed the plea of restoration of Lear to kingdom and prosperity. To quote him: "Tate has put his hook into the nostrils of his Leviathan, for Garrick and his followers, the showmen of the scene, to draw the mighty beast about more easily, 'A happy ending', as if the living martyrdom that Lear had gone through- the flaying of his feeling alive, did not make a fair dismissal from the stage, of life the only decorous thing for him. If he is to live and be happy after,! if he could sustain his world's burden after, why all this paddar and preparation-why torment us with all this unnecessary sympathy ? As if the childish pleasure of getting his gilt robes and sceptre again could tempt him to act over again his misused station, as if at his years, and with his experiences anything was left but to die." He further says, "We must refer briefly to the improvement, which this drama has suffered at the hands of one Nahum Tate: an improvement inflected for purpose as would seem, of dwarfing and dementing the play down to the capacity of some theatrical showmen. A part of Tate's work lay in rectifying the catastrophe, so as to have Lear and Cordelia come off triumphant thus, rewarding their virtue with worldly success. The cutting out of the precious Fool, and the turning of Cordelia into a love sick hypocrite who feigns

indifference to her father, in order to cheat him, and thus make him abandon her to a forbidden match with Edgar, completes this execrable piece of profanation. Tate improved *King Lear* set a thinker at work to improve Niagara".

"To live after the fight of this angle (Cordelia), to be the father orphaned of his only beloved child, to be the burdened heart that knows no more joy, from time to stretch hands into obscurity and try to re-clasp a being who was there; to feel himself forgotten in that departure; to have lost all reason for being here below; to be hence-forth a man who goes to and returns from a sepulchre-not received, there not admitted-this would indeed be a gloomy destiny for Lear if he were preserved alive. Thou hast done well, poet: to have killed this old man."

We have already discussed the redemption of King Lear. We again recollect those ideas. In our minds, the sacrifices of Lear and Cordelia are joint sacrifices, sacrifices upon which the gods could throw incense. We cannot dissociate Lear from Cordelia and think of the one surviving the other. Lear's fate, therefore involves the fate of all those who come within his orbit. If Lear's death is inevitable, Cordelia's extinction is a necessary sequence. "It may appear as if at certain times men have not felt the entire inevitability of Lear's story". The eighteenth century provided an alternative ending to it, and left Lear living in the comfort of reconciliation with Cordelia, just as the earliest tellers of the tale, Geoffrey and others had done. The current sentiment of its' human kindness had run to sentimentality and its complacent rationalism had demanded poetic justice. But Lear is not to be tucked back into the pettiness of domesticity, nor to the memory of life's whips and scorns :

Vex not his ghost; O. let him pass he hates him

*That would upon the rack of tough world stretch him out longer.*

It is more likely that the happy ending which Tate gave to the play was not merely meant to provide comfort for Lear : it was probably a device to save Cordelia. Even Dr. Johnson, a representative wonderful and least praised of the inventions in the last scene' is that of the dying Edmund. He has been treacherous to nearly every person in the play. His first treachery, indirectly, the cause of his ruin, is still in act, the killing of Cordelia and the king are the exemplary. He has been stricken down. "*The wheel has come full circle*" he has learnt too late :

*The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices*

*Make instruments to plague us.*

While studying and analysing any great tragedy one should always remember that the greatest and the most subtle quality of the tragic poet goes beyond the immediate presentation of scene and persons. It is the power to suggest something illimitable, to place life against the background of eternity and to make the reader feel the presence of problems which he cannot solve. "We remain confronted with the inexplicable fact or the no less inexplicable appearance of a world struggling for perfection, but bringing to birth, together with glorious good, an evil which it is able to overcome only by self-torture and self-waste. This fact or appearance is tragedy". That this vision of the incomprehensible may lead to a pessimistic philosophy of life is true; but it has not done so. A Shakespearean tragedy is never, like some miscalled tragedies, depressing. No one ever closes the book with the feeling that man is a poor, mean creature. 'No weakness, no contempt'. Tragedy shows man's weakness as well as his strength. It is man's challenge to fate. It is man's struggle with destiny. Tragedy involves resistance to fate, reaction against calamity. Cordelia is a pathetic figure, Lear is a tragic character. The tragic hero may not be good, but he is always great. He may be wretched and he may be awful but he is not small. He retains our sympathy

to the end. And with this greatness of the tragic hero is connected the centre of the tragic impression. This central feeling is the feeling of waste. With Shakespeare at any rate, the pity and fear which are stirred by the tragic story seem to unite with, and even merge in a profound sense of sadness and mystery, which is due to this impression of waste. There is no tragedy in the expulsion of evil; the tragedy is that it involves the waste of good.

#### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. The deaths of Lear and Cordelia leave the audience with a sense of tragic \_\_\_\_.
2. Poetic justice refers to the idea that virtue is rewarded and \_\_\_\_ is punished.
3. Edmund's death and repentance signal a partial restoration of \_\_\_\_ order.
4. The ending emphasizes the fragility of human \_\_\_\_ and justice.

#### Answers

1. loss
2. evil
3. moral
4. life

#### 14.4 POETIC JUSTICE

Closely related to this discussion about the controversial ending of the play is the problem of poetic justice. Poetic justice, in simple words means a mathematical distribution of reward and punishment. Shakespeare's conception of tragedy involves recognition of the blindness of chance that cannot be squared with any theory of poetic justice or theological view of the rewards due to virtue. But it also involves recognition of the moral law that results in the punishment of its violators. The villains never escape as they do in comedy. The wages of sin are always death though the reward of virtue is not happiness. Mark Cordelia's words to Lear :

*We are not the first,*

*Who with best meaning, have incurr'd the worst.*

Characters good and bad are involved in general destruction: there is no question in these plays of, systematized poetic justice. The punishment is often underserved or at least disproportionate, to the error or offence. The German critics who seek to rationalize and explain tragedy only explain away tragedy. An element of mystery is inseparable from tragedy in the general conception of it. The idea of tragedy is always associated with something wrong in the world, an inexplicable failure in the general justice of things. A tragedy in which everything can be explained and justified is no tragedy at all. The vastness of evil in the world, its malignant influence is a part of the contemporary thought. The doctrines of total depravity and of moral responsibility go side by under medieval drama. In the depiction of the waste of effort, the expense of spirit, the crippling of greatness by weakness, the ineffectuality of virtue, Shakespeare gave a far more comprehensive and a far more penetrating representation of the tragic fact than world had yet known, but without professing any solution of its mysteries. His characters are the characters of his own imagination and he stands godlike, apart. He dogmatizes not at all concerning the forces above and beyond us. Even when he employs the supernatural for artistic and tragic effect his attitude is rationalistic. The good and noble in his tragedies exist for themselves not for any outside god or heavenly power. These tragedies of passion are no fiction. You would think while reading them that you

stood before the unclosed awful Book of Fate, while the whirlwind of the most impassioned life was howling through the leaves and tossing them fiercely to and fro. These terrible leaves of the Book of Fate, which we name *Macbeth*, *Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* are all concerned with the breaches of the law wrought by passion-the rending of the bonds of loyalty, of wedlock, of filial duty, of love of country and love of humanity. They exhibit evil in its incubation, and in its temporary triumph, passion in its complexity of motion, its occult movements, its outbreak and violent fluctuations. But the effect left on the spirit of the reader or spectator of this play is not one of disorder.

The Laws of human life are not shaken; the pillars of the divine order stand sure. Even though Cordelia lies strangled upon the lap of Lear, we do not despair.

*Upon such sacrifice, my Cordelia*

*The Gods themselves throw incense.*

Before winding up the discussion, I would like to say something about the moral lesson conveyed through the tragedy of *King Lear*. The subject of Lear is self-denial, and it is only by being wilfully blind that one can fail to understand what Shakespeare is saying.

Lear renounces his throne but expects everyone to continue treating him as a King. He does not see that if he surrenders power, other people will take advantage of his weakness: also that those who flatter him the most grossly, i.e. Regan and Goneril, are exactly the ones who will turn against him. The moment he finds that he can no longer make people obey him as he did before, he falls into a rage which Tolstoy describes as “strange and un-natural; but which in fact is perfectly in character”. In his madness and despair, he passes through two moods which again are natural enough in his circumstances, though in one of them it is probable that he ‘is being used partly as a mouthpiece for Shakespeare’s own opinions. One is the mood of disgust in which Lear repents as it were, for having been a king and grasps for the first time the rottenness of formal justice and vulgar morality. The other is a mood of impatient fury in which he wrecks imaginary revenges upon those who have wronged him. To have thousand serpents with red burning spits come hissing in upon them.”

Only at the end does he realize, as a sane man, that power, revenge, and victory are not worthwhile :

*No, no. no. no! Come, Let's away to prison:*

*We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage;*

*When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,*

*And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,*

*And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh*

*At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues*

*Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,*

*Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;*

*And take upon's the mystery of things,*

*As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,  
In a wall'd prison, packs and sect of great ones,  
That ebb and flow by the moon.*

But by the time he makes this discovery it is too late, for his death and Cordelia's are already decided. That is the story and allowing for some clumsiness in the telling, it is a very good story. What exactly is the moral of Lear? Evidently there are two morals, one explicit, the other implied in the story.

Shakespeare starts by assuming that to make yourself powerless is to invite an attack. This does not mean that everyone will turn against you (Kent and the Fool stand by Lear from first to last), but in all probability someone will. If you throw away your weapons, some less scrupulous person will pick them up. If you turn the other check, you will get a harder blow on it than you got on the first one. This does not always happen, but it is to be expected and you ought not to complain if it does happen. The second blow is, so to speak part of the act of turning the other check. First of all, therefore, there is the vulgar, common-sense moral drawn by the Fool: 'Don't relinquish power, don't give away your lands'. But there is also another moral. Shakespeare never utters it in so many words and it does not very much matter whether he was fully aware of it. It is contained in the story, which, after all, he made up, or altered to suit his purpose. It is, give away lands if you want to, but don't try to gain happiness out of it. If you live for others, you must live for others, and do not make it a roundabout way of getting an advantage for yourself.

#### 14.5 MORAL ORDER IN THE PLAY

Shakespeare was not a philosopher; his tragedies however, reveal the various problems of good and evil in this world. In *King Lear*, there are two important dictums which are uttered by Gloucester and Edgar. Let us, take them one by one.

Edgar is of the opinion that the world is governed by strict moral laws and those who do evil will have to suffer. Our pleasant vices are sources of suffering and punishment to us, says Edgar. Gloucester was the evildoer because he gave birth to an illegitimate son, Edmund. Thus, he suffered because of this misdeed. We later on come to know that he was blinded and ruined by the illegitimate son. Similarly, Lear also suffered because he did not behave properly with his daughter, Cordelia. Lear trusted the flattery of Goneril and Regan, and later on, they become the instruments of his suffering, and persecution. Again, both Goneril and Regan indulge in guilty love for Edmund and this love itself becomes the instrument of their ruin and death. Because of their mutual jealousy and rivalry in love, Goneril poisons Regan and later stabs herself. Further, Edmund meets with just punishment from Edgar whom he had deceived and injured; at the supreme moment of his success in war and love. Edmund is defeated and killed by Edgar, the previous victim of his treachery. So, there are many elements in the play to support Edgar's view that the gods are just and that they punish us for our sins.

However, these sufferings are never proportionate for example, Edgar, Cordelia and King Lear suffer more than what they do in performance of their duties. So we can not accept the view that there is strict justice in the world. The gods are certainly on the side of morality: they do punish evil; but in the conflict between evil and good the destruction of evil is accompanied by the partial waste of good. This is one of the painful facts in the mortal world of tragedy. The gods cannot prevent unjust suffering: but their blessings are always with those who stand for virtue :

*Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia.*

*The gods themselves throw incense  
Then we come to the lines uttered by Gloucester.  
The gods are just and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us.”  
and  
“As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;  
They kill us their sport”.*

Gloucester is of the opinion that the gods are unjust and cruel. They take delight in inflicting pains upon mortals. He further adds that the human world is not governed by the laws of justice. He has trusted his son Edmund, and the same son proves treacherous to him and causes his undoing. Moreover, Gloucester is blinded for his virtuous efforts to help the aged and helpless Lear who is the victim of his daughter's cruelty. Gloucester finds the wicked prospering and the virtuous suffering. So he feels disillusioned and thinks that the gods are unjust and malicious and that they inflict suffering upon mortals in sheer sports and cruelty.

In fact, the gods who govern the human world of Lear are neither cruel nor malicious, they are on the whole on the side of virtue. The wicked suffer and are ultimately destroyed, but in the course of the conflict between good and evil, the virtuous also suffer. There is justice in the play though not poetic justice. Though the virtuous, sometimes suffer badly, a noble life is its own reward, and upon such sacrifices as that of Cordelia, the gods themselves throw incense. The gods are clearly on the side of virtue.

#### **14.6 LET US SUM UP**

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare's emphasis is upon the process of human regeneration, the self knowledge, penance, and expiation for sin upon which he had touched only lightly in the final scene of *Othello*. He affirms that Lear's four score years of pride and self-deception were merely the prelude to life and not true life at all. The suffering of Lear and Gloucester is presented with all the immediate intensity of which Shakespeare is capable in order to emphasize that the process of regeneration is a purgatorial one. If Shakespeare is to assert the power of man to overcome evil, the force of evil must be shown in their most uncompromising terms. *King Lear* is a triumph of dramatic construction which in its total effect, like *Hamlet* and *Othello*, affirms justice in the world, which it sees as a harmonious system ruled by a benevolent God.

In *King Lear*, the characters perform symbolic functions. The primary focus is upon Lear, and to a lesser extent upon Gloucester. They stand together for humanity at large. The other characters serve secondary supporting functions, each symbolic of some force of good or evil action upon humanity. The theatre of the action is not only the single world of man, but also its corresponding planes in the scheme of creation: the family, the state, and the physical universe. The universality of these is reinforced by the vagueness of the place setting, the audience is watching not only Lear's little kingdom, but the great world itself.

#### **14.7 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Do you agree with the observation that *King Lear* is more sinned against sinning ? If not, give reasons.

2. In Shakespearean tragedy Character is destiny. Do you think it is true in case of *King Lear* ?
3. Enumerate the advantages and disadvantages of the double plot in *King Lear*.
4. Do you find the atmosphere of *King Lear* extraordinarily pessimistic ?
5. Compare and contrast the characters of Kent and Gloucester.
6. What do you understand by poetic justice? Does the principle of poetic justice operate in a Shakespearean tragedy? Substantiate your answer from *King Lear*.

#### **14.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. In “King Lear,” which character represents the concept of poetic justice as they receive their just rewards for their actions?
  - a) King Lear
  - b) Cordelia
  - c) Goneril
  - d) Edgar
2. What is the ultimate fate of Goneril and Regan in “King Lear”?
  - a) They are reconciled with King Lear.
  - b) They are married to noble princes.
  - c) They die as a result of their own treachery.
  - d) They inherit the entire kingdom.
3. The character of Edmund in “King Lear” is often seen as a symbol of moral disorder and ambition. What is his ultimate fate?
  - a) He becomes the king of Britain.
  - b) He is blinded and killed in a duel.
  - c) He marries Cordelia.
  - d) He repents and seeks forgiveness.
4. Which character’s moral redemption and transformation is a central theme in “King Lear”?
  - a) King Lear
  - b) Gloucester
  - c) Kent
  - d) Edgar
5. How does the character of Cordelia exemplify moral virtue in “King Lear”?
  - a) She flatters her father, King Lear.

- b) She marries Edmund to restore order in the kingdom.
- c) She speaks the truth and forgives her father.
- d) She conspires with Goneril against King Lear.

6. How does King Lear and Cordelia meet their tragic end in the play?

- a) They die in battle.
- b) They are executed by Goneril and Regan.
- c) They are poisoned.
- d) They die of natural causes.

7. What is the significance of the ending of “King Lear” in terms of the restoration of moral order?

- a) Moral order is fully restored, and all characters find redemption.
- b) Moral order is disrupted, and chaos prevails.
- c) Moral order is partially restored, but there is lingering chaos.
- d) There is no resolution, and the play ends ambiguously.

8. Which character delivers the final lines of the play, reflecting on the tragic events and the fleeting nature of life?

- a) Cordelia
- b) King Lear
- c) Edgar
- d) The Fool

9. The ending of “King Lear” has been interpreted as a commentary on the cyclical nature of human suffering and redemption. What symbolizes this cyclical theme?

- a) A wheel
- b) A mirror
- c) A crown
- d) A dagger

10. What lesson or moral message can be derived from the ending of “King Lear”?

- a) Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.
- b) The natural world is indifferent to human suffering.
- c) True love and forgiveness can bring redemption even in the face of tragedy.
- d) Revenge is the most satisfying form of justice.

**Answers :**

1. c) Goneril
2. c) They die as a result of their own treachery.
3. b) He is blinded and killed in a duel.
4. d) Edgar
5. c) She speaks the truth and forgives her father.
6. b) They are executed by Goneril and Regan.
7. c) Moral order is partially restored, but there is lingering chaos.
8. a) Cordelia
9. a) A wheel
10. c) True love and forgiveness can bring redemption even in the face of tragedy.

#### **14.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- A.C. Bradley : *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Macmillan & Co. Ltd. London. 1961
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- Henry W. Wells and H.H. Anniah Gowda. *Style and Structure in Shakespeare*. Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979.

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## **BEN JONSON AND HIS WORK**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 15.3 Jonson's Works
- 15.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.5 Examination Oriented Questions
- 15.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 15.7 Suggested Readings

### **15.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this lesson, you will study Ben Jonson (1572–1637), one of the most important dramatists and poets of the English Renaissance. He is best known for his satirical plays like Volpone and The Alchemist, which explore human weaknesses and social issues with wit and insight. Studying Jonson helps us understand how literature can both entertain and critically reflect on society, a quality that makes his works meaningful even today.

### **15.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

#### **Objectives**

Learners will:

1. Gain knowledge of Ben Jonson's life and historical context during the late Elizabethan and Jacobean eras.
2. Identify Jonson's major works and literary style.
3. Understand his influence on English drama and classical comedy.

#### **Outcomes**

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Outline major events in Ben Jonson's life, including his military service and literary career.

2. List and describe key works like *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Every Man in His Humour*.
3. Explain Jonson's use of classical forms, satire, and moral commentary in his plays.

### 15.3 JONSON'S WORKS

Ben Jonson was born in 1572, only eight years after the birth of Shakespeare. He died in 1637, after twenty one years of Shakespeare's death. He entered the English theatres in London like a scourge. In fact, for quite sometime, he was regarded as an affliction, so powerful was his influence. The first play with which his name is generally associated is a lost comedy, named *The Isle of Dogs* (1597). He is believed to have collaborated with Thomas Nashe in writing this comedy. Its satire was so strong that it at once incensed the authorities, who immediately ordered the closure of all playhouses. It also led to the arrest of Ben Jonson along with two of the actors in the Marshalsea. His imprisonment lasted from July till October 1597. To begin with, Ben Jonson was both actor and dramatist. He disposed of his works among different theatre companies in London as best as he could. *The Isle of Dogs*, was not produced at Henslowe's theatre. But Henslowe being a friend of Ben Jonson paid the playwright as loan, four pounds towards the cost of imprisonment. He also advanced on the following December 3 a sum of twenty shillings on the plot of a play Jonson was to finish by Christmas. But when Jonson failed to complete his assignment, Chapman was paid a year later for work on a tragedy of "Benjamin's plot." Ben Jonson had written by 1598 *The Case is Altered* for the Chapel children. It is a comedy comparable with Chapman's *All Fools*, although it is more romantic in tone and less expertly worked out. He chooses Plautus, the Italian dramatist, for model, and develops the classic themes into a comedy of contemporary times. To this very period perhaps also belongs the original form of *A Tale of a Tub*, which exists only in the revised version that Jonson had made long after its composition. His fame began with his very first play, *Every Man in His Humour*, which was acted by the Chamberlain's company. As reported by Rowe in 1709, it is believed that Shakespeare's personal intervention had induced the company to accept this play. It is also known for sure now that Shakespeare himself acted a part in it when it was staged in September 1598. The play certainly became one of the great successes of its time. As the text of the play existed at that time, it was quite superficially another Italian comedy. The plot was set in Florence and concerned with the classic devices of the duel of wits between father and son and the stratagems of an intriguing slave. But behind this stereotype story lay a keen criticism of contemporary English society, which came into focus more sharply when Jonson revised the play's text for his Folio edition of 1616, the year of Shakespeare's death. Jonson's revision of the play included giving the characters English names and introducing a vast apparatus of pungent allusions of London.

Jonson's famous comedy thus became, essentially, the arrangement of an era bent on acquiring fashionable prestige at small cost. Jonson lashes this absurd quest for gentlemanliness in a variety of ways by attributing to each character some dominant trait of the time. Calling this dominant trait a "humour", Jonson made popular his theory of humours, as each character showed his or her ludicrous tendency in the comedy of contemporary life. For instance, the country cousin, Stephen, thinks he can rate as a gentleman by studying a book about hawking. Similarly, the city youth, Mathew, seeks the same end by pretending to be a poet. Another comic character in the play is Bobadill who wins temporary respect by boasting about his fencing. Although a coward, he earns respect by the elegance with which he swears and takes tobacco. The most intelligent of all the crowd of

youngmen are, of course, Mr. Knowell and Mr. Wellbred, who make an evocation of exploiting the fools they meet for the gratification of their own vanity. Being sick of the insincerities of time, the public welcomed Jonson's satirical comedy with delight and satisfaction. The comedy pleased people so much that Samuel

### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. Ben Jonson was a contemporary and rival of William \_\_\_\_.
2. Jonson's plays are known for their sharp \_\_\_\_ and classical structure.
3. Volpone is one of Jonson's most famous \_\_\_\_ comedies.
4. Jonson was buried in Westminster Abbey with the inscription “\_\_\_\_”.

### Answers

1. Shakespeare
2. satire
3. satiric
4. O Rare Ben Jonson

Rowlands, the most lively commentator of that time, soon urged all the poets of his day to follow Jonson's lead :

*Good honest poets, let me crave a boon:  
That you would write, I do not care how soon,  
Against the bastard humours hourly bred  
In every mad-brain'd, wit-worn, giddy head.  
At such gross follies do not sit and wink;  
Belabour these same gulls with pen and ink.*

Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour* was written as a sequel to his first success. It was acted at the Globe the very next year (1599). Jonson is said to have become so proud of it that he rushed it into print in 1600. He also signed a dedication to the gentlemen of the Inns of Court, the arbiters of elegance of the day. An explanation of this play has been that it was an effort to use the stage (of the theatre) as a vehicle or means for the type of caustic satire which the censors of the press were prohibiting. The play certainly belonged to the tradition or the literary movement which produced the satires of Hall and Marston. One can safely say that Jonson was so much satisfied with the success of his new technique introduced in *Every Man in His Humour* that in the second play, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, he almost ran it to death. In this second play, one does not find anything like a dramatic plot. The play consists of only dramatic episodes and acute psychological observations in generalized form. The characters still carry Italian names, but they are not shown living in Italy. They are shown inhabitants of the "Fortunate Island," which in the obvious language of satire meant England. In this comedy, ten or twelve social misfits are shown to exhibit their egotistic follies, which continue through four Acts of the play. The fifth Act moves rather swiftly, each of these misfits is kicked "out of his humour" by the very logic of the play's events. Their being kicked "out of humour" means they regain a more normal state of mind. They no longer remain

eccentrics. Jonson prefaced the play's printed text by a clever list of "the characters of the persons," in which each is neatly impaled, like the insects of an entomologist's collection: there's also an inordinately heavy mass of running commentary. Jonson uses four persons to emphasize the author's views or show the wisdom of his method. We do not have any record of what Shakespeare thought of Jonson's second comedy, *Every Man Out of His Humour*, but one thing seems clear that his theatre company did not find it rewarding. It was only after many years of Jonson's first play's production that Shakespeare did another play of the younger dramatist. Jonson's next play, *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), was sold to the boys of the Queen's Chapel. It is said to be slighter piece, comparatively, but even more aggressive than his earlier comedies. Its real significance lies in its being in many respects a forecaster of Jonson's development as a dramatist. This comedy ends in an authentic masque, and includes Jonson's loveliest song that he had as yet written: "Queen and huntress, chaste and fair." In the elaborately satiric definitions of courtier types it goes beyond *Every Man Out of His Humour* and prepares for the "characters" of Overbury and Earle. It is the last tribute to the aged Queen who, as in Llyly, is pictured in Cynthia. But through the stately grace of the allegory tramps the burly figure of the author, originally called Criticus. In the 1616 text of the play, however, the author is magnified into Crites, the Judge. As the play represents, he is the man who is always right. He becomes recipient of the Queen's ecstatic praise for his poetry and wisdom. At the end he writes himself Cynthia's warrant to purge society, along with his chosen companion, Arete, on Virtue :

*Dear Arete and Crites, to you two  
We give the charge: impose what pains you please;  
Th' incurable cut off, the rest reform.*

Such bumptiousness was intolerable, Jonson was angrily laughed at. Even his admirer, Marston, gibed at him in his revised anti-war play *Histriomastix* (1601), in Jack Drum's Entertainment, and elsewhere. Jonson retaliated to this gibe by writing his satirical play, *Poetaster* (1601). The play begins with Envy hopefully rising "to dawn the author." But she is trodden underfoot by the mailed prologue of the piece. It may not be one of Jonson's greatest plays, but is certainly one of the most amusing. The scene is Rome in the reign of King Augustus, in the first century A.D. The chief characters are the greatest poets of the age, their patrons, and their enemies. Jonson arrogates to himself the character of Horace and belauds him plentifully. Marston, made poetaster in the play, called Crispinus, is excoriated.

Since Dekker also figured in Jonson's play as a minor poetaster, he immediately retorted and wrote a satire on Jonson, entitled *Satiromastix, or the Untrussing of the Humorous Poet*. This provided a mine of information on Jonson not otherwise available to today's reader. All that his contemporary knew about him in 1601 seems to have been put into Dekker's play. Jonson's slowness in composition, his self-esteem, his career as bricklayer, his career as barnstorming actor, his poverty and psychophancy to the great, his killing of a player and escape from Tyburn by his "neck-verse," his "parboiled face," and his habit of epigramming his friends are all set down with the precision of a master realist. The two play houses that staged Dekker's satirical comedy must have been well filled. As a result, a printed text of *Satiromastix* was immediately in demand. Knowing his own weaknesses too well, Jonson withheld his retort. In a dignified "apologetical dialogue" to *Poetaster* he withdrew from the stage

war and devoted himself to classic tragedy. Jonson rescued himself by *Sejanus* (1603), a historical play of ponderous ethics and meticulous scholarship. It has the kind of greatness that Chapman's later tragedies have. Chapman and Marston both wrote commendatory verses for the first quarto in 1605. In fact, Chapman perhaps had a part in composing the stage version. Shakespeare's company staged it, as it later did Jonson's other Roman tragedy of *Catiline's Conspiracy* (1611). Shakespeare himself, although on the verge of retirement as actor, performed a part in *Sejanus*. The war of the theatres was quite over.

Jonson's training as a comic realist served him well in *Sejanus*, which gives an impressive real view of imperial Rome and develops the great figures as enlarged and darkened humour characters. It is an important play, but most important for what it led to. It led to *Volpone, the Fox* (1606), which is considered the most magnificent of his comedies. This rather dreadful comedy was staged by Shakespeare's company, which had now become the King's. The comedy is supposed to take place in modern Venice. Its treatment of the theme of greed came, however, from Jonson's study of the enormities of ancient Rome. The character symbolism peculiar to humour comedy is intensified in this play by an imitation of the beast-fable. This method showed how human types could be caricatured by representing them as animals. The chief villain in the play is called Fox. His agent is called the Fly (Mosca). His dupes are the birds of prey, such as crow, vulture, and raven. The technical perfection of the play is a little spoiled, but the human appeal a good deal increased, by the addition of three English types. These are Peregrine (the falcon), Sir Pol (the talkative parrot), and the latter's extraordinarily British and modern wife.

Critics over the ages have acclaimed *Volpone*, the finest of Jonson's, plays. Dryden, of course, gave the palm to Jonson's next play, *The Silent Woman* (1609), which verges upon farce, just as *Volpone* verges upon tragedy. These plays are so wonderfully articulated and so amazingly life-like that either of the two would assure Jonson's place as the greatest satiric dramatist in English literature. But both of these plays are said to have been surpassed by his third crowning play, *The Alchemist* (1610). In respect of tone, this comedy of Jonson strikes an exact center between the other two. This decidedly is much more economical than any other play of Jonson. It has been said that in *The Alchemist* every word and gesture counts in the final effect. One can see in this play a perfect fusion of classical method and English scene. It could go no further. The location is not only London; it is the fashionable Blackfriars quarter where Jonson himself lived. It is from here that he had signed the dedication of *Volpone*. Everything in the play occurs either inside the house of Lovewit or before the door of that house. The time is during the plague of 1610, which was raging as Jonson wrote. The play's time is not longer than the actual time the actors are on the stage. A single spring moves all the characters, which is their desire to get something for nothing. Of the twelve dramatis personae, three are knaves, seven others are dupes, representing five classes of people one would expect to see at Black-friars. These classes are the young professional law clerk, the luxury merchant dealing in tobacco and other country wares, the pleasure-loving Knight, the two Puritan preachers, and the wealthy young man up from the country with his sister. The rest of the play's characters, Surly and Lovewit, are neither quite knave nor quite dupe, but potentially both, as the play's action reveals. Such is said to be Jonson's picture of his neighbours, which is represented in the play without romance and quite without poetic justice, but also without bitterness. The picture in this play, of the social scene presented, does, of course, lack the harshness of *Volpone*, and enforces its moral with a more cleansing laughter.

The perfect precision of *The Alchemist*, could not be repeated, for sure, without its becoming stale. No wonder that Jonson's later comedies are inferior to his earlier three great ones. His comic art was a very jealous mistress. He was more and more distracted from it by his famous masques, which from 1610 onward demanded an increasing amount of his attention. However, two very important plays were produced even during this period,

namely *Bartholomew Fair* in 1614 and *The Staple of News* in 1626. The former is, in fact, the complement of *The Alchemist*. It presents a picture of the other side of London. In this side the lower classes congregate at Smithfield during the famous August fair. It presents a large canvas and many more characters. But Jonson finds even in this side of London much the same people and the same vices. The characterization as well as satiric brilliance are as masterly as ever in Jonson. The only thing one finds inferior here is the not so neat structure of the play.

The scenes of *The Staple of News* that ridicule the impostures of the new business of journalism are equally effective. As Swinburne said, "No man can know anything worth knowing of Ben Jonson who has not studied and digested the text of *Every Man in His Humour*, *The Fox*, *The Alchemist*, and *The Staple of News*; but any man who has may be said to know him well." Jonson also wrote *The Devil is an Ass* (1616) and *The New Inn* (1629), but both are on a lower plane. They do not match his earlier plays. They do, however, have more romantic charm than anything Jonson had written in drama since *The Case is Altered*. As Jonson grew older and sadder, and his classic certitude relaxed, he became in some ways more Elizabethan. He gave best expression to this side of himself in the beautiful fragment of pastoral drama which he left uncompleted, *The Sad Shepherd*.

#### **15.4 LET US SUM UP**

Ben Jonson was an English Renaissance dramatist, poet and actor. A contemporary of William Shakespeare, he is best known for his satirical plays, particularly *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair* and his lyrical poems.

#### **15.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Ben Jonson as a poet.
2. Analyze the poetic technique used by Ben Jonson in his poems.
3. Write a brief biographical sketch of Ben Jonson.

#### **15.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. Which of the following is one of Ben Jonson's most famous comedies, featuring the character Volpone, a cunning trickster?
  - a) "The Alchemist"
  - b) "Every Man in His Humour"
  - c) "The Shoemaker's Holiday"
  - d) "Tamburlaine"
2. In which historical period did Ben Jonson primarily write his plays?
  - a) Victorian Era
  - b) Elizabethan Era
  - c) Jacobean Era
  - d) Renaissance Era

3. Which Jonson play satirizes the pursuit of learning and knowledge through the character of the pedant, Brisk?

- “Volpone”
- “The Silent Woman”
- “Bartholomew Fair”
- “Sejanus His Fall”

4. Ben Jonson was known for his satirical comedy. Which of his plays is a comedy that humorously criticizes various aspects of society, including lawyers and doctors?

- “The Alchemist”
- “Epicoene, or the Silent Woman”
- “Volpone”
- “The Devil is an Ass”

5. In which of Jonson’s plays does the character Face serve as the chief rogue, exploiting his master’s absence for personal gain?

- “Volpone”
- “The Alchemist”
- “Every Man in His Humour”
- “Bartholomew Fair”

6. The comedy of humours, a dramatic concept popularized by Ben Jonson, revolves around the idea of:

- Miracles and divine interventions
- Characters driven by a single dominating trait or obsession
- Love and romantic entanglements
- Political intrigue and power struggles

7. Which of the following best describes the central idea of the comedy of humours?

- Characters representing the four elements: earth, water, air, and fire
- Characters driven by their individual quirks and personality traits
- Characters seeking vengeance against their rivals
- Characters engaged in epic adventures and quests

8. In the comedy of humours, characters are often categorized based on their:

- Social status
- Familial relationships

- c) Astrological signs
- d) Dominant personality traits

9. Which of the four humors (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic) is associated with qualities like cheerfulness and sociability?

- a) Sanguine
- b) Choleric
- c) Melancholic
- d) Phlegmatic

10. The comedy of humours aimed to provide social commentary by:

- a) Portraying idealized and flawless characters
- b) Exposing the flaws and idiosyncrasies of its characters
- c) Focusing solely on romantic relationships
- d) Ignoring social issues and conflicts

**Answers:**

1. a) “Volpone”
2. c) Jacobean Era
3. b) “The Silent Woman”
4. d) “The Devil is an Ass”
5. b) “The Alchemist”
6. b) Characters driven by a single dominating trait or obsession
7. b) Characters driven by their individual quirks and personality traits
8. d) Dominant personality traits
9. a) Sanguine
10. b) Exposing the flaws and idiosyncrasies of its characters

### **15.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- Riggs, David. *Ben Jonson : A Life*. Harvard University Press, 1989.
- Johnston, George B., and George Burke Johnston. *Poems of Ben Jonson*. Harvard University Press, 1955.

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## JONSON'S COMEDY OF HUMOURS

### STRUCTURE

- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 16.3 Jonson's Comedy of Humours
- 16.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.5 Examination Oriented Questions
- 16.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 16.7 Suggested Readings

#### 16.1 INTRODUCTION

The term "humour", in the case of Ben Jonson, has a special meaning; it is not to be mistaken with the ordinary meaning of the word suggesting comic or funny or laughing matter - person or event. To get at the particular meaning Jonson imparted to the word we need to go into its history, as to how it came down to the period of Jonson and acquired the meaning it did in his comedy. This special brand that Ben Jonson evolved for himself came to be known as the "comedy of humours". But before we go into various aspects of the Jonsonian comedy, let us first get clarity about the term humour as it came down to Jonson who gave it the special connotation which has come to stick to it.

The term 'humour' is originally derived from the Latin word *humor*, which in Latin means moisture or humid. The term was used in the Middle Ages and during the Renaissance period, in the tradition of Hippocratic pathology and physiology, to denote the four humours of the body. These four humours of the body depended on the four fluids, namely blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile. The admixture or commingling of these fluids determined a person's disposition, his/her temperament, character, mind, and morality. The humours in turn released spirits or vapours which affected a person's brain, and hence his/her behaviour. According to the predominant humour, a man would be sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, or melancholic. Robert Burton, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), gives an excellent account of the qualities of these humours. Vestigially, the theory of humours survives in such expressions as "ill-humoured", "good-humoured", "black with rage", "in a black mood", "yellow with jealousy", "green with envy", "yellow-rivered", "red with remorse", and so forth. No wonder that we still use "sanguine" or "melancholy" to describe certain temperaments.

The theory of humours had a considerable influence on writers when it came to the creation of characters. Dramatists devised characters based on the theory of the imbalances that occurred between the bodily fluids. In the Elizabethan age, it was Ben Jonson who picked up this theory and made it the basis of his characterization. He created characters for his plays who were dominated each by a particular mood, inclination, or peculiarity. He deliberately named his first successful comedy as *Every Man in His Humour*, and explained in its preface or prologue the theory and its use in the making of his play's characters. He also wrote another comedy using the same theory and named it *Every Man Out of His humour*. Thus, Ben Jonson became the most notable instance of a dramatist who based his comedy on the theory of humours. And it was for this very reason that his comedy came to be called the "Comedy of Humours". It may not be just a coincidence that in this very period writers were also addressing themselves to the depiction of "characters" in character sketches, and analyzing character and temperament.

It was only later in the eighteenth century that humour came to be associated with laughter, and came to be used in contradiction to wit. Any character, for any reason, deviating from the normal human behaviour, causing laughter, came to be known as a humorous or funny character. Thus, it lost its special meaning of a dominant trait or characteristic of one's personality. When a dramatist like Jonson created characters in terms of his theory of humours, he made his characters what E. M. Forster has called flat, not round. If one is dominated by any one trait, decidedly he/she automatically becomes comic. Of course, not always though. There are certain character traits which can make a character tragic or pathetic also. Ben Jonson created all kinds of characters, giving them the benefit of a humour for each, which made them comic, pathetic, or tragic. In the wide range of Jonson's social canvas, there is a large variety of male and female characters who display their humours in different situations.

## 16.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

1. Understand the theory of the four humours in Elizabethan psychology.
2. Analyze how Jonson used the humours to create exaggerated, type-based characters.
3. Examine how this technique contributed to the comic effect in his plays.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Explain the concept of comedy of humours and its medical-philosophical origin.
2. Identify examples of characters driven by dominant humours in Jonson's plays.
3. Discuss how the humour-based characters reveal social flaws and absurdities.

## 16.3 JONSON'S COMEDY OF HUMOURS

Theory and criticism play an important part in the growth of Jonson's dramatic art. The naturalistic portraiture came as inevitably to him as it did to Middleton. But the tenacity of Jonson's principles combines his theory and practice together in his comedy. The dominance of a clear intellect also prevented the severance and conflict of elements that we find in the works of some of his contemporaries, such as Marston. Jonson's evident

conscious purpose sets his realism at once apart from that of the unselfconscious comedy of Middleton. He seldom enters the domain of imaginative tragedy or of romance in which the conflict of thought finds its inevitable expression. He never condescends to mingle with his proposed art the popular theatrical attractions of sensation and sentiment. There is, of course, one disadvantage also of this purposiveness: His most representative comedy of humours also becomes limited. It has a sharp focus on an immediate area of experience, but that also makes it narrow. Similarly, the characters show their humours clearly, but they also become less complex, and even less real or life-like.

No doubt, Jonson's attempt in his comedies is to treat his material objectively or scientifically. He certainly endeavours to present moral and psychological truth more and more nearly in terms of actuality. He tries, for sure, to eliminate more and more thoroughly the element of the subjective. But the very fact that his expressed purpose is to punish those that deviate from the standard moral norms he has approved as socially desirable compels him to reduce those characters into types of one or another social or moral failing. Thus, his attempt ultimately is not only to show how any individual humour, if allowed to determine a person's life, can lead one into ludicrous as well as tragic situations, but also to stretch that humour to the limit of a social or moral folly. Hence, the interests of Jonson, the satirist, and those of Jonson, the humourist, would not harmonize with each other. For every humour is not necessarily an evil, or even a folly, nor every folly or evil necessarily a humour.

And yet the great artist as Ben Jonson was, he overcomes many of the problems that his varied interests create for him as dramatist. He succeeds in creating convincing characters, who would certainly demand the comic allowance of being not exactly the persons we encounter in real life, but who would not demand the romantic licence of being altogether the creatures of the twilight world. He is able to blend, as far as, is possible for a dramatist, satire and comedy, humour and representation, into an integrated picture of contemporary life. No doubt, his characters become types of various humours, but they retain at the same time their strong resemblance to personages from real life. His subtle art of drama lies in structuring humour to the point of human folly and relating human folly to the predominant humour of the individual personage. Thus, individual and typical, psychological and social, ethical and moral, all blend into a convincing human figure. Although the theory of humours was first put into practice in Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour*, it remains a principle of his characterization in all of his subsequent plays. His *Volpone, or The Fox*, considered his most subtle play, is no exception to this rule. The characters that we encounter in this comedy conform to Jonson's theory of humours. They behave as

### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. The comedy of humours is based on the belief that human behavior is controlled by four \_\_\_\_\_.
2. A character dominated by one humour becomes a comic \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Ben Jonson used this technique especially in plays like *Every Man in His* \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The four humours are blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and \_\_\_\_\_ bile.

### Answers

1. humours
2. type / caricature
3. Humour
4. black

logically in terms of their respective humours as the theory would demand to be logical and convincing. One great thing about Jonson as dramatist is that when it comes to delineating his characters, good as well as bad, young as well as old, he is not dominated by any sentiment of sympathy or antipathy. He is one of those rare dramatists who remain detached from their creations. Just as a scientist has the clinical attitude to his patient, diagnosing, dissecting, and curing by cutting the diseased tissue, so does Jonson treat his characters, diagnosing them in terms of their troubling humours, cutting those humours with the knife of his satire, and cure them by cutting out the affected parts of their moral conduct.

The chief character of *Volpone*, is Volpone, the fox. He is given to plots and intrigues. That, in fact, is his humour. He is a trickster who delights in disguises and intrigues. He can trick his victims into giving him their most prized possessions. There is a sort of comic sense in the simplicity and single-mindedness of Volpone's character. His insatiable desire to trick people is characteristic of the fool. Although Volpone is a nobleman, he shares the same human nature as the lowly fools in his household. The only difference is that while the lowly fools are naturally deformed, Volpone is the cause of his own deformation. The play's plot shows his fall from a Venetian nobleman to the position of a fool. He starts out playing the fool and ends up by becoming one. He conforms to Mosca's description of people : "Almost all the wise world is little else, but parasites or sub-parasites."

The next important character in *Volpone*, is Mosca. The word here means the gadfly, who is a parasite. He is Volpone's servant. He is only one step higher in the social scale than the three deformed fools of Volpone's household. These three fools are the dwarf, the hermaphrodite, and the eunuch. Mosca is socially deformed, or fellow of no birth or blood. Having no scope for advancement in the Venetian world, Mosca lives by his wits. He does not suffer from the folly of greed. He takes whatever he needs from the treasures of others, but he takes no more than his daily needs. In a way, his humour is to feed on others, not getting moved by any temptation. Thus, he is free from the normal ambitions of human nature. This gives him an advantage of judging others who are vulnerable to all sorts of follies. He mocks at the follies of other people. When an opportunity arises for making gains in the absence of his master, Mosca is discovered to be vulnerable to the folly of greed. Ironically, it is the very folly for which he has been making fun of other people. Now, he himself is found equally vulnerable to that folly. Hence, he, too, proves that "almost all the wise world is little else, in nature, but parasites or sub-parasites."

Another interesting character in this zoo-like spectacle of Jonson's satirical comedy is Voltore, who is a vulture. Vulture is one of the three birds of prey that circle around the fox, greedy and full of expectation. As a lawyer by profession, Voltore has a weakness for wills. That becomes his humour - to greed for gains through false wills. He uses his legal expertise to advocate injustice in order to take possession of Volpone's riches. Mosca cleverly fools this gull by using the advocate's own tactics. He tells Volpone the biggest lie and documents it with elements of well known facts. Thus, Voltore is tricked by his own folly. He believes that with his quick agility he can make the wide world believe that a lie is the truth. He fails to observe that as a part of the wide world he himself can also be cozened.

Another equally interesting character in *Volpone*, is that of Corbaccio, who represents the carion crow. An old and decrepit, deaf and round of back, he is rather avaricious. Avarice, so to say, is the humour of Corbaccio. Partially deformed by old age, this fool completes his transformation from nobleman to parasite by being tricked into disinheriting his son. The spiritual condition of this gentleman is embodied by his physical condition. He expects to outlive Volpone and inherit his wealth. His comic flaw, so to say, is not physical but spiritual blindness. Jonson increases the interest of his comedy by turning his portrait gallery into a zoo of beasts.

The strategy of using a beast fable format for exposing the animal-like beastly qualities of human beings works very well in the plot of Jonson's play. The humour of each comes out more clearly through the analogy of the beast. Each of the beasts used in the play is known for one or another dominant trait, which easily gets identified with one or another humour of the human species.

Corvino is another character in *Volpone* that attracts our attention at once. He represents the raven, which is one of the three greedy trio, the other two being vulture and crow. This peacock is proud of his beauty. This bird of prey is an exceedingly jealous husband who guards his wife with great care. Corvino's humour, so clearly brought out through the animal analogy of the peacock, is, obviously, jealousy. Interestingly, his greed persuades him to demand that Volpone cuckold him. When at last he discovers the folly of his ways, he is too proud to reveal his foolish vanity. The paramount quality common to these three characters, represented by three different birds of prey, is their desire to possess wealth.

Closely associated with the comedy centering on the fortunes of Volpone are also the characters of Celia and Bonario. Celia is that ripe beauty, Corvino's wife, who is used as an effective device of plot. It is Volpone's desire that delivers her at his doorstep. Her presence there gives Bonario a chance to save her. Bonario is the good fellow of the play. He is a romantic and a sentimentalist. Celia and Bonario are foolish as well as innocent. They look at life in Venice through the eyes of the lovers of melodramatic fiction. Their humour is to see life not as in itself it really is, but to see it as the books of romance have painted it. They are, in other words, not directed by their own experience of life, but by the descriptions of life given in romance fiction. Hence, they seriously misunderstand and misjudge whatever they encounter, people or places. If the gulls seem inhuman in their humour of total greed, Bonario and Celia seem equally inhuman in their humour of innocence. Their folly is not so much vicious as silly. But it remains a folly all the same.

A few more interesting characters in the motley crowd of *Volpone, or the Fox* are Sir Politic and Lady Would-Be and Peregrine. Sir Politic, his wife Lady Would-Be and Peregrine are native English characters now travelling through Italy. Although tourists, they are trying to become Italians in their life style. In their attempt to follow the old saying, "Do in Rome as the Romans do," they run into all kinds of funny situations. They turn out to be hilariously inept in the art of imitation, never quite succeeding in acquiring the manners of the Italian gentry. They find themselves parroting the ways of the master plotters without ever knowing what they are actually doing. So, their humour in terms of Jonsonian theory of comedy is mimicry, which is largely mindless, but also indirectly self-flattering. The fact that they fail to imitate the manners of the evil Italians that they are too good to become the stuff the Italians are made of. Peregrine serves as confidant of Sir Politic. He uses the English Knight for merriment, but never quite becomes involved in the main action of the satirical comedy.

The last set of characters included in the comic plot of *Volpone* consists of Nano, Androgyno, and Castrone. These three are regular, professional fools. They are naturally deformed persons. They are meant to serve as entertainers in the household of Volpone. Jonson uses them just as Shakespeare used the Fool in *King Lear* or Touchstone in *As You Like It*. Their function in Volpone, similar to the function of the fools in Shakespeare, is to remind us of the other side of human nature that people of high strata generally become unmindful of. They are there to show the difference there is between the high and the low in a society based on the power and privilege of capital and estate. Those who enjoy that power become totally unaware of what life really is for those who are deprived of all the privileges attached to capital and estate. These Fools are set apart also by their deformity. Although they are born with their deformities, having no hand in what they look like, they are treated in society as odd presences meant for the ridicule of the privileged.

Mosca is born without noble blood, but he is normal in every other way. Volpone, Voltore, Corbaccio, and Corvino are all normal and of noble blood. Nonetheless, these normal people acquire spiritual deformity through their inhuman or excessive greed and the foolish actions they indulge in. While the dwarf, hermaphrodite, and Eunuch are not responsible for their follies because they are born to behave that way, Mosca, Volpone, and the three birds of prey are fully responsible for their follies because their acts of folly are the result of their conscious and deliberate choice. Perhaps Mosca rightly defines the play's theme when he speaks these satirical lines, "Almost all the wise world is little else, in nature, but parasites or sub-parasites." Here, it is important for us to understand the difference between Volpone and Mosca; that is, between a gentleman and a parasite. In the European societies highly based on the class distinctions, the roles and functions of each class had got defined through long traditions and conventions of those societies. We can find recorded descriptions of parasites as a class attached to the great houses of the privileged lords and ladies, counts and countesses, dukes and duchesses, etc. These parasites were people without property. They would depend for their subsistence entirely on the estate of their masters. The masters would have them as a part of their establishment, an army of servants and hangers-on, whose roles and functions were well defined. The parasites were supposed to serve as butts of ridicule, of gross and vulgar jokes, accepting even abuse, by their wealthy masters, as a part of their duty. Some of them would be physically and mentally deformed and retarded. Since they were no better than beggars, having nothing to fall back on, they were destined to accept a life full of insults and indignities. It is an indication of decadence and degeneration, of dehumanization that the callousness of the rich and the cringiness of the poor were taken as natural on both sides. The status of the parasites was no better than the animal pets of the rich. They did get free food and lodging, but they paid by accepting indignities as their earnings. These figures were common in the classical Greek and Roman comedies, and continued as a tradition later in the Elizabethan and Jacobean comedies. Jonson focuses our attention on the inhumanity involved in the traditional practice of the parasite in the society of his time.

#### **16.4 LET US SUM UP**

Comedy of Humours is a dramatic genre most clearly associated with the English playwright Ben Jonson from the late 16th century. Comedy of humours focuses on a character or range of characters, each of whom exhibits two or more overriding traits or 'humours' that dominates their personality, desires and conduct. The characters in *Volpone* are stereotypes. All of the characters are imbalanced as well, so their 'humors' are out of balance and they thus act in comical ways. Thus, *Volpone* is a comedy of humours.

#### **16.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss Ben Jonson as a Jacobean dramatist.
2. Examine *Volpone* as comedy of humours.
3. Evaluate Volpone as a chief character in the play *Volpone*.

#### **16.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. Which of the following is one of Ben Jonson's most famous comedies, featuring the character Volpone, a cunning trickster?
  - a) "The Alchemist"

- b) "Every Man in His Humour"
- c) "The Shoemaker's Holiday"
- d) "Tamburlaine"

2. In which historical period did Ben Jonson primarily write his plays?

- a) Victorian Era
- b) Elizabethan Era
- c) Jacobean Era
- d) Renaissance Era

3. Which Jonson play satirizes the pursuit of learning and knowledge through the character of the pedant, Brisk?

- a) "Volpone"
- b) "The Silent Woman"
- c) "Bartholomew Fair"
- d) "Sejanus His Fall"

4. Ben Jonson was known for his satirical comedy. Which of his plays is a comedy that humorously criticizes various aspects of society, including lawyers and doctors?

- a) "The Alchemist"
- b) "Epicoene, or the Silent Woman"
- c) "Volpone"
- d) "The Devil is an Ass"

5. In which of Jonson's plays does the character Face serve as the chief rogue, exploiting his master's absence for personal gain?

- a) "Volpone"
- b) "The Alchemist"
- c) "Every Man in His Humour"
- d) "Bartholomew Fair"

6. The comedy of humours, a dramatic concept popularized by Ben Jonson, revolves around the idea of:

- a) Miracles and divine interventions
- b) Characters driven by a single dominating trait or obsession
- c) Love and romantic entanglements
- d) Political intrigue and power struggles

7. Which of the following best describes the central idea of the comedy of humours?

- Characters representing the four elements: earth, water, air, and fire
- Characters driven by their individual quirks and personality traits
- Characters seeking vengeance against their rivals
- Characters engaged in epic adventures and quests

8. In the comedy of humours, characters are often categorized based on their:

- Social status
- Familial relationships
- Astrological signs
- Dominant personality traits

9. Which of the four humors (sanguine, choleric, melancholic, phlegmatic) is associated with qualities like cheerfulness and sociability?

- Sanguine
- Choleric
- Melancholic
- Phlegmatic

10. The comedy of humours aimed to provide social commentary by:

- Portraying idealized and flawless characters
- Exposing the flaws and idiosyncrasies of its characters
- Focusing solely on romantic relationships
- Ignoring social issues and conflicts

**Answers :**

1. a) “Volpone”
2. c) Jacobean Era
3. b) “The Silent Woman”
4. d) “The Devil is an Ass”
5. b) “The Alchemist”
6. b) Characters driven by a single dominating trait or obsession
7. b) Characters driven by their individual quirks and personality traits
8. d) Dominant personality traits
9. a) Sanguine

10. b) Exposing the flaws and idiosyncrasies of its characters

### **16.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- Jonson, Ben. *Volpone* Ed. Robert N. Watson. Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Jonson, Ben. *Volpone or the Fox*. Ed David Cook Methuen, 1967.

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## **PLOT AND STRUCTURE**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 17.3 Plot and Structure
- 17.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.5 Examination Oriented Questions
- 17.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 17.7 Suggested Readings

#### **17.1 INTRODUCTION**

The plot of *Volpone* consists of the Epistle, the Argument and the Prologue, and Five Acts. In the Epistle that precedes the play, Jonson dedicates *Volpone* to Oxford University and Cambridge University calling them “most equal Sisters” (line 12). In the Argument, Jonson summarizes the main conflict of the play in the form of an acrostic poem. The Prologue expresses Jonson’s hope that the play will be both entertaining and enlightening.

#### **17.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

##### **Objectives**

Learners will:

1. Understand the main storyline and subplot of *Volpone*.
2. Analyze the five-act structure and progression of dramatic tension.
3. Identify how Jonson builds satire and irony through plot design.

## Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Summarize the key events in each act of *Volpone*.
2. Discuss the central plot of deception and its unraveling.
3. Evaluate how structure supports the satirical tone of the play.

### 17.3 PLOT AND STRUCTURE

Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, or *The Fox*, is set in the Italy of the Renaissance period. The characters take their names from birds and animals. The plot actually grew out of a beast fable popular in the oral tradition of the Elizabethan period. *Volpone* or *Volpe* in Italian is meant a fox. In the same manner of the animal fable, Mosca is the word for the parasite among flies called the gadfly. Mosca is a part of the household of the nobleman Volpone. He is a parasite subsisting on the estate of the rich Volpone. Being himself a person of no means, Mosca is a professional parasite. He is a type who was conventionally a part of the household of the renaissance gentleman. The natural idiots or deformed fools, such as the dwarf, eunuch, and fool, were meant to entertain the rich. In a way, their wages were to receive free meals, but they had to return it by being the butts of vulgar jokes and abuses for their rich masters. Some of these, like Mosca, were obsequious but clever fools. The others were natural fools. While people like Mosca chose to play the fools, others were born fools having no mind to behave otherwise.

Volpone's genius lies in his ability to fleece the greedy rich, the covetous wealthy, without resort to trade, venture, or product, which were the usual occupations or means and methods of economic advancement. In his practices, so wonderful they are, no poor, or ignorant person is harmed. In fact, several parasites are maintained in husbanding the gold. Volpone is a gentleman of Venice, which is one of the prominent cities in Italy. He is discovered at home, singing in praise of his wealth, the "sacred treasure in this blessed room." His servant Mosca impishly joins the song of his master in praise of gold. Volpone cherishes the manner in which the treasure of gold reaches him.

Not fortunate to have a heir to his riches, Volpone automatically attracts the greedy and wealthy to his house. They bring with them plates, coins, and jewels in the fond hope that Volpone's imminent death would return their gifts tenfold. This competition in giving gifts to Volpone is whetted by him when he cleverly feigns serious illness. While savouring the success of his ruse, Volpone summons his eunuch, dwarf, and fool to celebrate his present victory with an interlude, a brief and comic play like sequence. It is important to remember that although Volpone is a gentleman, and not a parasite, his practices are not gentlemanly but those of a parasite. He is making his living, and collecting his riches by, using improper practices, which the regular parasites do. This indicates that the dramatist has designed his role as comic, not serious.

In the absence of any relative, near or distant, to claim Volpone's property after his death, he has to name someone from the circle of people known to him as the beneficiary of his wealth. This position of Volpone attracts a large number of competitors. They try to win the favour of the ailing old man by bringing handsome gifts to him. Mosca, Volpone's servant, a parasite, finds it a god-sent opportunity to exploit the greedy would-be heirs of Volpone. He is clever and crafty who can play such games quite successfully. He encourages three major gulls.

One of these, who is first to arrive, is Voltore, the vulture. He is an advocate by profession and a gull by avocation. Volpone hurries to change into his costume of a decaying carcass. Meanwhile, the other gull, one Signor Corbaccio (carriion crow) arrives. Mosca takes Voltore's gifts and hurries him out to entertain the newcomer. He befools him in the same manner. Soon comes the third gull, Corvino (the raven), who receives the same treatment from Mosca. The cunning and crafty Mosca sends out one after due fleecing and lets in the next, and thus befools all the three gulls successfully. He assures each one of having the best chances of becoming heir of Volpone's fortunes, and sends each satisfied, without permitting them to see each other. Here lies the craft of the parasite.

We must note here the use by Jonson of the subtle device of hyperbole as an instrument of comedy. Since Mosca has to manage the comic stage at the house of Volpone, it is he who is allowed the benefit of this device. Hyperbole is conventionally the rhetorical device of exaggeration. Since it is used to achieve a certain effect, it should not be taken literally at its face value. In usual practice, hyperbole is used as an ornament to plain speech. Here in Jonson's comedy, it is more functional than decorative; it is an essential part of the dramatic fun. Thus, Mosca's use of hyperbole has special ironic thrust. He exaggerates, for example, Volpone's condition of ill health, but does not do the same in the case of Corbaccio. Jonson's use of hyperbole as a device of rhetoric in *Volpone*, enriches the meaning of the dramatic situation. The hyperbolic intensity of the play's rhetoric increases as the plot complications become more and more involved. Its use is again especially ironic and effective in revealing Mosca's character. Although he plays the servant to all, he is affectionate or loyal to none. It is a business dealing with him. He clothes his moves in fun only to sting his trapped victims.

Among the gulls being befooled by Mosca the most interesting of all, is Mr. Corvino, a rich merchant. He is also the husband of Celia, a beautiful lady of Venice. Mosca announces that his master's hearing is gone. He even declares that his master has only bastard children, those three deformed fools. Encouraged to join the game, Corvino pledges Mosca a share of his inheritance in exchange for his help. Mosca suggests that part of it is his gallant wife's. This makes Corvino to make a quick exit. Now comes another knock on the door. This brings in Lady Would-Be, the wife of the English Knight Sir Politic Would-Be. Volpone tells Mosca to get rid of her, wondering how the "bold English... dare let loose their wives to all encounters." Mosca comments that given the face she is blessed with she cannot but be virtuous. He even makes a hymn to the beauty of Corvino's wife. Volpone resolves to see the lady who is so much praised by Mosca. So, a disguise is needed to deceive the jealous Corvino, who guards his wife with ten spies.

Disguised as mountebank, Volpone finds entry into Corvino's house. Celia's husband rushes from his house, screaming and beating on disguised Volpone, demanding that Volpone leave his house at once. After the crowd disperses in confusion, Volpone and Mosca stagger down to the front of the stage in great distress. Volpone has been wounded by "angry Cupid, bolting from Celia's eyes." He must see her or die a wretched death. Although now the meeting seems almost impossible, Mosca undertakes to turn the trick. The action again shifts in Corvino's house. The raven is furious with Celia for flirting with the disguised Volpone. His rage is stopped by a sudden knock at the door, on which he hustles Celia out of the room with dire consequences. A servant announces the arrival of Signor Mosca. Corvino turns from wrath to smiles hoping to hear the news of Volpone's death. But Mosca dashes his hopes to the ground, telling him that Volpone has instead recovered. The juice that cured him was produced by Voltore and Corbaccio. Now, he says some young woman is needed at once to fully effect the recovery. Mosca rejects Corvino's proposal that a courtesan could be procured for the purpose. He subtly suggests the services of Celia, Corvino's wife.

The third Act opens with the traditional Elizabethan theatrical convention of the soliloquy. Mosca is discovered in the street, soliloquizing on the nature, number, and the kinds of parasitic fools. As an important device, soliloquy enabled the Elizabethan playwright to comment upon the action of the play as well as to reveal the inner thoughts and feelings of the speaker. In the present case, Jonson employs it as a quiet interlude before the plot begins to hurdle out of the characters' control to a final comic conclusion. Up to this point, as Mosca's attitude suggests, the villains are the complete masters of events. Things are just about to get out of their hands.

Mosca's musings are interrupted by old Corbaccio's son, Bonario (good fellow). Mosca feigns self-pity to overcome the youngman's reluctance for a dialogue with him. After winning over Bonario's sympathy Mosca warns him that his father wants to disinherit him. Bonario begins to suspect him of some trickery. Mosca offers to bring Bonario to witness the deed so that he can prove himself to be honest. The young man follows him with his heart weeping blood in anguish. Meanwhile, to pass time, Volpone watches an interlude by his household fools. A knock then interrupts the playing. That brings the English lady. Lady Would-Be is there to torment Volpone. As he puts it, 'The storm comes towards me.' She elaborates upon horrors, making Volpone tremble and sweat. She talks out the old man. Only Mosca's appearance saves him from the Lady's torture.

Mosca tells a lie that he saw Sir Politic, the Lady's husband, "rowing upon the water in a gondola, with the most cunning courtesan of Venice." He thus succeeds in sending her away, depriving her, at the same time, the gift she had brought for Volpone. Mosca now enters with Bonario in tow and places him in hiding as a knock is heard at the door. Both await the entrance of Corbaccio, with Bonario in close hiding and Mosca as the welcoming servant. The newcomer, however, turns out to be Corvino, not Corbaccio. Celia stands shrinking by her side. Putting Bonario out of the way, Mosca opens the drapes on Volpone's bed, showing Volpone waiting for Celia. Corvino asks his wife Celia to obey him and go to Volpone's bed. She says she cannot respect the marriage vow to obey him above her honour. Corvino defines honour as "a mere term invented to awe fools." She declares her husband's tactic as sin. Volpone orders Mosca to bring the lamb (Celia) forward for slaughter. He introduces the couple in most cuckolding terms. Celia withdraws, requesting death, but Corvino drags her forward. Mosca persuades Corvino to leave his wife alone with Volpone. She is left alone to lament being "placed beneath the basest circumstance, and modesty an exile made for money."

Suddenly, the fox leaps from his feigned sickbed and begins to chase. The aging lecher tries to seduce the lady with a song. She remains adamant. He recounts the larges he will give her for obliging him :

*...we will eat such a meal...  
The heads of parrots, tongues of nightingales,  
The brains of peacocks and ostriches,  
Shall be our food....*

Celia takes her innocence as her wealth, and stands steadfast. She asks him if he had a conscience. His reply is, "Tis the beggar's virtue." He finally asks her to yield, or he will force her. At a critical time, Bonario jumps out of his hiding and rescues the lady in danger of losing her honour. Now the old rascal cries, "I am unmasked, unspirited, undone, betrayed to beggary, to infamy." Feigning a wretched state, Mosca enters and offers to let Volpone cut his throat. Before Volpone has time to take Mosca seriously, Mosca proposes a double suicide. Their lamentations are interrupted by a knock at the door. Mosca feels the branding iron of the felon burning into his

forehead. Volpone takes to his bed; for the first time his suffering is not entirely feigned. The door opens on Corbaccio.

Mosca invents another lie, and tells Corbaccio that his son, Bonario, by accident has come to know of his purpose. Thereupon he came here with an open sword and wounded Volpone. Hearing how his son had come to kill him, he declares that his son would be disinherited. At this point, Voltore enters the stage unnoticed. But Mosca suddenly discovers his presence. Accused by Voltore of his double loyalty, Mosca at once thinks of a new trick - to call Bonario hear the deed of his disinheritance so that he killed his father. This way, Mosca thinks, he will be able to remove Corbaccio from the way. Meanwhile, Bonario seizes the lady, wounds her, and makes her swear that Volpone raped her. That pretext would accuse Corbaccio, defame Volpone, and ruin Voltore's hopes. Corbaccio, who has been counting Volpone's treasure, is hustled out the door by Voltore. They must find Corvino to tell him the news. Volpone and Mosca have nothing left to do but pray for the success of their latest dodge.

With Act IV, comes the subplot involving Sir Politic Would-Be, Lady Would-Be, and Peregrine. Sir Politic instructs his young companion, a fellow Englishman, about the Italian manners, saying that Englishmen never change their habits when they travel abroad. When they are engaged in inspecting the diary notes of Sir Politic, Lady Would-Be comes. She has on her mind Mosca's lie that her husband was rowing in a gondola with an Italian courtesan. She thinks the young Englishman is that lady disguised as boy. She calls him a prostitute, a female devil in a male exterior. Before the encounter reaches the boiling point, Mosca arrives on the scene. Lady Would-Be declares her injury to Mosca and calls Peregrine naughty names. Mosca explains her mistake, and she changes her attitude to the young man. After a blithe apology, she exits on Mosca's arm, leaving Peregrine bewildered. He swears to take a comic revenge on Sir Politic.

### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. *Volpone* is set in the Italian city of \_\_\_\_.
2. *Volpone* pretends to be on his \_\_\_\_ to fool legacy hunters.
3. Mosca acts as Volpone's clever \_\_\_\_.
4. The subplot involving Celia and Corvino adds to the play's \_\_\_\_ tension.

### Answers

1. Venice	2. deathbed
3. servant	4. moral / dramatic ( <i>accept either</i> )

Then follows the court case, where with Celia and Bonario on one side, and the rest on the side of Mosca, accusations and counter-accusations follow. Witnesses are produced by both sides, the case is argued by the two sides, finally the innocents losing it. The innocents were foolish enough to think that Venetian courts dispensed justice when they merely administered the law. Jonson is obviously satirizing the courts and their quibble about words, ignoring the truth. Volpone confesses to Mosca that cozening the court in such a grand manner was worth "more than if I had enjoyed the wench." After attaining the success in the trial, Volpone now develops a new plot. Mosca is to put on an expensive gown, take up pen and ink, and begin taking an inventory of Volpone's hoard.

If anyone should ask after Volpone's body, the fools are to say it was corrupted. Volpone will "get up behind the curtain, on a stool," and watch the circus unfold. Suddenly, as usual, someone knocks at the door. It is the vulture. Voltore is happy to see Mosca taking inventory, but he becomes suspicious of his new garb. Old Corbaccio also comes on the scene. Then follows the third gull, Corcino. Also appears unexpectedly Lady Would-Be. As all get together, they see Volpone's will, and discover "Mosca the heir." The gulls are stunned and show violent reactions. Each of the greedy characters wanting to become Volpone's heir is told off by Mosca, using one trick or another. When all have been successfully evaded, Volpone comes out of his hiding place and showers praise on his parasite for his brilliance as a trickster. If he could only disguise himself and follow the gulls, he could further enjoy his triumph. Mosca readily agrees to fit his master in a rare disguise. It is an outfit of a police officer. Mosca tells Volpone to look for curses. Volpone replies, "The fox fares ever best when he is curst."

Simultaneously, proceeds the sub-plot further. Peregrine, disguised and accompanied by three merchants, enters Sir Politic's house. His design is merely to frighten, not to harm, Sir Politic. Peregrine, now disguised as merchant, tells that Peregrine was a Venetian spy who reported Sir Politic's plot "to sell the state of Venice to the Turk." Sir Politic becomes distraught. He explains how his "plot" was drawn from playbooks and only put into his notebook. Merchant Peregrine offers to smuggle Sir Politic aboard a boat to escape capture. The three merchants, as planned, now burst upon the scene. Sir Politic, turned into a turtle as disguise, is walked upon by the merchants for joke. Later, he pulls off his disguise and laughs at him. After the merchants depart, Sir Politic looks for his lady, and is told that she, too, is in need of a physic. He determines to shun this place and clime forever.

The scene now reverts to the main plot again. Volpone and Mosca enter, disguised, each congratulating the other on his appearance. When Volpone leaves for a moment to gather news from the court, Mosca soliloquizes, "My fox is out of his hole, and ere he shall re-enter, I'll make him languish in his borrowed case." Unless Volpone came to terms is meanwhile, Mosca dismisses the fools and servants for the day and resolves to "bury him or gain by him.... To cozen him of all were but a cheat well placed." Corbaccio and Corvino, meanwhile, are discovered in a Venetian street. They are talking about the court sentence to be pronounced on Bonario and Celia. Volpone approaches the two gentlemen in his police disguise. He congratulates them on "the sudden good dropped down upon you from old Volpone." Their old indignation returns, and they begin to beat Volpone. Both gulls leave in a huff, but Voltore comes on to take their place. He is grumbling about Mosca's knavery. When Volpone begins to supplicate for some of the rents from a tenement house owned by the deceased Volpone, Voltore vents his spleen on the head of Volpone. With a parting insult, Volpone runs for the next corner. Now, Volpone encounters Corbaccio and Corvino. He tells them that Mosca has a cozening nose. He expresses surprise that such a witty group could be fooled by a parasite. After a parting remark about the valour of cuckolds, Volpone gleefully escapes the gulls' reach.

Just before their arrival at the Senate chamber, Volpone and Voltore meet once more. Volpone tells the vulture that he must be the heir. It is not within the wit of man, he says, to cozen so great a lawyer. Volpone is hounded into the courtroom by the seething gulls. The whole cast is now assembled at the Senate to play out the game. Voltore changes his argument, accuses Mosca of the whole mischief, and pleads for mercy for the innocent Bonario and Celia. The court is shocked at the news of Volpone's demise. But Volpone is discovered wandering in the street in a fearful state. At that moment, the three fools of his household come upon the disguised Volpone. He is shocked to learn that Mosca has dismissed them. He asks them to find Mosca and send him to the court. This brings us to the last scene of the play, where all tricks are exposed, and the tricksters are trapped. After

everybody stands exposed in the court, the court sentences them all with due punishment. Because Mosca is without a noble blood, his sentence is to be perpetual prisoner in the galleys of Venice. Volpone's substance is given to the hospital for incurables, and he is to be put in chains till he be "sick and lame indeed." Voltore is banished. Corbaccio's estate is given to his son, and he is sent to a monastery. Corvino will be rowed about Venice with a cap of ass's ears instead of horns. Celia is given her dowry and returned to her father.

Jonson's writing in the classical tradition thus, structures his play observing the unity of action, unity of place, and unity of time. The only thing that seems a surprise is the subplot in the play. It does not very well blend with the main plot. It only adds something to the satire on English society. But satire does not remain within the structure of the play. But for this subplot, the play's action is wholly unified. Another thing that undercuts the power of comedy in the play, its unified impact, is the too complicated nature of the action. It consists of intrigue upon intrigue, involving the audience in a sort of puzzle which it is hard to keep track of. Every scene is rescued by a sudden knock, which furthers the action. But these surprise appearances undercut the realistic fabric of the plot. Also undercuts its otherwise powerful impact the justice distributed at the end. The poetic justice meted out to the plotters and tricksters is too neat to square up with the spirit of realism intended to inform the play's plot structure. These shortcomings notwithstanding, *Volpone* remains one of the powerful comedies of its age.

#### 17.4 LET US SUM UP

*Volpone* has five acts. *Volpone* takes place in seventeenth-century, over the course of one day. *Volpone*, a venation nobleman, has no relative to make his heir; he must name someone his beneficiary. While Corvino threatens his wife Celia with closer incarceration. *Volpone* sings to Mosca of Celia's beauty and his desire. Mosca hatches a plot to secure Celia for his master.

#### 17.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss in detail the structure of *Volpone*.
2. How story develops in the play *Volpone*?
3. Evaluate the plot of *Volpone*.

#### 17.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Who is the central character and main trickster in Ben Jonson's "Volpone"?
  - a) Mosca
  - b) Voltore
  - c) Corbaccio
  - d) Volpone
2. What is Volpone's motive for pretending to be gravely ill throughout most of the play?
  - a) He wants to avoid paying taxes.
  - b) He wants to test the loyalty and greed of his acquaintances.
  - c) He is genuinely sick.

d) He is seeking revenge against Mosca.

3. Which character in “Volpone” is a lawyer who uses legal maneuvering to gain Volpone’s wealth?

- a) Voltore
- b) Corbaccio
- c) Corvino
- d) Mosca

4. What does Mosca, Volpone’s servant, encourage each of the three legacy hunters to give as a gift to Volpone?

- a) A golden necklace
- b) A precious gem
- c) A rare bird
- d) A valuable painting

5. What is Corvino’s relationship with Celia, which leads to one of the major conflicts in the play?

- a) He is her father.
- b) He is her husband.
- c) He is her brother.
- d) He is her lover.

6. Who is the character who disguises herself as a male in “Volpone” in order to gain access to Volpone’s fortune?

- a) Celia
- b) Lady Would-be
- c) Bonario
- d) Nano

7. What does Lady Politic Would-be frequently engage in, reflecting her obsession with appearances and social status?

- a) Feasting
- b) Gossiping
- c) Disguising herself
- d) Prayer

8. How does the play “Volpone” conclude for the main characters, Volpone and Mosca?

- a) They are both arrested and imprisoned.
- b) They marry Celia and Lady Would-be, respectively.

c) They escape with Volpone's wealth.  
d) They die tragically.

9. Which character ultimately exposes Volpone's deception and greed, leading to the resolution of the play?

- Mosca
- Corvino
- Bonario
- Voltore

10. What is the major theme explored in "Volpone" by Ben Jonson?

- The corrupting influence of wealth and greed
- The power of love and romance
- The pursuit of knowledge and enlightenment
- The importance of social class and hierarchy

**Answers:**

1. d) Volpone
2. b) He wants to test the loyalty and greed of his acquaintances.
3. a) Voltore
4. c) A rare bird
5. b) He is her husband.
6. b) Lady Would-be
7. b) Gossiping
8. a) They are both arrested and imprisoned.
9. c) Bonario
- 10.a) The corrupting influence of wealth and greed

**17.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- *Volpone* : Plot Overview. Sparknotes.com
- Knowlton, E.C; "The Plots of Ben Jonson". Jstor.com
- <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2913432>.
- [www.gradesaver.com](http://www.gradesaver.com)

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**VOLPONE AS MORAL SATIRE****STRUCTURE**

- 18.1 Introduction
- 18.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 18.3 Volpone as moral Satire
- 18.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 18.5 Examination Oriented Questions
- 18.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 18.7 Suggested Readings

**18.1 INTRODUCTION**

Reading through Ben Jonson's prose in his *Discoveries*, *the Dedications*, and the *Letters*, one becomes aware of the strong moral basis of his writings. His drama, too, has the same moral basis as we find in his prose. The following passage from *Timber: or Discoveries; Made upon Men and Matter* sums up that moral basis which informs his entire work, drama, poetry, prose alike :

*A man should study other things, not to covet, not to feare, not to repent him:  
To make his Base such, as no Tempest shall shake him: to be secure of all  
opinion; and pleasing to himself, even for that, wherein he displeaseth others.  
For the worst opinion gotten for doing well, should delight us: would'st not  
thou be just, but for fame; thou ought'st to be it with infamy: Hee that would  
have his vertue published, is not the servant of vertue, but glory.*

While in his dramatic works, we find Jonson a realist by principle, in his prose works we find direct statements stating his beliefs as well as the principles themselves from which were derived his criticisms of contemporary society and literature as well as the attitude to his material which sets him apart from his contemporaries. Ben Jonson had a deliberate schooling in objectivity. He persistently subjected his imagination to the evidence of the actual. These mental habits of Jonson constitute the counterpart in the domain of art that thorough principling which permeates his art. In the growth of his dramatic art, his theory and criticism both played an important part.

Jonson is greatly separated from his contemporaries in that he seldom enters the twilight region of romance. His art is sharply purposed, which is not afflicted by the popular practices of the Elizabethan stage.

## 18.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Understand the function of satire in *Volpone*.
2. Analyze how Jonson criticizes greed, hypocrisy, and moral corruption.
3. Explore the play's ending as a form of poetic justice and moral reinforcement.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Identify the moral flaws of characters like Volpone, Mosca, Corvino, and Voltore.
2. Interpret the play as a critique of human vices, especially avarice.
3. Explain how Jonson uses satire to expose societal and ethical decay.

## 18.3 VOLPONE AS MORAL SATIRE

Jonson's province as, dramatist is the contemporary society, its social and moral follies. He closely concentrates in his own province upon the reality around him. He always strives for more and more precision in detail, which make his comedy highly specialized. As a dramatist, he accepts certain terms of reference, always limiting the background of his plays against which the comedy is to take place. Thus, his plays are marked by a self-contained universe made up of just those elements that are freed from all further implications. Compared to Shakespeare's late comedies and Middleton's latest tragic-comedies, Jonson's social satire even at its severest, one far more earnest in tone. But the scope of his most representative comedy is rather limited, in comparison with theirs, to a narrow, sharp focusing on an immediate area of experience. His treatment of his material is, however more scientific than theirs, much more selective than theirs. The endeavour of his comedy is to present moral and psychological truth more and more nearly in terms of actuality. It attempts to eliminate more and more thoroughly the element of the subjective.

Since, Ben Jonson was a satirist and a moralist first and dramatist later, he did never dramatize himself, and it was with some difficulty that he dramatized anything else. Had it not been for his age, which predominantly expressed itself in drama, Ben Jonson would have written his satires in more direct poetic and prose forms like Pope and Swift. Those forms would have suited his specific purpose of moral satire much better than did the dramatic. There is for sure, a deeply inherent non-dramatic principle in him. This principle helps formulate a proper approach to the study of his moral satire. Giving precedence to dramatic form and its conventions and practices would, in fact, do injustice to Jonson's art as a moral satirist. It is important, therefore, that his comedies are studied as moral satires in dramatic form rather than as dramas with satirical or moral tinge. The difference made out here may seem superficial, but it makes an important difference in the understanding of his art.

While making a study of Jonson's art, it is very important that a choice is made of the approach to be adopted for making that study. The reason for this necessity is that the scope of his art is too wide to be included in one continuous movement of the mind. Another reason for this necessity is that his conscious and determined reference to principle introduces inconsistencies and conflicts which are not there in the works of his contemporaries. We may explore his work, perhaps justly assessing the parts. We may also subject our imagination to each word we encounter in entire work in all variety of pattern and purpose. Looking at the spectrum of his work we come across the poet of the festive comedies, such as *Every Man in His Humour* and *Epicon*, or *the Silent Woman*. We then come across the poet of the jovial and virile observation of *Bartholomew Fair*, *The New Inn*, *The Staple of News*, *The Magnetic Lady*. And then we see that the poet of these two categories is not quite the same person as the humour theorist of *Every Man Out of His Humour*, of the sharper prologues and inductions. Nor is he the poet of the Donne - like and unexpected love songs. Nor is any of these the man in whom a *saeva indignation*, disciplined by that same subjection of fact to the true *virtue ordinate*, made of the satirist at one and at the same time a Roman like Juvenal and an Italian like Machiavelli.

And yet all these men are one man. We see him informing, by his spirit, all this variety of work. Poet, scholar, or satirist, it is the same Jonson, the discipliner of all that "sufflaminanda erant". He is the same critic of life and letters, driven perhaps into too great severity, both as critic and as poet, in his contempt for sensation and sentiment. He is the same rough talker with the touch of swagger, the man of infinite humility to his God and equal haughtiness to man. And when all this has been said not even half of Jonson has been described.

Ben Jonson's *Volpone, or The Fox*, is considered his most successful play, a masterpiece of moral satire, a sublimely simple and homogeneous work. It captures the mood of purposed evil. The compact flawlessness of the first four Acts is only equaled or surpassed in Jonson's age by his own two succeeding comedies. Moreover, there stirs in this play something that we hardly come across in Jonson's other works: The promise continually upon the verge of fulfilment, of that passionate obsession in the author with the figure of his own creating that is familiar to us in nearly all of his contemporaries, and is utterly akin to Jonson's detached moralists art. Ever and again about the figure of Volpone there moves, indefinable and unseizable, this sense of an imagination kindling, not to critical denunciation, but to oblivion of critical positions, to identifying of itself with the passion and the power of its own creation. To Ben Jonson, it is entirely impossible to allow this kind of passion, since Volpone was originally begotten of his moral satire. But also equally impossible for Jonson is to impoverish him, to strip away a certain magnificence of daring. This daring is Volpone's high insolence with which, unaware, he himself has fallen in love. When the moment comes, in the fifth act, to reverse and unmask Volpone, when he should have been driven into ignominous terms, we are suddenly made to realize what hold this magnificent insolence has laid upon the writer's imagination. Like Shakespeare's Falstaff in *Henry IV*, when the moment arrives for Volpone's dropping, he almost wrecks the play.

Mosca, Volpone's tricky servant, and perhaps Jonson himself, realizes rather too late, as does Shakespeare in *Henry IV*, that Volpone is no slave-minded craven whom he is blackmailing. Instead, the person is an aristocrat whose high spirit he has failed to gauge. With just one last terrific gesture, utterly unbecoming a comedy, in fact precipitating it into tragedy, Volpone pulls down disaster upon himself and his opponent alike: "I limmed this night-piece and it was my best." Thus, Volpone, the pride of Lodovico, himself dictates his last free gesture. And he withdraws, no way disabled in mind or spirit, a Venitian magnifico still. Never again did perhaps Jonson come so near feeling for a character of his own creation an admiration like the one, he gave to the two great contemporaries

whom he revered. One can safely say that the closing scenes of *Volpone* are his comment on the Jacobean ideal of an aristocrat, his characteristic variant of the theme "I am Duchess of Malfi still."

It may sound paradoxical, even perverse, but it is true that from the very opening lines of Volpone's slow-moving monologue, we are haunted by the splendour of the play, a splendour which is symbolized superficially by the gold and massive plate of the legacy-hunters. But this splendour finds its antitype in the depths below depths of evil into which the characters coldly and resolutely plunge. Cruel and ruthless as these characters are, they are intended by the dramatist to appear repulsive and contemptible. But the very solidity of the atmosphere of evil lends a greatness to their tenacity and their resolution. Ben Jonson penetrates, by the supreme power of his imagination, behind the melodramatic semblances with which tradition had invested the Machiavellian plotter. He expresses the cold concentration, the flawless courage of these evil characters, which was major quantity of the portrait Machiavelli drew. It is no surprise that *Volpone* rivals for posterity even *The Alchemist*. And to many critics, it seems the supreme reach of Ben Jonson's poetic power in moral satire. Here is an example of the power of that poetic satire presented in dramatic form :

*Good morning to the day; and, next, my gold;*  
*Open the shrine, that I may see my saint.*  
*Haile the worlds soule, and mine. More glad then is*  
*The teeming earthe to see the lang'd-for sunne*  
*Peep through the hornes of the celestial ram,*  
*Am I to view the splendour, darkening his:*  
*That, lying here, amongst my other hoords,*  
*Shew'st like a flame, by night; or like the day*  
*Strook out of chaos, when all darkness fled*  
*Unto the centre, O, thou sonne of SOL,*  
*(But brighter then thy father) let me kisse,*  
*With adoration, thee, and every relique*  
*Of sacred treasure, in this blessed roome.*  
*Well did wise Poets, by thy glorious name,*  
*Title that age, which they would have the best;*  
*Thou being the best of things: and far transcending*  
*All stile of joy, in children, parents, friends,*  
*Or any other waking dreame on earth.*  
*... Dear Saint,*  
*Riches, the dumb god, that giv'st all men tongues :*  
*That canst do nought, and yet mak'st men doe all things;*

*The price of soules; even hell, with thee to boot,  
Is made worth heaven! Thou art vertue, fame,  
Honour, and all things else! Who can get thee,  
He shall be noble, valiant, honest, wise.*

In *Volpone*, as well as in *The Alchemist*, and other great comedies of Jonson, he has noticed and analysed whatever his contemporaries depicted from the life of Jacobean London. In fact, quite often he has done it a little sooner than they did. His picture of contemporary life is so full, of thoughts, habits and discoveries of his age, that comparison immediately suggests itself with two of his contemporaries who rival him in breadth. These contemporaries are Middleton and Shakespeare. Like Middleton, Jonson comprehends in his picture most of the forms of life to be found in the London of Jacobean age. He distinguishes people's habits and processes. He reflects their background, their daily life, their eccentricities and the peculiarities of their gestures and speech. But Jonson does it all with this difference, that where Middleton only records, he records and criticizes or satirises simultaneously. Like Shakespeare, Jonson gathers up in his plays the findings of all contemporary exploration. But Jonson does it with this difference that, where Shakespeare transmutes all into an eternal and a universal expression, Jonson analyses all into a no less permanent, but far from universal, critical record. The material of Jonson's plays must remain, in the last event, a critical record of his times, unkindled as it is by passion. So far as the form and the structural technique are concerned, critics have recognised in Jonson a supreme and self-constituted artist. The spirit that animates the people whose movements make that form, remains, except for the singular case of *Volpone*, critical and highly undramatic.

#### **CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks**

1. *Volpone* satirizes human \_\_\_, particularly greed.
2. The name *Volpone* means “\_\_\_” in Italian.
3. At the end of the play, *Volpone* loses his \_\_\_.
4. Jonson delivers a clear moral lesson through the downfall of the \_\_\_.

#### **Answers**

1. vice	2. fox	3. wealth	4. deceivers
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When all is said, however, no one can fail to recognize that it is the conscious critical purpose of Ben Jonson as dramatist which constitutes a point of distinction between him and his contemporaries. All the dramatists of the age, including the greatest of all, Shakespeare, were artists by instinct, theatre-men by profession, and moralists, if at all, by fits and starts. As and when they outgrew the moralist, and they did quite often, their work was that of artists conforming naturally to the popular and professional demands upon their art. It is for this reason that their plays reflect clearly not only their own preoccupations but also the mood and temper of their age. In the case of Ben Jonson alone, it was the moral satirist rather than the professional dramatist, who always came first. This priority may be just by a short length, but it is always and unmistakably there. Not that Jonson was not a considerable artist; he decidedly was. But his peculiarity remained in the fact that his ethical principles predominated all the aspects of his art. These principles not only controlled the subject-matter of his art but, transmuted into aesthetic theories, controlled also its form.

We do not require the evidence of Jonson's poems and his masks to indicate how much of his considerable artistic instinct was suppressed and disciplined into other forms by his conscious moral and satiric purposes. We do not require this extra evidence because there is enough evidence of rebellion that was nearly successful in the transformation of his mood in *Volpone*. Some critics think that Jonson perhaps crippled himself as an artist by the moral imposition on his dramatic art. As an evidence to it they speak of his divided mind. At the same time, they concede, that his deeply divided mind is at least half concealed by the unified surface of purpose that is presented to us by his artistic compositions. Nevertheless, it is further argued, that it is this very fundamental division which is responsible for the reader's inability to conceive of his work as a whole. Whatever be at last the effect upon his ultimate achievement, one thing is decidedly certain that the severity of his aesthetic standard, coming as early in the Jacobean age as it did, was of an immense value in giving a standard of subject-matter, thought and structure to serious critical comedy.

Ben Jonson's contemporaries may have in the beginning disapproved of his theories. They may not have approved of his high-handed imposition of classical norms. But the effect of his practice came out indubitable. It does not mean that there was any considerable imitation of his comedy. In the case of his technique, the question of imitation would not even arise, for that would have been unprofitable in any case. But the strength and severity of his hard-knit drama had been demonstrated from the appearance of his very first comedy. Dramatists like Middleton, who were born with the natural instinct for easy, graceful plotting and were unencumbered by purposes ethical or aesthetic, evolved their own technique very much more readily than was Jonson able to do. But it has been considered arguable that, without the experience of Jonson's tougher texture, the *Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, and the grimmer comedy of Middleton would have been much less serious stuff, much less close-knit, and much less ironical.

Jonson's greatness as satiric poet is, therefore, incompletely reflected in his dramatic compositions. His is a greatness of character, not only, nor principally, of imagination, and much less of dramatic artistry. Like many people, he unconsciously characterized himself when he wrote of the man to whom his reference most naturally turned. What he said of Bacon can, in fact, be repeated of himself, albeit with some modifications :

*I have, and do reverence him for the greatness, that was only proper to himself, in that he seem'd to me ever, by his work one of the greatest men, and most worthy of admiration, that had been in many Ages. In his adversity I ever prayed, that God would give him strength: for Greatness he could not want. Neither could I condole in a word, or syllable for him; as knowing no Accident could do harm to virtue; but rather help to make it manifest.*

The peculiar virtue attributed here to Bacon was shared by Jonson himself. Jonson's most savage comedy *Volpone*, shows his virtue as a moral satirist. Despite its Italian title and majority of characters, it does not seek to reduce men to beasts or mere concepts. Its virtuous characters, Celia and Bonario, who respectively represent Heavenly and Good, may act like ciphers and may mouth moral platitudes, but they do leave us wondering how else uprightness might express itself in such a singularly naughty world. The Venice of *Volpone* is anything but serene. Its merchants are unscrupulous and self-seeking, its husbands mercenary and violent, its lawyers mendacious and corrupt, and visitors to it mistake its dissimulation for sophistication.

Jonson, who was much given to declarations and manifestos of literary intent, insisted that comedy had been considered by the Greeks to be equal in dignity to tragedy. Comic dramatists, he added, were held to be

moral instructors "no less than the Tragicks ." His complaint was that the modern (of his time) theatre-goers had consistently failed to grasp the point that "the moving of laughter" was not essential to comedy, whereas "equity, truth, perspicuity, and candour" were. His prologue to the second version ( that is with characters of English names) of *Every Man in His Humour*, equally represents an attempt to define the qualities of his own dramas in the face of debased popular taste. He claims to hate the kind of play that makes "a child now sawdled, to proceed Man, and then shoot up, in one beard and weed, / past three score years", and that which "with three rusty swords" re-enacts "York and Lancaster's long jars". His plays will have no apologetic choruses, no scenic effects, and no ominous noises off. They will rather employ

... deeds and language, such as men do use,  
And persons, such as comedy would choose,  
When she would show an image of the times,  
And sport with human follies not with crimes.  
Except we make them such, by loving still  
Our popular errors, when we know they're ill.  
I mean such errors as you'll all confess,  
By laughing at them, they deserve no less...

This clearly announces the advent of a theatrical new age, an age which will dispose of artifice and substitute plain words, one which will subvert rather than confront, one which will allow that drama can represent a shared and deficient humanity rather than elevate and isolate the tragic hero.

As indicated at the earliest in his "English" version of *Every Man in His Humour*; drama, for Jonson, was more than simply sport with human folly. It was, to him, a precise study of the kind of whimsical excess which disturb the steady and reasoned development of human affairs. Excess also determines the nature of Jonson's most subtle, various and energetic comedies, *Volpone*, *Epicene or The Silent Woman*, and *The Alchemist*. In the world of *Volpone*, gold is said to overturn the metaphors of pagan legend and Christian Scripture alike. It usurps splendours of nature and the joys of love, and even renders hell "with thee to boot" worth heaven. At last, the Venetian justice prevails. The moral satire overtly controls the play's structure. The interest remains sharply focused on the nature of follies, their respective debasing effects, and their appropriate punishments.

#### 18.4 LET US SUM UP

*Volpone*, disguised as a didactic comedy, is actually an intelligent and cynical satire that compels the audience to rethink their moral expectations. It is a play that takes on the form of a comical satire as well as a mortality play. It also adapts the features of a fable, and in that it strives to teach a moral.

#### 18.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss *Volpone* as a moral fable.
2. Evaluate *Volpone* as a comical satire.
3. Examine *Volpone* as a cynical satire.

## 18.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Which term best describes Ben Jonson's writing style in "Volpone," characterized by its use of witty wordplay, puns, and satirical humor?
  - a) Romantic
  - b) Realistic
  - c) Baroque
  - d) Classical
2. In "Volpone," Ben Jonson often employs the use of \_\_\_\_\_, where characters speak directly to the audience to reveal their inner thoughts and intentions.
  - a) Soliloquies
  - b) Monologues
  - c) Asides
  - d) Dialogues
3. What is the primary meter used by Ben Jonson in "Volpone" for his verse lines?
  - a) Iambic pentameter
  - b) Trochaic tetrameter
  - c) Anapestic hexameter
  - d) Blank verse
4. One of Ben Jonson's techniques in "Volpone" is the creation of morally flawed characters who serve as targets of satire. Which term is commonly used to describe such characters?
  - a) Antiheroes
  - b) Protagonists
  - c) Heroes
  - d) Idealists
5. In "Volpone," Ben Jonson employs the technique of \_\_\_\_\_, which involves the use of humor to criticize and expose the follies and vices of society.
  - a) Farce
  - b) Parody
  - c) Satire
  - d) Tragedy

6. Ben Jonson uses \_\_\_\_\_ to create humor by emphasizing the ridiculous and exaggerated aspects of his characters' flaws and personalities.

- Irony
- Hyperbole
- Allusion
- Foreshadowing

7. Which of the following best characterizes Ben Jonson's approach to language and dialogue in "Volpone"?

- Simplistic and direct
- Flowery and ornate
- Economical and precise
- Philosophical and abstract

8. Ben Jonson's use of intricate wordplay and clever linguistic devices in "Volpone" is reflective of his background as a:

- Novelist
- Playwright
- Poet
- Historian

9. In "Volpone," Ben Jonson uses \_\_\_\_\_, a literary device in which characters are given names that reflect their traits or roles in the play.

- Alliteration
- Symbolism
- Allegory
- Onomatopoeia

10. Ben Jonson's writing in "Volpone" is often associated with \_\_\_\_\_, which emphasizes the importance of reason, order, and balance in literature.

- Romanticism
- Realism
- Classicism
- Surrealism

**Answers:**

- c) Baroque
- c) Asides

3. a) Iambic pentameter
4. a) Antiheroes
5. c) Satire
6. b) Hyperbole
7. c) Economical and precise
8. c) Poet
9. b) Symbolism
10. c) Classicism

### **18.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- Karim, Sajjadul. “Ben Jonson’s *Volpone* : An Unconventional and Innovative Jacobean Comedy.” *IIUC Studies* 8 : (2011), and 27.38.
- Bay, Lynn. Ben Jonson’s “*Volpone*” - Satire?” Seminar Paper. Google Books 2009. <http://books.google.co.in/books?isbn=3656759065>

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## **JONSON'S STYLE AND TECHNIQUE**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 19.3 Jonson's Style and Technique
- 19.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.5 Examination Oriented Questions
- 19.6 Suggested Readings

#### **19.1 INTRODUCTION**

Ben Jonson's style and technique as a dramatist has been a subject of continuous debate among critics. Although most of his contemporaries are conveniently defined, in terms of their dramatic style and technique, as Elizabethan or Jacobean, he remains a difficult proposition when it comes to putting a classified critical jacket on him. Just as he was in his body, so did he emerge in his work, too huge to wear any classified jacket. Being the most learned among his contemporaries, he did not, without giving a long thought, take to the conventions and practices popular in the theatre of his times. His reputation as a learned poet and dramatist had come up quite early. In the same century in which Jonson wrote, we find John Dryden, the leading dramatist of the later seventeenth century called the Restoration period, making the following comments: "As for Jonson, ...I think him the most learned and judicious writer which any theatre ever had.... He was deeply conversant in the Ancients, both Greek and Latin and he borrowed boldly from them.... If I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare." With his vast vision and plasticity of technique, Shakespeare adopted the popular dramatic tradition of his time. He produced a poetic drama which was not indebted to any classical source for its correctness. In his hands, drama developed, out of the pressure of its own vitality, its own kind of form and unity. Shakespeare's style and technique in his plays are characteristically English. There is nothing foreign about them. The same cannot, however, he said about the style and technique of Jonson's plays.

#### **19.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES**

##### **Objectives**

Learners will:

1. Explore Jonson's use of classical form, unity, and control in drama.

2. Identify elements of his language style, including wit, precision, and irony.
3. Examine his technique of character creation, structure, and moral satire.

## Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Describe Jonson's adherence to classical unities of time, place, and action.
2. Analyze his satirical tone and use of dramatic irony.
3. Evaluate his character development through exaggeration and social observation.

### 19.3 JONSON'S STYLE AND TECHNIQUE

Known for his vast learning and wide interest in classical literature of ancient Greece and Italy, Jonson approached his dramatic art from quite a different point of view. With him, the theory of drama came first, its practice later. He knew in advance what the function of comedy was, and what sort of humour was proper to it. He knew the rules of dramatic structure and he understood what the principle of decorum meant. He knew how the principle of three unities was essential for a dramatic plot. He knew all there was to know about the ancient classical theory of drama and its practice by the great masters. Similarly, when he wrote plays based on Roman history, he knew what Roman sources to consult and which phases of Roman life to refer to. Thus, he was, unlike Shakespeare, imitative, pedantic, and supremely self-confident in his learned art. Jonson is the one great example in English of the Renaissance humanist, in the narrowest sense of that term, who turned poet and dramatist.

If Ben Jonson were only an imitator of the classical dramatic style and technique, he would have been remembered more as a literary curiosity than as a great literary figure. But he was also a rugged Englishman with a sardonic taste for the varied and colourful London life of his day. He also had a boisterous and even a cruel sense of humour which manifested itself in his best comedies with a bizarre brilliance. He showed enormous vitality and impressive originality even when he followed most closely the classical models or applied rules derived from classical theory or practice. In addition to all this, Jonson also had the quality which is not often associated with those already mentioned. He had, that is, a delicate artfulness in the handling of such elements of style as word and image. This ability enabled him to produce, as part of his dramatic style, as well as of non-dramatic poetry, such well - remembered examples of perfect verbal patterning as "Drink to me only with thine eyes," "Slow, slow fresh fount," and "Queen and huntress, chaste and fair."

Thus, the contrast between Jonson and Shakespeare is not a simple one, between the Renaissance humanist obsessed by classical rule and precedent and the "natural genius" inventing his own style of writing with the help of a popular tradition. Jonson's sardonic view of human nature owed nothing to his classical sources. Similarly, his lyrical gift, even though it was partly stimulated by classical epigram and the Greek Anthology, reflected an important aspect of his not altogether classical personality. In the latter part of his career, Jonson was the leader of an important literary group and, in fact, something of a literary dictator. He was actually the first significant example of the species in English literature. Although time has established the superiority of Shakespeare over Jonson in the art of drama, it was not so clear to the critics and playgoers of the Elizabethan age. Jonson had a claim on literary men that Shakespeare did not have. He had the ability or arrogance to bully critics into

admiration by the force of his literary claims and the supreme self-confidence in pressing them. It took long time in England to develop a critical theory adequate enough to cope with the richness and subtlety of Shakespeare's dramatic style. In the case of Jonson, there was no such difficulty. His dramatic style could be proved good by the available critical apparatus derived from the classical sources.

In his *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy* (1688), Dryden provided a model analysis of a Jonson play, *Epicoene or The Silent Woman*. "I will take the pattern of a perfect play form Ben Jonson, who was a careful and learned observer of the dramatic laws." It was not possible to analyse a Shakespeare play in this fashion, because he drew upon the images of nature "not laboriously, but luckily." In Dryden's view, "he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards, and found her there." Jonson was thus, more respected in the seventeenth century because his dramatic style was based on those very principles that provided the norm for critical analysis.

Jonson's very first successful play, *Every Man in His Humour*, gives a fairly good idea of his dramatic style and technique. It is a comedy of intrigue which owes much to the Roman comedy. But it is also highly original so far as its tone and manner are concerned. His intention to present a satiric picture of his age is quite clear. His style marked by cool irony comes handy for making an exposure of the contemporary human follies and foibles. As he declares, his dramatic style was that of a realist. In his Prologue to the play, he attacks both the themes and the conventions of contemporary drama. He holds his own style superior to the popular dramatic style of his contemporaries, including Shakespeare. As he insists, he would not "serve the ill customs of his age." The following excerpt from the Prologue clearly explains the style and technique Jonson devised for his satirical comedy modeled on the classical precedent of the Graeco-Roman tradition:

*To make a child, now swaddled, to proceed  
Man, and then shoot up, in one beard, and weed,  
Past threescore years: or, with three rusty swords,  
Fight over York and Lancaster's long jars,  
And in the tiring house bring wounds to scars.  
He rather prays, you will be pleased to see  
One such today as other plays should be,  
Where neither chorus wafts you o'er the seas,  
Nor creaking throne comes down, the boys to please,  
Nor nimble squib is seen, to make afeard.  
The gentlewomen, nor rolled bullet heard  
To say, it thunders, nor tempestuous drum  
Rumbles, to tell you when the storm doth come;  
But deeds and languages such as men do use,  
And persons such as comedy would choose*

*When she would show an image of the times  
And sport with human follies, not with crimes.*

This amply elucidates Jonson's realistic dramatic style, which uses the language, people actually speak, which depicts people and places from familiar everyday life, and which dwells on common human follies rather than uncommon events that occur on unknown islands. Decidedly, this is the language of a conscious reformer of the theatre. In his view, his style of dramatic writing is both artistically better and morally superior compared to what was being produced on the popular stage in his time. In technique also, he was to be a more correct dramatist, more contemporary in theme, and more improving in effect.

The function of comedy, in the classical style of Ben Jonson, was to reprove human foibles by holding them up to ridicule. He adapted the old explanation of human character by the four humours to develop "comedy of humours," a comedy, that is, in which each character is seen to be dominated, even obsessed, by on particular quirk. The effectiveness of Jonson's dramatic style lies in its component of satire. It is through the power of satire that he intended to improve the moral health of contemporary England. His zeal for moral improvement was so strong that he did not mind being brutal and ruthless in his satire on social shams. As he himself declared,

*... I will scourge those apes  
And to these courteous eyes oppose a mirror,  
As large as is the stage whereon we act,  
Where they shall see the time's deformity  
Anatomized in every nerve and sinew  
With constant courage, and contempt of fear.*

Jonson never realized that his theory of humours was at cross purposes with his dramatic philosophy of realism. A character made to represent a humour is bound to be a caricature. It can never be presented as a fully realized human being. It will remain as a fop, a blusterer, a jealous husband, and anxious father, an uncouth country cousin aping city manners, a hypocritical Puritan, or some other type. A type meant to represent a humour is seldom an individual character, a specific human being. He is too general to be a particular. Such characters are, for sure, not life-like. They will serve the purpose of underlining a social or moral oddity in human character or creating comedy. They will also serve the purpose of satire, lending themselves easily to the satirist's ironic treatment. They would serve all these purposes, but they would never become the real people we come across and converse with. An element of the puppet will always be there in such a characterization. Thus, in Jonson's style, comedy becomes satire, character becomes oddity, evil becomes culpable folly.

There is humour enough in Jonson's comedy. He presents his obsessed characters with wit, very much a component of his style. There is also in this style liveliness of comic extravagance, even cleverly manipulated absurdity. At times, comedy in the hands of Jonson degenerates into farce - low comedy. It is however, splendid farce, which deals with ridiculous situations merely, but with ridiculous situations as they arise from ridiculous elements in human nature. In some respects, this aspect of Jonson's style is Dickensian. But the big difference is that when Dickens laughs, the overtones are humanitarian. On the other hand, Jonson's laughter is sterner. Behind his laughter there always is felt his own enormous self-confidence, which at times rises to arrogance.

### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. Jonson followed the classical unities of time, place, and \_\_\_\_.
2. His language is marked by economy, precision, and \_\_\_\_.
3. Jonson's plays are often structured around a strong central \_\_\_\_ or idea.
4. He preferred moral clarity and order, unlike Shakespeare's complex \_\_\_\_.

### Answers

1. action	2. wit
3. theme	4. ambiguity / psychology (accept either)

Although for a time distracted from his standardized style of satirical comedy, involved as he had become in the war of theatres going on in his time, Jonson soon returned to his favourite type of work and wrote *Volpone*, or *The Fox*. His distraction into controversial writing had confined his satirical talent. Now it came into play once again. His didactic style, demanding moral enforcement by striking at the opposite of each moral represented by one or another character of humour, took charge again. One direct consequence of Jonson's commitment to moral satire was to undermine the role of incident in his comedy. Instead, there emerged in his kind of satirical comedy greater reliance on dialogue. Whatever action there is in his comedy, it is in the nature of intrigue often leading to farcical scenes, such as Volpone's tricking of Celia into submission. Volpone does not succeed, for in Jonson no trick is allowed to reach a quick conclusion, there always is a surprise knock at the door. Thus, characters come and go to thwart an intrigue or to initiate a new one. And the characters are exposed of their respective follies as much through dialogue as through their intrigues. Since, the entire force of his comedy depends on the encounters among characters, dialogue has to carry the entire burden of the comedy.

Jonson's merit as a dramatist, therefore, does not rest with the invention of incident, or landscape, but with the power of dialogue. He makes it powerful by making use of rhetorical devices. He remains among his contemporaries a master of dramatic rhetoric. Rhetoric meant much more to the Elizabethans than it means to us today. Jonson employed poetic dialogue to create irony, the power of which is directly proportionate to its rhetorical elaboration. In *Volpone*, for example, what is said is not so much important as the manner of saying it. When Mosca uses formal and elevated language to praise the unworthy, the effect of this rhetorical embellishment is ironic. Also, Mosca's agility in employing ambiguities for persuasion is a highly developed rhetorical skill. In short, Jonson's style enriches the meaning of the dramatic situation. Viewed alone, the speeches of Volpone are stripped of their power. Only in relation to the action of the play can the audience hope to realize their literary value.

Jonson's satire is not limited to hitting at moral failings alone; it also hits at literary failings as well. Along with the devices of irony and ambiguity, therefore, the stylistic device of allusion, even in the form of parody, remains a powerful weapon of Jonsonian comedy. Parodying or burlesquing goes on side by side with ridiculing and exposing. Very early in *Volpone*, for instance, the interlude performed by the household fools of Volpone,

namely the eunuch, dwarf and fool, is a parody of the king of comic relief injected between the Acts of a morality play. Jonson devises his dialogue as an imitation of the false pace of such verse, at the same time demonstrating his own command of the past literature. He takes the opportunity to show his contempt also for the policies of the Puritans by arguing for the Pythagorean rule over that of reformed religion. At the end of the show, the fools suggest that it is best to suffer neither rule. As Mosca's song indicates, the fool's condition is the best:

*Fools they are the only nation  
Worth men's envy or admiration,  
.....  
E'en his face begetheth laughter,  
And he speaks truth free from slaughter.*

Since, the Fool lives outside the social order, he can speak the truth because he is not held responsible for what he says. Mosca has deliberately chosen for himself the status of a fool.

Ben Jonson being a man of classical learning as well as an accomplished man of the theatre, he deliberately satirizes here the poor professional players of the traveling morality drama. It gives him a chance to show his theatrical superiority. Here is a highbrow dramatist ridiculing the pedestrian practices of his age. His larding of the dialogue of the present interlude with Greek names serves to show his familiarity with the classics. Thus, allusion becomes a powerful weapon of the privileged. He uses it to browbeat his rival practitioners.

Jonson's theatrical or dramatic technique is highly dependent on costumes and animal names, both of which contribute to the success of his comedy. For instance, the leading character in the play is named Volpone, which in Italian means a fox. Other characters in the play are also named after birds or animals. In the tradition of the beast fable, the name Voltore characterizes the gull (vulture) as a bird of prey. The vulture hovers outside the room of the fox in the play waiting for his victim to die. Thus, Jonson builds an atmosphere of the play through the very names of his characters. He introduces us to his two leading characters and sets up the circumstances of their mischievous ruse. At the same time, he is able to mock players, Puritans, and the people in general who throng the house of Volpone to be gulled. Here, the successful theatrical technique of Jonson also requires elaborate use of costumes. For example, *Volpone* dresses in a elaborate invalid's costume in preparation for Voltore's entrance. All such byplays in Volpone are always made possible by the use of costumes. The names from the beast fables are also meant to induct the sting of satire, which for its success require us to visualize the scenes from the fables.

Use of mimicry in performance and of hyperbole in poetic dialogue are also powerful devices of Jonson's technique and style of his comedy. For instance, Corbaccio, as the name suggests, is an old crow ready to die, living only on carrion. He is not as fearsome a bird of prey as the vulture. So Mosca, the gadfly, is bolder in his presence. This is made evident by two pieces of visual "business". In mimic fashion, Mosca illustrates Volpone's death throes on Corbaccio's face. Again, Mosca employs Corbaccio's hearing defect to mock his infirmity. The actor's facial expression and vocal tone belie the meaning of his rhetoric.

Hyperbole is another device of rhetoric which Jonson makes full use of for achieving dramatic effects. He does not make the usual ornamental use of the device. He makes it highly functional in his dramatic technique. Mosca is the master of hyperbole in the play. His use of the device has special ironic power. For instance, he exaggerates Volpone's condition of ill health, but not Corbaccio's present state of health. The device enriches the meaning and effect of the dramatic situation. The hyperbolic intensity of the play's rhetorical style increases as the plot complications become more involved. Another instance of irony and satire working through mimicry and parody is Volpone's sales talk in Act II. The dialogue in blank verse at the occasion changes to epigram during the mountebank's pitch. Volpone's sales talk is purposeful and pragmatic. Mosca's presence during Volpone's oratory is important. Though he has not a line, it is he who has engineered the scene and performance and knows which is Celia's window. He is the device who focuses Volpone's and our attention on her presence in the window. Here, Jonson's rhetoric for Scoto has all the enchantment associated with carnival barkers. The irony of the hyperbolic language is in the dramatic situation. Thus, Volpone and Mosca both have to perform so many roles within the play, and all are made successful by Jonson's power of style and technique.

#### 19.4 LET US SUM UP

Ben Jonson was an early modern playwright whose popularity rivaled that of Shakespeare or Marlowe. Jonson's comic style remains constant and easily recognisable throughout his plays. Whether it is *Every Man in His Humour* or *Volpone* or *The Fox* or *The Alchemist*. Volpone is most like the characteristic 'City Comedies' of Jacobean London in the vigorous fluency of its language. According to Swinebure, "There is in *Volpone* a touch of something like imagination, a savour of something like romance, which gives a higher tone to the style and a deeper interest to the action [than in *The Alchemist*]. The style of Ben Jonson is high. The entire play is written in blank verse.

#### 19.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the significance of Sir Politic-Peregrine sub-plot.
2. What is the significance of animal names in *Volpone*?
3. Discuss Jonson's style and its role in creating comedy.
4. Discuss *Volpone* as a moral satire.
5. Examine the role of small costumes in *Volpone*.

#### 19.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

- L. C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (1937)
- E. W. Talbert, *New Light on Ben Jonson's Workmanship* (1943)
- H. W. Baun, *The Satire and The Didactic in Ben Jonson's Comedies* (1947)
- A. H. Sackton, *Rhetoric as a Dramatic Language in Ben Jonson* (1948).
- J. J. Enck, *Jonson and The Comic Truth* (1957)

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## PLOT DISCUSSION

### STRUCTURE

- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 20.3 Brief Summary of *The Tempest*
  - 20.3.1 Act I, Scene I
  - 20.3.2 Act I, scene II (part 1)
  - 20.3.3 Act I, scene II (part 2)
  - 20.3.4 Act II, scene I
  - 20.3.5 Act II, scene II
  - 20.3.6 Act III, scene I
  - 20.3.7 Act III, scene II
  - 20.3.8 Act III, scene III
  - 20.3.9 Act IV, scene I
  - 20.3.10 Act V, scene I & Epilogue
- 20.4 Themes
- 20.5 Examination Oriented Questions
- 20.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 20.7 Suggested Readings

### 20.1 INTRODUCTION

*The Tempest* is a play by William Shakespeare, probably written in 1610–1611, and thought to be one of the last plays that he wrote alone. After the first scene, which takes place on a ship at sea during a tempest, the rest of the story is set on a remote island, where Prospero, a complex and contradictory character, lives with his daughter Miranda, and his two servants: Caliban, a savage monster figure, and Ariel, an airy spirit. The play contains music and songs that evoke the spirit of enchantment on the island. It explores many themes, including magic, betrayal, revenge, and family.

In Act IV, a wedding masque serves as a play-within-a-play, and contributes spectacle, allegory, and elevated language.

Although *The Tempest* is listed in the First Folio as the first of Shakespeare's comedies, it deals with both tragic and comic themes, and modern criticism has created a category of romance for this and others of Shakespeare's late plays. *The Tempest* has been put to varied interpretations, from those that see it as a fable of art and creation, with Prospero representing Shakespeare, and Prospero's renunciation of magic signalling Shakespeare's farewell to the stage, to interpretations that consider it an allegory of Europeans colonizing foreign lands.

## 20.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

### Objectives

Students will:

1. Understand the key events and characters in the plot of *The Tempest*.
2. Identify and analyze the major themes of the play, such as power, revenge, forgiveness, and magic.
3. Recognize how the island setting influences the action and themes.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Summarize the plot of *The Tempest* and describe the role of major characters.
2. Explain the significance of central themes, including colonialism, illusion vs. reality, and reconciliation.
3. Discuss how Prospero's magical control shapes the narrative and moral arc.

## 20.3 BRIEF SUMMARY OF *THE TEMPEST*

A storm strikes a ship carrying Alonso, Ferdinand, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, Stephano, and Trinculo, who are on their way to Italy after coming from the wedding of Alonso's daughter, Claribel, to the prince of Tunis in Africa. The royal party and the other mariners, with the exception of the unflappable Boatswain, begin to fear for their lives. Lightning cracks, and the mariners cry that the ship has been hit. Everyone prepares to sink.

The next scene begins much more quietly. Miranda and Prospero stand on the shore of their island, looking out to sea at the recent shipwreck. Miranda asks her father to do anything he can to help the poor souls in the ship. Prospero assures her that everything is all right and then informs her that it is time she learned more about herself and her past. He reveals to her that he orchestrated the shipwreck and tells her the lengthy story of her past, a story he has often started to tell her before but never finished. The story goes that Prospero was the Duke of Milan until his brother Antonio, conspiring with Alonso, the King of Naples, usurped his position. Kidnapped and left to die on a raft at sea, Prospero and his daughter survive because Gonzalo leaves them supplies and Prospero's books, which are the source of his magic and power. Prospero and his daughter arrived on the island where they remain now and have been for twelve years. Only now, Prospero says, has Fortune at last sent his enemies his way, and he has raised the tempest in order to make things right with them once and for all.

After telling this story, Prospero charms Miranda to sleep and then calls forth his familiar spirit Ariel, his chief magical agent. Prospero and Ariel's discussion reveals that Ariel brought the tempest upon the ship and set fire to the mast. He then made sure that everyone got safely to the island, though they are now separated from each other into small groups. Ariel, who is a captive servant to Prospero, reminds his master that he has promised Ariel freedom a year early if he performs tasks such as these without complaint. Prospero chastises Ariel for protesting and reminds him of the horrible fate from which he was rescued. Before Prospero came to the island, a witch named Sycorax imprisoned Ariel in a tree. Sycorax died, leaving Ariel trapped until Prospero arrived and freed him. After Ariel assures Prospero that he knows his place, Prospero orders Ariel to take the shape of a sea nymph and make himself invisible to all but Prospero.

Miranda awakens from her sleep, and she and Prospero go to visit Caliban, Prospero's servant and the son of the dead Sycorax. Caliban curses Prospero, and Prospero and Miranda berate him for being ungrateful for what they have given and taught him. Prospero sends Caliban to fetch firewood. Ariel, invisible, enters playing music and leading in the awed Ferdinand. Miranda and Ferdinand are immediately smitten with each other. He is the only man Miranda has ever seen, besides Caliban and her father. Prospero is happy to see that his plan for his daughter's future marriage is working, but decides that he must upset things temporarily in order to prevent their relationship from developing too quickly. He accuses Ferdinand of merely pretending to be the Prince of Naples and threatens him with imprisonment. When Ferdinand draws his sword, Prospero charms him and leads him off to prison, ignoring Miranda's cries for mercy. He then sends Ariel on another mysterious mission.

On another part of the island, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and other miscellaneous lords give thanks for their safety but worry about the fate of Ferdinand. Alonso says that he wishes he never had married his daughter to the prince of Tunis because if he had not made this journey, his son would still be alive. Gonzalo tries to maintain high spirits by discussing the beauty of the island, but his remarks are undercut by the sarcastic sourness of Antonio and Sebastian. Ariel appears, invisible, and plays music that puts all but Sebastian and Antonio to sleep. These two then begin to discuss the possible advantages of killing their sleeping companions. Antonio persuades Sebastian that the latter will become ruler of Naples if they kill Alonso. Claribel, who would be the next heir if Ferdinand were indeed dead, is too far away to be able to claim her right. Sebastian is convinced, and the two are about to stab the sleeping men when Ariel causes Gonzalo to wake with a shout. Everyone wakes up, and Antonio and Sebastian concoct a ridiculous story about having drawn their swords to protect the king from lions. Ariel goes back to Prospero while Alonso and his party continue to search for Ferdinand.

Caliban, meanwhile, is hauling wood for Prospero when he sees Trinculo and thinks he is a spirit sent by Prospero to torment him. He lies down and hides under his cloak. A storm is brewing, and Trinculo, curious about but undeterred by Caliban's strange appearance and smell, crawls under the cloak with him. Stephano, drunk and singing, comes along and stumbles upon the bizarre spectacle of Caliban and Trinculo huddled under the cloak. Caliban, hearing the singing, cries out that he will work faster so long as the "spirits" leave him alone. Stephano decides that this monster requires liquor and attempts to get Caliban to drink. Trinculo recognizes his friend Stephano and calls out to him. Soon the three are sitting up together and drinking. Caliban quickly becomes an enthusiastic drinker, and begins to sing.

Prospero puts Ferdinand to work hauling wood. Ferdinand finds his labor pleasant because it is for Miranda's sake. Miranda, thinking that her father is asleep, tells Ferdinand to take a break. The two flirt with one another. Miranda proposes marriage, and Ferdinand accepts. Prospero has been on stage most of the time, unseen, and he is pleased with this development.

Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban are now drunk and raucous and are made all the more so by Ariel, who comes to them invisibly and provokes them to fight with one another by impersonating their voices and taunting them. Caliban grows more and more fervent in his boasts that he knows how to kill Prospero. He even tells Stephano that he can bring him to where Prospero is sleeping. He proposes that they kill Prospero, take his daughter, and set Stephano up as king of the island. Stephano thinks this a good plan, and the three prepare to set off to find Prospero. They are distracted, however, by the sound of music that Ariel plays on his flute and tabor-drum, and they decide to follow this music before executing their plot.

Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Antonio grow weary from traveling and pause to rest. Antonio and Sebastian secretly plot to take advantage of Alonso and Gonzalo's exhaustion, deciding to kill them in the evening. Prospero, probably on the balcony of the stage and invisible to the men, causes a banquet to be set out by strangely shaped spirits. As the men prepare to eat, Ariel appears like a harpy and causes the banquet to vanish. He then accuses the men of supplanting Prospero and says that it was for this sin that Alonso's son, Ferdinand, has been taken. He vanishes, leaving Alonso feeling vexed and guilty.

Prospero now softens toward Ferdinand and welcomes him into his family as the soon-to-be-husband of Miranda. He sternly reminds Ferdinand, however, that Miranda's "virgin-knot" (IV.i.15) is not to be broken until the wedding has been officially solemnized. Prospero then asks Ariel to call forth some spirits to perform a masque for Ferdinand and Miranda. The spirits assume the shapes of Ceres, Juno, and Iris and perform a short masque celebrating the rites of marriage and the bounty of the earth. A dance of reapers and nymphs follows but is interrupted when Prospero suddenly remembers that he still must stop the plot against his life.

He sends the spirits away and asks Ariel about Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban. Ariel tells his master of the three men's drunken plans. He also tells how he led the men with his music through prickly grass and briars and finally into a filthy pond near Prospero's cell. Ariel and Prospero then set a trap by hanging beautiful clothing in Prospero's cell. Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban enter looking for Prospero and, finding the beautiful clothing, decide to steal it. They are immediately set upon by a pack of spirits in the shape of dogs and hounds, driven on by Prospero and Ariel.

Prospero uses Ariel to bring Alonso and the others before him. He then sends Ariel to bring the Boatswain and the mariners from where they sleep on the wrecked ship. Prospero confronts Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian with their treachery, but tells them that he forgives them. Alonso tells him of having lost Ferdinand in the tempest and Prospero says that he recently lost his own daughter. Clarifying his meaning, he draws aside a curtain to reveal Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess. Alonso and his companions are amazed by the miracle of Ferdinand's survival, and Miranda is stunned by the sight of people unlike any she has seen before. Ferdinand tells his father about his marriage.

Ariel returns with the Boatswain and mariners. The Boatswain tells a story of having been awakened from a sleep that had apparently lasted since the tempest. At Prospero's bidding, Ariel releases Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano, who then enter wearing their stolen clothing. Prospero and Alonso command them to return it and to clean up Prospero's cell. Prospero invites Alonso and the others to stay for the night so that he can tell them the tale of his life in the past twelve years. After this, the group plans to return to Italy. Prospero, restored to his dukedom, will retire to Milan. Prospero gives Ariel one final task—to make sure the seas are calm for the return voyage—before setting him free. Finally, Prospero delivers an epilogue to the audience, asking them to forgive him for his wrongdoing and set him free by applauding.

### 20.3.1 Detailed summary and Analysis

#### Summary: Act I, scene I

A violent storm rages around a small ship at sea. The master of the ship calls for his boatswain to rouse the mariners to action and prevent the ship from being run aground by the tempest. Chaos ensues. Some mariners enter, followed by a group of nobles comprised of Alonso, King of Naples, Sebastian, his brother, Antonio, Gonzalo, and others. We do not learn these men's names in this scene, nor do we learn (as we finally do in Act II, scene i) that they have just come from Tunis, in Africa, where Alonso's daughter, Claribel, has been married to the prince. As the Boatswain and his crew take in the topsail and the topmast, Alonso and his party are merely underfoot, and the Boatswain tells them to get below-decks. Gonzalo reminds the Boatswain that one of the passengers is of some importance, but the Boatswain is unmoved. He will do what he has to in order to save the ship, regardless of who is aboard.

The lords go belowdecks, and then, adding to the chaos of the scene, three of them—Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo—enter again only four lines later. Sebastian and Antonio curse the Boatswain in his labors, masking their fear with profanity. Some mariners enter wet and crying, and only at this point does the audience learn the identity of the passengers on-board. Gonzalo orders the mariners to pray for the king and the prince. There is a strange noise—perhaps the sound of thunder, splitting wood, or roaring water—and the cry of mariners. Antonio, Sebastian, and Gonzalo, preparing to sink to a watery grave, go in search of the king.

#### Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. Prospero was the rightful Duke of \_\_\_ before being exiled.
2. The play opens with a violent \_\_\_ at sea.
3. One of the central themes in the play is \_\_\_ and forgiveness.
4. Caliban is portrayed as a native of the \_\_\_.

#### Answers

1. Milan
2. storm
3. reconciliation
4. island

### 20.3.2 Act I, scene II (part 1)

Prospero and Miranda stand on the shore of the island, having just witnessed the shipwreck. Miranda entreats her father to see that no one on board comes to any harm. Prospero assures her that no one was harmed and tells her that it's time she learned who she is and where she comes from. Miranda seems curious, noting that Prospero has often started to tell her about herself but always stopped. However, once Prospero begins telling his tale, he asks her three times if she is listening to him.

Prospero tells Miranda that he was once Duke of Milan and famous for his great intelligence. Prospero explains that he gradually grew uninterested in politics, however, and turned his attention more and more to his studies, neglecting his duties as duke. This gave his brother Antonio an opportunity to act on his ambition. Working in concert with the King of Naples, Antonio usurped Prospero of his dukedom. Antonio arranged for the King

of Naples to pay him an annual tribute and do him homage as duke. Later, the King of Naples helped Antonio raise an army to march on Milan, driving Prospero out. Prospero tells how he and Miranda escaped from death at the hands of the army in a barely-seaworthy boat prepared for them by his loyal subjects. Gonzalo, an honest Neapolitan, provided them with food and clothing, as well as books from Prospero's library. Having brought Miranda up to date on how she arrived at their current home, Prospero explains that sheer good luck has brought his former enemies to the island. Miranda suddenly grows very sleepy, perhaps because Prospero charms her with his magic.

When Miranda is asleep, Prospero calls forth his spirit, Ariel. In his conversation with Ariel, we learn that Prospero and the spirit were responsible for the storm of Act I, scene i. Flying about the ship, Ariel acted as the wind, the thunder, and the lightning. When everyone except the crew had abandoned the ship, Ariel made sure, as Prospero had requested, that all were brought safely to shore but dispersed around the island. Ariel reports that the king's son is alone. He also tells Prospero that the mariners and Boatswain have been charmed to sleep in the ship, which has been brought safely to harbor. The rest of the fleet that was with the ship, believing it to have been destroyed by the storm, has headed safely back to Naples.

Prospero thanks Ariel for his service, and Ariel takes this moment to remind Prospero of his promise to take one year off of his agreed time of servitude if Ariel performs his services without complaint. Prospero does not take well to being reminded of his promises, and he chastises Ariel for his impudence. He reminds Ariel of where he came from and how Prospero rescued him. Ariel had been a servant of Sycorax, a witch banished from Algiers (Algeria) and sent to the island long ago. Ariel was too delicate a spirit to perform her horrible commands, so she imprisoned him in a "cloven pine" (I.ii.279). She did not free him before she died, and he might have remained imprisoned forever had not Prospero arrived and rescued him.

Reminding Ariel of his debt to him, Prospero threatens to imprison him for twelve years if he does not stop complaining. Ariel promises to be more polite. Prospero then gives him a new command: he must go make himself like a nymph of the sea and be invisible to all but Prospero. Ariel goes to do so, and Prospero, turning to Miranda's sleeping form, calls upon his daughter to awaken. She opens her eyes and, not realizing that she has been enchanted, says that the "strangeness" of Prospero's story caused her to fall asleep.

### 20.3.3 Act I, scene II (part 2)

After Miranda is fully awake, Prospero suggests that they converse with their servant Caliban, the son of Sycorax. Caliban appears at Prospero's call and begins cursing. Prospero promises to punish him by giving him cramps at night, and Caliban responds by chiding Prospero for imprisoning him on the island that once belonged to him alone. He reminds Prospero that he showed him around when he first arrived. Prospero accuses Caliban of being ungrateful for all that he has taught and given him. Prospero calls Caliban a "lying slave" and reminds him of the effort he made to educate him (I.ii.347). Caliban's hereditary nature, he continues, makes him unfit to live among civilized people and earns him his isolation on the island. Caliban, though, cleverly notes that he knows how to curse only because Prospero and Miranda taught him to speak. Prospero then sends him away, telling him to fetch more firewood and threatening him with more cramps and aches if he refuses. Caliban obeys him.

Ariel, playing music and singing, enters and leads in Ferdinand. Prospero tells Miranda to look upon Ferdinand, and Miranda, who has seen no humans in her life other than Prospero and Caliban, immediately falls in love. Ferdinand is similarly smitten and reveals his identity as the prince of Naples. Prospero is pleased that

they are so taken with each other but decides that the two must not fall in love too quickly, and so he accuses Ferdinand of merely pretending to be the prince of Naples. When he tells Ferdinand he is going to imprison him, Ferdinand draws his sword, but Prospero charms him so that he cannot move. Miranda attempts to persuade her father to have mercy, but he silences her harshly. This man, he tells her, is a mere Caliban compared to other men. He explains that she simply doesn't know any better because she has never seen any others. Prospero leads the charmed and helpless Ferdinand to his imprisonment. Secretly, he thanks the invisible Ariel for his help, sends him on another mysterious errand, and promises to free him soon.

#### 20.3.4 Act II, scene I

While Ferdinand is falling in love with Miranda, Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and other shipwrecked lords search for him on another part of the island. Alonso is quite despondent and unreceptive to the good-natured Gonzalo's attempts to cheer him up. Gonzalo meets resistance from Antonio and Sebastian as well. These two childishly mock Gonzalo's suggestion that the island is a good place to be and that they are all lucky to have survived. Alonso finally brings the repartee to a halt when he bursts out at Gonzalo and openly expresses regret at having married away his daughter in Tunis. Francisco, a minor lord, pipes up at this point that he saw Ferdinand swimming valiantly after the wreck, but this does not comfort Alonso. Sebastian and Antonio continue to provide little help. Sebastian tells his brother that he is indeed to blame for Ferdinand's death—if he had not married his daughter to an African (rather than a European), none of this would have happened.

Gonzalo tells the lords that they are only making the situation worse and attempts to change the subject, discussing what he might do if he were the lord of the island. Antonio and Sebastian mock his utopian vision. Ariel then enters, playing “solemn music” (II.i.182, stage direction), and gradually all but Sebastian and Antonio fall asleep. Seeing the vulnerability of his sleeping companions, Antonio tries to persuade Sebastian to kill his brother. He rationalizes this scheme by explaining that Claribel, who is now Queen of Tunis, is too far from Naples to inherit the kingdom should her father die, and as a result, Sebastian would be the heir to the throne. Sebastian begins to warm to the idea, especially after Antonio tells him that usurping Prospero's dukedom was the best move he ever made. Sebastian wonders aloud whether he will be afflicted by conscience, but Antonio dismisses this out of hand.

Sebastian is at last convinced, and the two men draw their swords. Sebastian, however, seems to have second thoughts at the last moment and stops. While he and Antonio confer, Ariel enters with music, singing in Gonzalo's ear that a conspiracy is under way and that he should “Awake, awake!” (II.i.301). Gonzalo wakes and shouts “Preserve the King!” His exclamation wakes everyone else (II.i.303). Sebastian quickly concocts a story about hearing a loud noise that caused him and Antonio to draw their swords. Gonzalo is obviously suspicious but does not challenge the lords. The group continues its search for Ferdinand.

#### 20.3.5 Act II, scene II

Caliban enters with a load of wood, and thunder sounds in the background. Caliban curses and describes the torments that Prospero's spirits subject him to: they pinch, bite, and prick him, especially when he curses. As he is thinking of these spirits, Caliban sees Trinculo and imagines him to be one of the spirits. Hoping to avoid pinching, he lies down and covers himself with his cloak. Trinculo hears the thunder and looks about for some cover from the storm. The only thing he sees is the cloak-covered Caliban on the ground. He is not so much repulsed by Caliban as curious. He cannot decide whether Caliban is a “man or a fish” (II.ii.24). He thinks of

a time when he traveled to England and witnessed freak-shows there. Caliban, he thinks, would bring him a lot of money in England. Thunder sounds again and Trinculo decides that the best shelter in sight is beneath Caliban's cloak, and so he joins the man-monster there.

Stephano enters singing and drinking. He hears Caliban cry out to Trinculo, "Do not torment me! O!" (II.ii.54). Hearing this and seeing the four legs sticking out from the cloak, Stephano thinks the two men are a four-legged monster with a fever. He decides to relieve this fever with a drink. Caliban continues to resist Trinculo, whom he still thinks is a spirit tormenting him. Trinculo recognizes Stephano's voice and says so. Stephano, of course, assumes for a moment that the monster has two heads, and he promises to pour liquor in both mouths. Trinculo now calls out to Stephano, and Stephano pulls his friend out from under the cloak. While the two men discuss how they arrived safely on shore, Caliban enjoys the liquor and begs to worship Stephano. The men take full advantage of Caliban's drunkenness, mocking him as a "most ridiculous monster" (II.ii.157) as he promises to lead them around and show them the isle.

### 20.3.6 Act III, scene I

I am your wife, if you will marry me.

If not, I'll die your maid. To be your fellow

You may deny me, but I'll be your servant

Whether you will or no.

Back at Prospero's cell, Ferdinand takes over Caliban's duties and carries wood for Prospero. Unlike Caliban, however, Ferdinand has no desire to curse. Instead, he enjoys his labors because they serve the woman he loves, Miranda. As Ferdinand works and thinks of Miranda, she enters, and after her, unseen by either lover, Prospero enters. Miranda tells Ferdinand to take a break from his work, or to let her work for him, thinking that her father is away. Ferdinand refuses to let her work for him but does rest from his work and asks Miranda her name. She tells him, and he is pleased: "Miranda" comes from the same Latin word that gives English the word "admiration." Ferdinand's speech plays on the etymology: "Admired Miranda! / Indeed the top of admiration, worth / What's dearest to the world!" (III.i.37–39).

Ferdinand goes on to flatter his beloved. Miranda is, of course, modest, pointing out that she has no idea of any woman's face but her own. She goes on to praise Ferdinand's face, but then stops herself, remembering her father's instructions that she should not speak to Ferdinand. Ferdinand assures Miranda that he is a prince and probably a king now, though he prays his father is not dead. Miranda seems unconcerned with Ferdinand's title, and asks only if he loves her. Ferdinand replies enthusiastically that he does, and his response emboldens Miranda to propose marriage. Ferdinand accepts and the two leave each other. Prospero comes forth, subdued in his happiness, for he has known that this would happen. He then hastens to his book of magic in order to prepare for his remaining business.

### 20.3.7 Act III, scene II

Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano continue to drink and wander about the island. Stephano now refers to Caliban as "servant monster" and repeatedly orders him to drink. Caliban seems happy to obey. The men begin to quarrel, mostly in jest, in their drunkenness. Stephano has now assumed the title of Lord of the Island and he

promises to hang Trinculo if Trinculo should mock his servant monster. Ariel, invisible, enters just as Caliban is telling the men that he is “subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island” (III.ii.40–41). Ariel begins to stir up trouble, calling out, “Thou liest” (III.ii.42). Caliban cannot see Ariel and thinks that Trinculo said this. He threatens Trinculo, and Stephano tells Trinculo not to interrupt Caliban anymore. Trinculo protests that he said nothing. Drunkenly, they continue talking, and Caliban tells them of his desire to get revenge against Prospero. Ariel continues to interrupt now and then with the words, “Thou liest.” Ariel’s ventriloquizing ultimately results in Stephano hitting Trinculo.

While Ariel looks on, Caliban plots against Prospero. The key, Caliban tells his friends, is to take Prospero’s magic books. Once they have done this, they can kill Prospero and take his daughter. Stephano will become king of the island and Miranda will be his queen. Trinculo tells Stephano that he thinks this plan is a good idea, and Stephano apologizes for the previous quarreling. Caliban assures them that Prospero will be asleep within half an hour.

Ariel plays a tune on his flute and tabor-drum. Stephano and Trinculo wonder at this noise, but Caliban tells them it is nothing to fear. Stephano relishes the thought of possessing this island kingdom “where I shall have my music for nothing” (III.ii.139–140). Then the men decide to follow the music and afterward to kill Prospero.

### 20.3.8 Act III, scene III

Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and their companion lords become exhausted, and Alonso gives up all hope of finding his son. Antonio, still hoping to kill Alonso, whispers to Sebastian that Alonso’s exhaustion and desperation will provide them with the perfect opportunity to kill the king later that evening.

At this point “solemn and strange music” fills the stage (III.iii.17, stage direction), and a procession of spirits in “several strange shapes” enters, bringing a banquet of food (III.iii.19, stage direction). The spirits dance about the table, invite the king and his party to eat, and then dance away. Prospero enters at this time as well, having rendered himself magically invisible to everyone but the audience. The men disagree at first about whether to eat, but Gonzalo persuades them it will be all right, noting that travelers are returning every day with stories of unbelievable but true events. This, he says, might be just such an event.

Just as the men are about to eat, however, a noise of thunder erupts, and Ariel enters in the shape of a harpy. He claps his wings upon the table and the banquet vanishes. Ariel mocks the men for attempting to draw their swords, which magically have been made to feel heavy. Calling himself an instrument of Fate and Destiny, he goes on to accuse Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio of driving Prospero from Milan and leaving him and his child at the mercy of the sea. For this sin, he tells them, the powers of nature and the sea have exacted revenge on Alonso by taking Ferdinand. He vanishes, and the procession of spirits enters again and removes the banqueting table. Prospero, still invisible, applauds the work of his spirit and announces with satisfaction that his enemies are now in his control. He leaves them in their distracted state and goes to visit with Ferdinand and his daughter.

Alonso, meanwhile, is quite desperate. He has heard the name of Prospero once more, and it has signaled the death of his own son. He runs to drown himself. Sebastian and Antonio, meanwhile, decide to pursue and fight with the spirits. Gonzalo, ever the voice of reason, tells the other, younger lords to run after Antonio, Sebastian, and Alonso and to make sure that none of the three does anything rash.

### 20.3.9 Act IV, scene I

Prospero gives his blessing to Ferdinand and Miranda, warning Ferdinand only that he take care not to break Miranda's "virgin-knot" before the wedding has been solemnized (IV.i.15–17). Ferdinand promises to comply. Prospero then calls in Ariel and asks him to summon spirits to perform a masque for Ferdinand and Miranda. Soon, three spirits appear in the shapes of the mythological figures of Juno (queen of the gods), Iris (Juno's messenger and the goddess of the rainbow), and Ceres (goddess of agriculture). This trio performs a masque celebrating the lovers' engagement.

First, Iris enters and asks Ceres to appear at Juno's wish, to celebrate "a contract of true love." Ceres appears, and then Juno enters. Juno and Ceres together bless the couple, with Juno wishing them honor and riches, and Ceres wishing them natural prosperity and plenty. The spectacle awes Ferdinand and he says that he would like to live on the island forever, with Prospero as his father and Miranda as his wife. Juno and Ceres send Iris to fetch some nymphs and reapers to perform a country dance. Just as this dance begins, however, Prospero startles suddenly and then sends the spirits away. Prospero, who had forgotten about Caliban's plot against him, suddenly remembers that the hour nearly has come for Caliban and the conspirators to make their attempt on his life.

Red, White, and Royal Blue

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air;  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve;  
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i. 148 – 158)

Prospero's apparent anger alarms Ferdinand and Miranda, but Prospero assures the young couple that his consternation is largely a result of his age; he says that a walk will soothe him. Prospero makes a short speech about the masque, saying that the world itself is as insubstantial as a play, and that human beings are "such stuff / As dreams are made on." Ferdinand and Miranda leave Prospero to himself, and the old enchanter immediately summons Ariel, who seems to have made a mistake by not reminding Prospero of Caliban's plot before the beginning of the masque. Prospero now asks Ariel to tell him again what the three conspirators are up to, and Ariel tells him of the men's drunken scheme to steal Prospero's book and kill him. Ariel reports that he used his music to lead these men through rough and prickly briars and then into a filthy pond. Prospero thanks his trusty spirit, and the two set a trap for the three would-be assassins.

On a clothesline in Prospero's cell, Prospero and Ariel hang an array of fine apparel for the men to attempt to steal, after which they render themselves invisible. Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano enter, wet from the filthy pond. The fine clothing immediately distracts Stephano and Trinculo. They want to steal it, despite the protests of Caliban, who wants to stick to the plan and kill Prospero. Stephano and Trinculo ignore him. Soon after they touch the clothing, there is "A noise of hunters" (IV.i.251, stage direction). A pack of spirits in the shape of hounds, set on by Ariel and Prospero, drives the thieves out.

### 20.3.10 Act V, scene I& Epilogue

Ariel tells Prospero that the day has reached its "sixth hour" (6 p.m.), when Ariel is allowed to stop working. Prospero acknowledges Ariel's request and asks how the king and his followers are faring. Ariel tells him that they are currently imprisoned, as Prospero ordered, in a grove. Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian are mad with fear; and Gonzalo, Ariel says, cries constantly. Prospero tells Ariel to go release the men, and now alone on stage, delivers his famous soliloquy in which he gives up magic. He says he will perform his last task and then break his staff and drown his magic book.

Ariel now enters with Alonso and his companions, who have been charmed and obediently stand in a circle. Prospero speaks to them in their charmed state, praising Gonzalo for his loyalty and chiding the others for their treachery. He then sends Ariel to his cell to fetch the clothes he once wore as Duke of Milan. Ariel goes and returns immediately to help his master to put on the garments. Prospero promises to grant freedom to his loyal helper-spirit and sends him to fetch the Boatswain and mariners from the wrecked ship. Ariel goes.

Prospero releases Alonso and his companions from their spell and speaks with them. He forgives Antonio but demands that Antonio return his dukedom. Antonio does not respond and does not, in fact, say a word for the remainder of the play except to note that Caliban is "no doubt marketable" (V.i.269). Alonso now tells Prospero of the missing Ferdinand. Prospero tells Alonso that he, too, has lost a child in this last tempest—his daughter. Alonso continues to be wracked with grief. Prospero then draws aside a curtain, revealing behind it Ferdinand and Miranda, who are playing a game of chess. Alonso is ecstatic at the discovery. Meanwhile, the sight of more humans impresses Miranda. Alonso embraces his son and daughter-in-law to be and begs Miranda's forgiveness for the treacheries of twelve years ago. Prospero silences Alonso's apologies, insisting that the reconciliation is complete.

After arriving with the Boatswain and mariners, Ariel is sent to fetch Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano, which he speedily does. The three drunken thieves are sent to Prospero's cell to return the clothing they stole and to clean it in preparation for the evening's reveling. Prospero then invites Alonso and his company to stay the night. He will tell them the tale of his last twelve years, and in the morning, they can all set out for Naples, where Miranda and Ferdinand will be married. After the wedding, Prospero will return to Milan, where he plans to contemplate the end of his life. The last charge Prospero gives to Ariel before setting him free is to make sure the trip home is made on "calm seas" with "auspicious gales" (V.i.318).

The other characters exit and Prospero delivers the epilogue. He describes the loss of his magical powers ("Now my charms are all o'erthrown") and says that, as he imprisoned Ariel and Caliban, the audience has now imprisoned him on the stage. He says that the audience can only release him by applauding, and asks them to remember that his only desire was to please them. He says that, as his listeners would like to have their own crimes forgiven, they should forgive him, and set him free by clapping.

## 20.4 THEMES

### The Illusion of Justice

*The Tempest* tells a fairly straightforward story involving an unjust act, the usurpation of Prospero's throne by his brother, and Prospero's quest to re-establish justice by restoring himself to power. However, the idea of justice that the play works toward seems highly subjective, since this idea represents the view of one character who controls the fate of all the other characters. Though Prospero presents himself as a victim of injustice working to right the wrongs that have been done to him, Prospero's idea of justice and injustice is somewhat hypocritical—though he is furious with his brother for taking his power, he has no qualms about enslaving Ariel and Caliban in order to achieve his ends. At many moments throughout the play, Prospero's sense of justice seems extremely one-sided and mainly involves what is good for Prospero. Moreover, because the play offers no notion of higher order or justice to supersede Prospero's interpretation of events, the play is morally ambiguous. As the play progresses, however, it becomes more and more involved with the idea of creativity and art, and Prospero's role begins to mirror more explicitly the role of an author creating a story around him. With this metaphor in mind, and especially if we accept Prospero as a surrogate for Shakespeare himself, Prospero's sense of justice begins to seem, if not perfect, at least sympathetic. Moreover, the means he uses to achieve his idea of justice mirror the machinations of the artist, who also seeks to enable others to see his view of the world. Playwrights arrange their stories in such a way that their own idea of justice is imposed upon events.

In *The Tempest*, the author is in the play, and the fact that he establishes his idea of justice and creates a happy ending for all the characters becomes a cause for celebration, not criticism. By using magic and tricks that echo the special effects and spectacles of the theater, Prospero gradually persuades the other characters and the audience of the rightness of his case. As he does so, the ambiguities surrounding his methods slowly resolve themselves. Prospero forgives his enemies, releases his slaves, and relinquishes his magic power, so that, at the end of the play, he is only an old man whose work has been responsible for all the audience's pleasure. The establishment of Prospero's idea of justice becomes less a commentary on justice in life than on the nature of morality in art. Happy endings are possible, Shakespeare seems to say, because the creativity of artists can create them, even if the moral values that establish the happy ending originate from nowhere but the imagination of the artist.

### The Difficulty of Distinguishing “Men” from “Monsters”

Upon seeing Ferdinand for the first time, Miranda says that he is “the third man that e'er I saw” (I.ii.449). The other two are, presumably, Prospero and Caliban. In their first conversation with Caliban, however, Miranda and Prospero say very little that shows they consider him to be human. Miranda reminds Caliban that before she taught him language, he gabbled “like / A thing most brutish” (I.ii.359–360) and Prospero says that he gave Caliban “human care” (I.ii.349), implying that this was something Caliban ultimately did not deserve. Caliban's exact nature continues to be slightly ambiguous later. In Act IV, scene i, reminded of Caliban's plot, Prospero refers to him as a “devil, a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick” (IV.i.188–189). Miranda and Prospero both have contradictory views of Caliban's humanity. On the one hand, they think that their education of him has lifted him from his formerly brutish status. On the other hand, they seem to see him as inherently brutish. His devilish nature can never be overcome by nurture, according to Prospero.

Miranda expresses a similar sentiment in Act I, scene ii: “thy vile race, / Though thou didst learn, had that in’t which good natures / Could not abide to be with” (I.ii.361–363). The inhuman part of Caliban drives out the human part, the “good nature,” that is imposed on him. Caliban claims that he was kind to Prospero, and that Prospero repaid that kindness by imprisoning him (see I.ii.347). In contrast, Prospero claims that he stopped being kind to Caliban once Caliban had tried to rape Miranda (I.ii.347–351). Which character the audience decides to believe depends on whether it views Caliban as inherently brutish, or as made brutish by oppression. The play leaves the matter ambiguous. Caliban balances all of his eloquent speeches, such as his curses in Act I, scene ii and his speech about the isle’s “noises” in Act III, scene ii, with the most degrading kind of drunken, servile behavior. But Trinculo’s speech upon first seeing Caliban (II.ii.18–38), the longest speech in the play, reproaches too harsh a view of Caliban and blurs the distinction between men and monsters.

In England, which he visited once, Trinculo says, Caliban could be shown off for money: “There would this monster make a man. Any strange beast there makes a man. When they will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian” (II.ii.28–31). What seems most monstrous in these sentences is not the “dead Indian,” or “any strange beast,” but the cruel voyeurism of those who capture and gape at them.

### **The Allure of Ruling a Colony**

The nearly uninhabited island presents the sense of infinite possibility to almost everyone who lands there. Prospero has found it, in its isolation, an ideal place to school his daughter. Sycorax, Caliban’s mother, worked her magic there after she was exiled from Algeria. Caliban, once alone on the island, now Prospero’s slave, laments that he had been his own king (I.ii.344–345). As he attempts to comfort Alonso, Gonzalo imagines a utopian society on the island, over which he would rule (II.i.148–156). In Act III, scene ii, Caliban suggests that Stephano kill Prospero, and Stephano immediately envisions his own reign: “Monster, I will kill this man. His daughter and I will be King and Queen—save our graces!—and Trinculo and thyself shall be my viceroys” (III.ii.101–103).

Stephano particularly looks forward to taking advantage of the spirits that make “noises” on the isle; they will provide music for his kingdom for free. All these characters envision the island as a space of freedom and unrealized potential. The tone of the play, however, toward the hopes of the would-be colonizers is vexed at best. Gonzalo’s utopian vision in Act II, scene i is undercut by a sharp retort from the usually foolish Sebastian and Antonio. When Gonzalo says that there would be no commerce or work or “sovereignty” in his society, Sebastian replies, “yet he would be king on’t,” and Antonio adds, “The latter end of his commonwealth forgets the beginning” (II.i.156–157). Gonzalo’s fantasy thus involves him ruling the island while seeming not to rule it, and in this he becomes a kind of parody of Prospero.

While there are many representatives of the colonial impulse in the play, the colonized have only one representative: Caliban. We might develop sympathy for him at first, when Prospero seeks him out merely to abuse him, and when we see him tormented by spirits. However, this sympathy is made more difficult by his willingness to abase himself before Stephano in Act II, scene ii. Even as Caliban plots to kill one colonial master (Prospero) in Act III, scene ii, he sets up another (Stephano). The urge to rule and the urge to be ruled seem inextricably intertwined.

## Prospero's Threats

Prospero issues many threats in *The Tempest*, demonstrating his innate violence and cruelty. For the most part, Prospero directs his threats at his servants. Prospero's threats typically contain elements of magic, as when he reprimands Caliban for his disobedience: "If thou neglect'st or dost unwillingly / What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps, / Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar" (I.ii.). Prospero also makes harsh threats against his more helpful servant, Ariel. Prospero has promised to liberate Ariel after a period of faithful service, and when Ariel reminds his master of this promise, Prospero warns: "If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails" (I.ii.). Curiously, the tree prison Prospero describes here echoes the tree prison the witch Sycorax had placed Ariel in prior to Prospero's arrival. Thus, not only do Prospero's threats indicate his cruel and domineering nature, but they also link him to other tyrannical figures.

## Obedience and Disobedience

The themes of obedience and disobedience underscore the island's hierarchy of power. Prospero stands at the top of this hierarchy. As both the former Duke of Milan and a gifted student of magic, Prospero is the most powerful figure on the island. He therefore demands obedience from all of his subjects, including his servants and his daughter. At some point, however, each of these subjects disobeys him. Caliban swears his allegiance to Stephano, trading one master for another in an attempt to topple the island's hierarchy altogether. Other examples of disobedience in the play are more nuanced. Miranda, for instance, believes she disobeys her father by pursuing romance with Ferdinand. But her actions are actually in line with her father's wishes, since Prospero's harsh treatment of Ferdinand is designed to make Miranda take pity on him and fall in love with him. The situation is again different in Ariel's case. Ariel has proven himself a faithful servant, yet Prospero considers him disobedient when he asks for his freedom. These complexities ultimately suggest that the island's hierarchy of power is less stable than it appears.

## Treason

Shakespeare weaves the theme of treason throughout the play. The first instance of treason occurred in the play's prehistory, when Antonio conspired with King Alonso to assassinate Prospero and succeed him as the new Duke of Milan. The attempt to kill Prospero was both political treason and brotherly betrayal. The theme of treason returns in the form of twin assassination plots that arise during the play. While Caliban and Stephano plot to kill Prospero and take control of the island, Antonio and Sebastian plot to kill Alonso and take control of Naples. Both of these plots get interrupted, so despite these men's treasonous intentions, they ultimately do no real harm. Yet the interruption of these assassination plots does not fully dismantle the theme of treason. Perhaps indicating future strife, the play's final scene features Miranda and Ferdinand playing chess—a game that can only be won with the metaphorical assassination of the opponent's king. When Miranda accuses Ferdinand of cheating, she recalls how her uncle Antonio cheated his way into power twelve years prior. Does the future hold yet more instances of treason?

## Wonder/Admiration

The themes of wonder and admiration center on Miranda, whose name means both "wonderful" and "admirable" in Latin. In a play so full of negative feelings about past wrongdoings, Miranda's optimism about the future serves as a beacon of hope. Ferdinand senses Miranda's admirable qualities upon first meeting her,

exclaiming, “O you wonder!” (I.ii.). In a later scene he proclaims her superior virtues: “O you, / So perfect and so peerless, are created / Of every creature’s best!” (III.i.). Aside from Gonzalo, Miranda most clearly symbolizes optimism about the possibility of new beginnings and a better future: what she herself calls a “brave new world.” In spite of Miranda’s optimism, wonder sometimes carries a less positive connotation in *The Tempest*. Under Prospero’s command and Ariel’s magic, the island is itself a place of wonderful occurrences meant to confuse and disorient. At one point in Act V Prospero comments that Alonso and his company have had many wonderful visions, and that these visions prevent them from thinking clearly. In this sense, the island’s wonderful occurrences conceal truth for the purpose of manipulation.

## Monstrosity

The theme of monstrosity constitutes the flip-side to the themes of wonder and admiration. Whereas wonder and admiration apply mainly to the beautiful and loving Miranda, monstrosity applies mainly to the ugly and hateful Caliban. The word “monster” appears most frequently in the scenes with Stephano and Trinculo. Upon first laying eyes on Caliban, Trinculo identifies him as a fishy-looking freak, and he imagines exploiting Caliban’s monstrous appearance for profit on the streets of a city: “holiday fools” would willingly part with “a piece of silver” to witness the sideshow attraction. Caliban’s monstrosity derives not from his appearance alone, but from the contrast between his savage appearance and his civilized language. At one point Trinculo expresses surprise that a creature like Caliban should use a term of respect like “Lord.” Although Caliban stands as the primary example of monstrosity in *The Tempest*, Alonso also uses the word “monstrous” to refer to illusory sounds and visions produced by Ariel.

## 20.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. How does the theme of power and control manifest throughout the play, particularly in the interactions between characters like Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel, and how do these dynamics reflect the broader social and political context of the time the play was written?
2. In *The Tempest* Shakespeare presents various forms of imprisonment and liberation, from the physical confinement of characters on the island to the emotional and psychological bonds they experience. Explore how these themes of captivity and freedom intersect with character development and the overall message of the play.
3. The character of Caliban in *The Tempest* has sparked discussions about colonialism, race, and otherness. How does Shakespeare’s portrayal of Caliban reflect the attitudes and biases prevalent during his time, and how do modern interpretations of the play grapple with these complex themes?
4. The relationship between Prospero and his daughter Miranda lies at the heart of *The Tempest*. Analyze the ways in which Prospero’s overprotective nature and control over Miranda impact her growth and agency, and how this father-daughter dynamic fits into the larger themes of the play.
5. *The Tempest* is often considered a play about illusion and reality, with elements of magic and enchantment blurring the lines between the two. Explore instances of illusion and deception in the play, such as the masque scene, and discuss how these instances serve both narrative purposes and broader thematic exploration.

## 20.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

9. What does Prospero reveal to Ferdinand when testing his love for Miranda?

- A) That Miranda is actually a spirit
- B) That he intends to keep Ferdinand as a slave
- C) That Ferdinand's father is dead
- D) That he knows about Ferdinand's past indiscretions

10. How does Prospero ultimately achieve his goal of reconciliation and forgiveness at the end of the play?

- A) By casting a new spell
- B) By punishing his enemies
- C) Through a magical duel
- D) Through a heartfelt speech

**Answer: 1a, 2d, 3d, 4b, 5b, 6a, 7d, 8c, 9c, 10d**

## **20.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare" (2004)
- Bloom, Harold. "Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human" (1998)
- Kermode, Frank. "The Tempest: A Case Study in Critical Controversy" (1967)
- Vaughan, Virginia Mason. "O Brave New World : Two Centuries of Shakespeare on the American Stage" (1991)

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## THE TEMPEST

### THE TEMPEST: AS A PASTORAL TRAGI-COMEDY

#### STRUCTURES

- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 21.3 *The Tempest* as a pastoral tragi-comedy
- 21.4 Let Us SumUp
- 21.5 Multiple Choice Questions
- 21.6 Suggested Readings

#### 21.1 INTRODUCTION

*The Tempest* by William Shakespeare is often classified as a pastoral tragicomedy due to its unique blend of elements from both pastoral and tragicomic traditions. In this play, Shakespeare weaves a pastoral setting on a remote island, complete with natural beauty and the theme of regeneration, providing a contrast to the courtly world. However, the presence of tragic elements, such as the usurpation of power, exile, and revenge, adds depth and complexity to the overall narrative, ultimately leading to a resolution that aligns with the conventions of a tragicomedy, where harmony is restored, and characters find redemption and forgiveness amidst the pastoral backdrop.

#### 21.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

##### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Understand the genre conventions of pastoral and tragicomedy in Renaissance drama.
2. Examine how *The Tempest* fits into and modifies these conventions.
3. Explore how the blending of tragic, comic, and pastoral elements influences the play's tone and message.

##### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Define pastoral tragicomedy and identify its features in *The Tempest*.
2. Analyze scenes that blend seriousness with resolution and comic subplots.
3. Discuss how the natural island setting contributes to the pastoral aspect and the happy ending to the comic resolution.

### 21.3 AS A PASTORAL COMEDY

Although most well-known comedies of Shakespeare are essentially romantic, it is his last plays, namely *Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, that are classified as "romances". What seems rather strange is the fact that these romances of Shakespeare appeared on the stage in the early seventeenth century when romances and romantic comedies had become rather unfashionable. But there is another contention that towards the end of the first decade of the century, the romantic comedy had all of a sudden found favour with the audience. As an evidence to this contention is cited the popularity of Beaumont and Fletcher, who produced in collaboration the largest number of plays in the period, called Jacobean. Sensing the pair's popularity Shakespeare perhaps changed the general direction of his drama, which was rather tragic. He produced his part of romance comedy to join the popular stream of Beaumont and Fletcher. He did this by producing *Pericles*. Around the same time Shakespeare wrote *Henry VIII* in collaboration with Fletcher. But he did individually his last three plays, all romances, and all of high artistic merit. *The Tempest*, as mentioned earlier, was one of these, and was the last of all.

About the same time (in 1610), the theatre company called 'King's Men' revived on the stage the old *Mucedorus*. It has been argued that Brevo, the wild man in this old play, contributed to the emotional situation which Shakespeare realized in the character of Caliban. It has also been argued that *Mucedorus* was perhaps dug out because of the sudden demand for romantic comedies.

Although there were some vital differences between the old and the new, both nourished the need for the remote and exotic. *Mucedorus* was in fact, not the only play from the old stock that found its way on the Jacobean stage. *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*, is said to be another play which gained popularity at the time. This old play is an academic type and has some curious similarities with Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. Although in lesser degree, its similarities with *The Tempest* can also be seen. Some critics have attached great importance to similarities between *The Tempest* and *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*. One thing these similarities established is that Shakespeare's last play has its native progenitors. Also, this native line is not merely dramatic.

Edmund Spenser's famous romance-epic, *The Faerie Queene*, is the most potent progenitor of *The Tempest*. In Book VI of Spenser's poem, which, like *The Tempest*, exploits the pastoral situation for making a comment on the subject of the contrast between nature and nurture, there is the fabric that Shakespeare follows in his play. *The Faerie Queene* itself too, had its progenitors in Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and the Greek romances. Some critics have argued that Spenser's poem alone is sufficient to account for the pastoral situation in *The Tempest*. A strong suspicion has also been expressed to the possibility of *The Tempest* and other romances of Shakespeare, except *Pericles*, having been influenced by the Italian pastoral drama. *Pericles* is excluded from this influence because it is believed to have been designed for a more sophisticated audience than those used to pastoral drama. It is very difficult to determine with any degree of certainty as to which influence went into the writing of a particular play, and to what degree any one influence contributed to its production. One can only see in a broad manner the spirit of a particular period and the works which might have shaped that spirit. Beyond such a general interest in sources, any inquiry is bound to be more distracting than useful.

One of the things which can be asserted with certainty is that Fletcher was familiar with the new form of pastoral tragico-comedy. The working principles of this new form of drama had been formulated and defended during the long controversy of Guarini, which lasted from 1587 to 1620's. It is quite possible that *Philaster* was

a fresh attempt to adapt the new model of comedy to the stage of the private theatre. It is considered fresh attempt because before it an attempt had been made in the staging of the more formal specimen of this type called *Faithful Shepherds*. It has also been speculated that perhaps Shakespeare took advice from Fletcher at the time of the Company's commencing to play at the Blackfriar's, so that in one form or another the fashion of the period for Guarini may have influenced Shakespeare.

One of the more immediate predecessors to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* was Daniel's *Queenes Arcadia*, "a Pastoral Tragi-comedy," which was performed in 1605. Another was, of course, Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherds*, which was probably performed in 1607. By this time, the theories of Guarini had decidedly become a matter of common literary knowledge. Fletcher's Preface to the published version of his play gives a clear account of some of these theories. It has been amply evidenced that Fletcher not only knew Guarini very well but also the lesser dramatists in the same tradition. He knew their works as well as those of his own contemporaries in England. No specific details are, however, available of the indebtedness of Fletcher and Shakespeare to Guarini and other Italian dramatists. One does however find the "Shakespearean" imperial themes of royal birth, the sacrifice for love, and resurrection from death or near death. Fletcher's success as dramatist lies in his adaptation of the elements of Italian pastoral to the format of the popular English drama. Of course, neither Fletcher nor his Italian masters could succeed in using these common themes in the manner of Shakespeare. Guarini could not be called a great poet. With all his weighty theory he remains at best pretentious poet. Fletcher very much resembles him in so far as they both deny a predominant moral function to poetry. Another common to them is that both trifle with whatever genre they choose to experiment in. Nevertheless, the tradition in which they worked seems to have blended with the native English tradition in which *Pericles* was written by Shakespeare. *The Tempest*, too, carries a certain resemblance to the Italian form and its popular descendant, the *Commedia dell' Arte*.

Although exact antecedents are not easy to trace, it seems beyond doubt that the tragi-comic form of Shakespeare's last plays, which includes *The Tempest*, was influenced, if not dictated, by the nature of the fables from the Italian tradition. Shakespeare must have chosen them because they conveniently lent themselves to the formulation of poetic propositions with regard to the status of human life in relation to nature. They also equally conveniently lent themselves to the poetic proposition with regard to the mercy of a providence which gives new life when the old has become decadent. These themes are decidedly pastoral and tragi-comical. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* very well illustrates this proposition. We can recall here how Prospero pitches his countrymen into a sea which is threatening but also merciful. It seems so benevolent that it does not even stain their clothes. It seems to offer a penitence which washes away old sins and imparts new life. The shipwreck of *The Tempest*, is tragicomic, just like the one the Bermudan castaways spoke. Although the wreck was an apparent disaster, it actually proves a means of grace. As is asserted in the play, the gods, "chalk'd forth the way" for every man to find himself "when no man was his own."

In a way, it is a great achievement of Prospero, and Gonzalo sums it up for him: self-conquest, followed by the redemption of the noble. They receive their liberation from the sense of loss and impurity which haunts them as they wander exhausted in search of Ferdinand and themselves. We find that even Antonio, as he is presented after the shipwreck, has not completely lost his earlier brightness. He too, is a part of Miranda's Brave New World. He is also one of those brave spirits that give the natural slave the insight to "be wise hereafter and seek for grace." Here, an interesting thing to note is that the play carefully juxtaposes the reactions of Miranda and

Caliban to the sight of the castaways. This comparison, we find, is made both at the beginning as well as at the end of the play. The comparison here is as pertinent as the comparison of their reactions to the same education. But Antonio is, nonetheless, one of Prospero's failures. The closing passages of the play seem to show that Antonio chooses silence, but he will not choose the good. Unlike Sebastian, he is not impressed by it. He refuses to close the circuit of noble virtue which excludes only Caliban. Prospero, he expects, must acknowledge another thing of darkness.

In his discussion on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, W. H. Auden with an admirable imaginative perception, gives Antonio as chorus the last ironic word to each dream of the good or new life :

*Your all is partial, Prospero;*  
*My will is all my own:*  
*Your need to love shall never know*  
*Me: I am I, Antonio,*  
*By choice myself alone.*

The play seems to suggest, just as Auden does in these lines, that a world without Antonio is a world without freedom. Prospero's shipwreck cannot bring him back, if he does not desire to do so, to life. The Gods chalk out a tragicomic way, but enforce only disaster. The rest is voluntary.

The pastoral features of Shakespeare's tragi-comedy come from a vast reservoir of primitive fiction. The complication for pinpointing the precise influence arises from the fact that there are not only many fables but also many versions of those fables. Hence, the difficulty for the source hunters. Ultimately, one settles for the source of *The Tempest*, on an ancient motif, of almost universal occurrence, in saga, ballad, fairy-tale and folk-tale. The existence of such a story accounts for the many analogues to Shakespeare's play. These sources are, invariably, quite plentiful, and some of them are already tragicomic in form, as might be expected from the affinity of romance with tragicomedy. All these works, and many others, treat with some degree of seriousness fabulous elements, so essential to a romance. Here and there they inevitably suggest the very pattern of events in Shakespeare's play. They begin to tell us why Shakespeare would use a similar pattern. They show us, in their very dullness, what it was that Shakespeare habitually did. He accepted the curious fable, not for its merely entertaining qualities, but because, conveyed through his imagination, it had significance in terms "of man, of nature, and of human life."

Thus, *The Tempest*, inherited both the traditions of romance and pastoral blended into the new form of tragicomedy. One aspect of romance has been its remoteness in the history of civilization. Locating a story in the rural setting, having the rural folk as characters would make it pastoral. The ancient classical pastorals would have shepherds and shepherdesses as main figures in the story. But in the later versions of the pastoral, it is the civilized individual or set of individuals who are transferred to the rural setting. In the Elizabethan tradition, pastoral becomes stylized in that the setting is transformed into an ideal society, with nature as setting but people and their practices of an ideal society. More's *Utopia* or Sidney's *Arcadia* are the best examples of the Elizabethan pastoral. Shakespeare adopted this model in his romantic comedies. Although they open in the civilized world of the court situated in the city, they are soon shifted in location to the Arcadia-like setting where nature with its hills and rivers, flora and fauna, with pure and simple humanity, transforms even the impure human specimen into semi-

natural stuff. The town and the country are juxtaposed to reveal the strength and weakness of each other. Symbolically, the two constitute the two halves of the human psyche itself. And it is in the reconciliation of the two that the unity of being could be achieved. Shakespeare's romantic or pastoral comedy always ends on this note of reconciliation. The principle of going back to nature, of regaining the purity of natural self, are brought home through the use of pastoral setting.

*The Tempest* goes a step further and makes the pastoral a little higher on the level of romance by inducting into the pastoral, the romance elements of supernatural and magic, of characters either higher or lower than the normal pastoral. The lonely island of Prospero is a perfect pastoral setting. The master of the island and his only daughter are living in a cave. Then there is Caliban, who is less than a human product of nature, a sort of aboriginal. His mother Sycorax is a sorceress, not a normal female of the pastoral. Even more improbable than these two is Ariel that Prospero creates through the power of his magic. Like *Dr. Faustus*, he has the power of magic to summon any spirit. Ariel can do any impossible job at the bidding of his master. He can cause storms on the sea. He can subside those storms. He can create illusions for the human characters. He can also create disillusionments for them. Notwithstanding all this, however, the setting remains pastoral with the island and the surrounding ocean, with sermons in stones and songs in the springs, with flora and fauna. There are no signs of civilization, except that the civilized people are brought to inhabit the island, and for the conventional purpose of purgating them of their corruptions gathered in the civilized world. And we do see the purgation taking place when the play ends with all bitterness gone and reconciliation reached between different individuals and groups who had earlier nourished ill-will against each other. Thus, *The Tempest*, can be rightly called a pastoral comedy, just as it can be called a romantic comedy or romance. Like the other mature plays of Shakespeare, it has the complexity of vision and structure by virtue of which it can be called pastoral as well as anti-pastoral, romantic as well as anti-romantic, tragic as well as comic.

Almost all mature comedies of Shakespeare follow the Aristotelian definition of moving from not-so-happy situation to a happy ending. We find a plot that opens with some acrimony or even open hostility between brothers or successors, resulting in the ouster of one of them to the rural or pastoral setting. But after the purgatorial therapy of nature, all culminating into reconciliation, ending on a note of harmony, symbolized by marriage or union of lovers as well as rivals. In the case of tragedies, the movement is from a serious situation to the tragic ending. *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, all end in deaths and destruction. Families are destroyed, kingdoms are ruined, individuals are killed. They end in disharmony and disorder. Only a higher moral order is restored in the destruction of the evil forces. Thus, comedies and tragedies have antithetical patterns.

However, Shakespeare also tried his hand at a mix of these two forms of drama, which we call tragicomedy. Here, the ending is happy but the beginning or the middle is not. There are scenes in his last plays which create a sense of an inevitable tragedy. We feel a catastrophe is bound to take place. But somehow the events take a sudden turn for the better, the threatening tragedy is averted, and discords are resolved into a happy ending. An early example of such a mixed form is *The Merchant of Venice*. Later, all of Shakespeare's romances, the last four plays except *Henry VIII*, are tragic-comedies. All of these plays reach near-tragic situations in the course of the progress of their plots. But finally, the threats are averted, misunderstandings are removed, reconciliations are reached, and happy endings are contrived. It is this pattern which all of these later comedies or romances of Shakespeare follow.

### Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. A tragicomedy blends elements of \_\_\_ and comedy.
2. The setting of the play – an isolated \_\_\_ – gives it a pastoral tone.
3. The play ends not in tragedy but in \_\_\_ and renewal.
4. The comic subplot involves Stephano, Trinculo, and \_\_\_.

### Answers

1. tragedy
2. island
3. reconciliation
4. Caliban

*The Tempest*, opens in the fashion of a romance with a busy scene, giving a kind of keynote to the whole harmony. It prepares us for the excitement to follow. The scene is in the bustle of a tempest, from which the real horrors are abstracted. It is natural or pastoral as well as poetical. In the second scene, Prospero's speeches, till the entrance of Ariel, contain the finest example of retrospective narrative, making the necessary exposition of the story. Then follows the appearance of Miranda. In the very first speech, the simplicity and tenderness of her character are at once laid open. Then follow the super or ultra-natural characters of Ariel, representing air; and Caliban, representing earth. Then the play sketches the vices generally accompanying a low degree of civilization. The second act brings all that before us. We are shown "the tendency in bad men to indulge in scorn and contemptuous expressions as a mode of getting rid of their own uneasy feelings of inferiority to good, and also by making the good ridiculous, of rendering the transition of others to wickedness easy," as observed by Coleridge. Antonio and Sebastian represent the world of the wicked.

We confront then a near-tragic or real tragic scene in *The Tempest*. The scene of the intended assassination of Alonso and Gonzalo makes an exact counterpart of the scene between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The tragic effect of this scene is heightened by contrast with another counterpart of it in low life. This scene involves the conspirators Stephano, Caliban, and Trinculo in the second scene of the third act. The two scenes have the same essential characteristics. Here, we are shown the springs of the vulgar in politics, the kind which is interwoven in human nature. The highest and the lowest characters are brought together on board in the very opening scene as well as later. This displays Shakespeare's rare genius, which brings together in happy combinations - the highest and the lowest, the gayest and the saddest. He is not droll in one scene and melancholy in another.

Thus, tragedy and comedy in Shakespeare's tragi-comedy do not mix as two parts arranged in a linear order. They do not alternate or stand apart from each other. Nor is it a ramble mingling of the two. His mixing involves a harmonizing of the two contraries. As Coleridge says, "Laughter is made to swell the tear of sorrow, and to throw as it were a poetic light upon it, while the tear mingles tenderness with the laughter." Thus, what we have in *The Tempest* and other tragicomedies is not mechanic but organic regularity of plot or action. But the balance is tilted towards romance and comedy after Miranda and Ferdinand are brought together fostering an affair of love. We start feeling assured that the plot will take a happy turn henceforth. And it does. We see the love maturing. Of course, in between we have Caliban threatening our hopes. But with Ariel on Prospero's side, the threat is never allowed to become serious enough to give to the action a tragic turn. The play ends with the

grand speech of Prospero, his divine eloquence, where he takes leave of his magic art. The "Epilogue", spoken by Prospero says it all:

*Now my charms are all dethrown,*

*And what strength I have's my own,*

Before the "Epilogue" also the last words of the play are Prospero's:

*I'll deliver all;*

*And promise you calm seas, auspicious gales.*

## 21.4 LET US SUM UP

Thus, to conclude we can say that in this play, Shakespeare weaves a pastoral setting on a remote island, complete with natural beauty and the theme of regeneration, providing a contrast to the courtly world. However, the presence of tragic elements, such as the usurpation of power, exile, and revenge, adds depth and complexity to the overall narrative, ultimately leading to a resolution that aligns with the conventions of a tragi-comedy, where harmony is restored, and characters find redemption and forgiveness amidst the pastoral backdrop.

## 21.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. What is the primary setting of *"The Tempest"* that contributes to its pastoral nature?
  - a) A royal court
  - b) A remote island
  - c) A bustling city
  - d) A magical forest
2. Which character in *"The Tempest"* embodies the pastoral trope of the "noble savage"?
  - a) Alonso
  - b) Antonio
  - c) Caliban
  - d) Prospero
3. How does *"The Tempest"* explore themes of nature and the natural world?
  - a) Through the depiction of a courtly society
  - b) Through the use of artificial settings
  - c) Through the island's enchanting and untamed landscape
  - d) Through magical spells and illusions

4. Who are the characters in “*The Tempest*” that experience a form of physical or emotional exile, a common theme in pastoral literature?

- a) Prospero and Miranda
- b) Ferdinand and Alonso
- c) Caliban and Ariel
- d) Gonzalo and Trinculo

5. In the pastoral tradition, what role does music and song often play?

- a) It serves as a symbol of courtly authority.
- b) It represents the chaos of the natural world.
- c) It brings harmony and reconciliation.
- d) It leads to conflict and discord.

6. What tragic event forms the backstory of “*The Tempest*,” involving Prospero and his usurped dukedom?

- a) A shipwreck
- b) A murder plot
- c) A political conspiracy
- d) A magical curse

7. How does “*The Tempest*” incorporate elements of revenge, a common theme in tragicomedy?

- a) Through Prospero’s quest for vengeance
- b) Through Miranda’s secret love affair
- c) Through Caliban’s rebellion against Prospero
- d) Through Gonzalo’s humorous antics

8. The resolution of “*The Tempest*” involves reconciliation and forgiveness, typical of the genre. Who forgives whom?

- a) Prospero forgives Alonso.
- b) Caliban forgives Ariel.
- c) Miranda forgives Ferdinand.
- d) Antonio forgives Prospero.

9. What role does magic and supernatural elements play in the tragicomic aspects of “*The Tempest*”?

- a) It leads to tragedy and chaos.
- b) It facilitates reconciliation and transformation.

- c) It causes misunderstandings and conflicts.
- d) It serves as a symbol of villainy and deceit.

10. Which character in “*The Tempest*” undergoes a significant transformation from a power-hungry usurper to a penitent individual, exemplifying the redemptive quality of tragicomedy?

- a) Ariel
- b) Caliban
- c) Alonso
- d) Antonio

**Answers:**

1. b) A remote island
2. c) Caliban
3. c) Through the island’s enchanting and untamed landscape
4. a) Prospero and Miranda
5. c) It brings harmony and reconciliation.
6. c) A political conspiracy
7. a) Through Prospero’s quest for vengeance
8. a) Prospero forgives Alonso.
9. b) It facilitates reconciliation and transformation.
10. d) Antonio

## 21.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

- Stephen Orgel, *The Tempest: A Case Study in Critical Controversy*, 2008
- Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Soul of the Age: A Biography of the Mind of William Shakespeare*, 2008.
- Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare’s Caliban: A Cultural History*, 1991.
- Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare’s Language*, 2000.

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**THE TEMPEST****STRUCTURE AND STYLE****STRUCTURE**

- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 22.3 Elements of Masque in the play
- 22.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.5 Self Assessment Questions
- 22.6 Multiple Choice Questions
- 22.7 Suggested Readings

**22.1 INTRODUCTION**

*The Tempest* is one of William Shakespeare's late plays, showcases a remarkable structure and style. First, it adheres to a five-act dramatic structure, typical of Shakespearean plays, with clear exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The play opens with a tempestuous storm at sea, immediately engaging the audience and setting the stage for the unfolding events on the enchanted island.

Shakespeare employs a blend of verse and prose in the play. While the nobility and characters such as Prospero often speak in blank verse, lower-class characters like Stephano and Trinculo use prose, creating a stylistic contrast that mirrors social hierarchies. Additionally, the use of magical elements and supernatural occurrences, including Prospero's spells and the appearance of airy spirits like Ariel, adds a fantastical dimension to the play's style, contributing to its unique charm.

**22.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES****Objectives**

Learners will:

1. Analyze the five-act structure of *The Tempest* and its progression from conflict to harmony.
2. Identify Shakespeare's use of verse and prose, songs, and masque-like elements.
3. Examine how style and structure enhance mood, character development, and thematic resonance.

## Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Describe the structure of *The Tempest* in terms of dramatic arc.
2. Recognize Shakespeare's stylistic features—blank verse, lyrical imagery, and symbolic language.
3. Explain how structural choices (e.g., masques, comic relief) contribute to the overall effect of the play.

### 22.3 ELEMENTS OF MASQUE IN THE PLAY

The subject is treated more convincingly and taken up with greater subtlety by Miss Welsford, who suggests that *The Tempest* was influenced by certain specific masque, including Jonson's *Humenaei*, *The Masque of Blackness* and *The Masque of Beauty*. She considers music and dances as reflections of masque influences. She also considers the Caliban-plot a Jonsonian anti-masque translated into dramatic terms. In her considered opinion, the whole plot of *The Tempest* is based upon two motifs used by Jonson in *The Masque of Beauty*. These motifs are of wandering and of disenchantment. Those days, it was the custom of the masquers to make a sudden appearance, having been hidden "as a result of adverse spells" and then "freed from enchantment by the beneficent powers of the sovereign." In *The Tempest*, Prospero plays the part of a masque presenter. The play takes up the narrative of event, not like a classical drama where during "the last few hours of uncertainty which must soon be terminated by irrevocable choice and decisive action," but like a masque, which deals with a moment of transformation: "It expressed, not uncertainty, ended by success or failure, but expectancy crowned by sudden revelation.... The plot of *The Tempest*, leads up without hesitation or uncertainty, to that moment when Prospero gathers his forgiven enemies around him, draws back the curtain from before the inner stage, and 'discovers Ferdinand and Miranda playing at chess.'"

#### Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. *The Tempest* is divided into \_\_\_\_ acts.
2. Shakespeare uses both verse and \_\_\_\_ in the dialogue.
3. The masque scene celebrates the union of \_\_\_\_ and Ferdinand.
4. Ariel's songs often serve to create a magical and \_\_\_\_ atmosphere.

#### Answers

1. five	2. prose
3. Miranda	4. ethereal / dreamlike ( <i>accept either</i> )

Miss Welsford's theory that there is an intimate connection between *The Tempest* and the contemporary masques is reinforced by the claim made by Whiter that Prospero's speech after his sudden dismissal of the reveling spirits makes allusions to the scenes and properties of the masque. In the first place, the word "rack" is supposed to apply specially to stage-clouds, sometimes used to "dissolve" a scene. This is, for sure, an attractive

idea. But the word was also used of natural cloud. There are other critics also who have made similar suggestions. One of these is Allardyce Nicoll. One of these suggestions contends that the towers, palaces, and temples in *The Tempest* are those of Tethys Festival and Oberon, and "great globe of itself" that much-admired stage-globe of Jonson's *Hymenaei*. An older suggestion in this regard is the view that Prospero's speech, in its lamentation for the transience of mortal splendour, significantly resembles Jonson's lament for the ephemeral beauty of his masque. As Miss Welsford says, "many masques end with the thought not of eternity but of the swift flight of time and of the inevitable end of beauty and delight." Shakespeare's play shows a strong affinity with these themes of the masques of Jonson. For instance, the vanity of Prospero's art, like the flush of youthful love, and the wonder - broken knowledge, as Bacon called it - of Miranda at the brave new world, is subject to mutability like everything else under the moon.

Miss Welsford's theory, that the play is more a dramatized masque than a venture into classical dramatic structure, begins to totter when we look to the fact that the play, *The Tempest*, is divided into five acts in tune with the contemporary theory. It also runs into trouble when we note that the play's action proceeds in accordance with the scheme of classical development, which the Renaissance critics had worked out in the tradition of Donatus and the later editors of Terence. As has already been said, no one would deny a general influence from the court masque, but that cannot be allowed to obliterate the fact that Shakespeare reverts in *The Tempest* to something like the formal structure, which he had earlier used with varying degrees of success in his romantic comedy at the beginning of his career as a dramatist. For instance, he had incorporated in *The Comedy of Errors*, which followed Plautine scheme, a romance plot. In most of his other early comedies also, he had experimented with the five-act structure. We cannot overlook the fact that *The Tempest* insists on its observance of the unity of time, just as the academic dramatists like Alexander used to do. But the play's conformity to the academic theory of structure is less obtrusive.

Looking into the structure of *The Tempest*, one would see that the first scene is like a prologue. With the second scene, we are straightaway plunged into a protasis which conceals its studious origin by an extraordinary, though not perhaps entirely successful, attempt to give a natural motivation and a naturalistic dialogue. The presentment of actors, which is one of the functions of the "beginning" part of the play, is accomplished in the first act. Only exception to the presentment are Trinculo and Stephano, who appear in the second scene of second act. But this has happened as the authority permitted. All that is relevant to what happened "in the dark backward and abysm of time," has been related before the end of the opening act. We are fully instructed by the end of second act regarding the nature of the final and typical disturbance which must be resolved by the end of the play. Ferdinand has met Miranda. Antonio has resolved upon, and has already set afoot, another usurper's plot. The low characters are shaping their attempt on Prospero and Miranda.

In the third act of *The Tempest*, the turbulence is intensified in accordance with the norm for the 'epitasis'. The fourth act continues the 'epitasis', despite the direct threat of intervention from Caliban. This act also prepares us for the comic catastrophe, by the union of Ferdinand and Miranda. The apparently unnecessary perturbation on the part of Prospero at the thought of Caliban can be a point at which an oddly pedantic concern for classical structure would cause its way through the surface of the play. But the fourth act shows the full vigour and crisis of the play's design - "Lies at my mercy all mine enemies." The exode or catastrophe is finally prepared by the *personae ad catastropham machinata*, who is Ariel.

Ariel is technically responsible for the comic nature of the catastrophe. For it is he, who makes Prospero say that he will offer his enemies forgiveness rather than revenge. But for Ariel's intervention, the catastrophe would have been tragic. At the same time, there are critics who have considered Ariel's act as utterly unnecessary in view of the already existing comic motive. This motive is the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda. Here, it is hard to ignore the fact that Ariel's pursuasion of Prospero is a point at which the classical structure tears through the texture of the play. On the other hand, the conversation about forgiveness, unlike Prospero's perturbation at the prospect of Caliban's rebellion, does seem to have some motivation in the structure of the play's ideas. It sounds plausible because it was necessary for the prince to overcome the turbulence of his own passions. It seems quite possible that Shakespeare purposely constructed *The Tempest* in accordance with the neo-Terentian regulations.

We also need to look into the fact as to why Shakespeare chose to treat this theme so intensively. In the chronology of Shakespeare's plays, *The Tempest*, is shown to follow *The Winter's Tale*. The latter play is so deeply committed to its extensive presentation that it is not easy to conceive of its being handled in any other way. At the same time, we cannot overlook the fact that there are strong affinities between the two plays. But in case we choose to take Caliban as the centre or focus of the play's structure of ideas, the said difficulty vanishes. It seems quite imperative to the whole system of contrasts based upon him that he should be adult. As Perdita knew, nurture will not stick on nature tout court. As we have seen, Caliban illustrates that point very well. But he serves double function as a criterion. Caliban cannot serve as this criterion until after the attempt to educate him, and after his just enslavement when Prospero's experiment had shown that his nurturing produced only "the briars and darnell of appetites."

#### **22.4 LET US SUM UP**

Thus, to conclude, the play features rich and symbolic imagery, with frequent references to the natural world, music, and art. Prospero's elaborate speeches and the island's lush descriptions enhance the play's poetic style, while the masque in Act IV exemplifies the blend of music, dance, and spectacle that was popular in the Jacobean era. Overall, *The Tempest* showcases Shakespeare's mastery of dramatic structure and his ability to seamlessly weave various elements into a cohesive and enchanting theatrical experience.

#### **22.5 SELF ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss *The Tempest* as a romance.
2. Discuss *The Tempest* as a tragic-comedy.
3. Is *The Tempest* autobiographical?
4. Analyse *The Tempest* from a Post-colonial angle.
5. Discuss the role of Caliban and Ariel in *The Tempest*.

#### **22.6 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. What style of language does Shakespeare primarily use for the character of Prospero in "The Tempest"?
  - a) Prose
  - b) Blank verse

- c) Rhymed couplets
- d) Monologues

2. In “The Tempest,” which character often speaks in prose, creating a stylistic contrast with others?

- a) Ariel
- b) Ferdinand
- c) Caliban
- d) Miranda

3. Shakespeare’s use of rich and symbolic imagery in “The Tempest” is often associated with which character’s speeches?

- a) Caliban
- b) Miranda
- c) Ariel
- d) Prospero

4. What theatrical element is incorporated into “The Tempest” through the masque in Act IV?

- a) Comedy
- b) Tragedy
- c) Music and dance
- d) Soliloquies

5. How many acts are typically found in the structure of a Shakespearean play like “The Tempest”?

- a) Three
- b) Four
- c) Five
- d) Six

6. The play “The Tempest” opens with a dramatic event that serves as a catalyst for the entire plot. What is this event?

- a) A wedding ceremony
- b) A shipwreck
- c) A political conspiracy
- d) A love confession

7. What is the main function of the character Prospero in the structure of “*The Tempest*”?

- a) The clown and comic relief
- b) The antagonist and source of conflict

- c) The protagonist and central figure
- d) The confidant and advisor

8. In the structure of “The Tempest,” which part of the play contains the climax of the story?

- a) Act I
- b) Act II
- c) Act III
- d) Act IV

9. “*The Tempest*” features multiple subplots in addition to the central narrative. Which subplot involves the love story between Miranda and Ferdinand?

- a) The subplot of revenge
- b) The subplot of political intrigue
- c) The romantic subplot
- d) The subplot of shipwreck survivors

10. The masque in Act IV of “The Tempest” is often seen as a stylistic departure from the main narrative. What is its purpose within the play’s structure?

- a) To provide comic relief
- b) To introduce new characters
- c) To explore the theme of love and marriage
- d) To create a sense of mystery and confusion

**Answers:**

1. b) Blank verse
2. c) Caliban
3. d) Prospero
4. c) Music and dance
5. c) Five
6. b) A shipwreck
7. c) The protagonist and central figure
8. c) Act III
9. c) The romantic subplot
10. c) To explore the theme of love and marriage

## 22.7 SUGGESTED READINGS

- C.L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*.
- Howard Felperin, *Shakespeare's Romance*.
- Ruth Nevo, *Comic Transformations in Shakespeare*.
- D. Yong, *The Heart's Forest: A Study of Shakespeare's Postal Plays*.

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## CRITICAL INTERPRETATIONS

### STRUCTURE

- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 23.3 Post-Colonial View
  - 23.3.1 What was Shakespeare's response to stereotypes of race and religion
  - 23.3.2 Early post-colonial responses to *The Tempest*
  - 23.3.3 An allegory of European discovery and colonisation
- 23.4 Ecocritical Reading of *The Tempest*
- 23.5 Feminist Politics in *The Tempest*
- 23.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.7 Multiple Choice Questions
- 23.8 Bibliography

### 23.1 INTRODUCTION

Postcolonial, ecocritical, and feminist readings are essential to understanding *The Tempest* as they unveil the intricate layers of power, environment, and gender dynamics embedded in the play. A postcolonial analysis highlights the themes of colonization and resistance, revealing the complex relationships between Prospero, the colonizer, and Caliban, the colonized. Ecocritical perspectives bring attention to the depiction of the island's natural world, emphasizing the environmental impact of human actions and the symbolic significance of the landscape. Feminist readings focus on the roles and agency of female characters, particularly Miranda, within the patriarchal framework, offering insights into gender relations and the representation of women. Together, these approaches enrich our understanding of *The Tempest* by exposing the social, political, and ecological dimensions that are crucial to its narrative and thematic depth.

### 23.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

#### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Explore multiple critical perspectives for interpreting *The Tempest*.
2. Understand how postcolonial theory frames characters like Caliban and Ariel in terms of power, race, and control.
3. Investigate the play's relationship with nature (ecocriticism) and the role of women (feminist theory).

## Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Apply a postcolonial lens to discuss colonial power dynamics between Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel.
2. Use ecocritical approaches to analyze the depiction of nature, the island, and the disruption of natural order.
3. Reflect on Miranda's limited agency and discuss feminist concerns about voice, representation, and gender roles.

### 23.3 POST-COLONIAL VIEW

Post-colonial readings of *The Tempest* were inspired by the decolonisation movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America.

#### 23.3.1 What was Shakespeare's response to stereotypes of race and religion?

Post-colonial criticism is a method of analysis that addresses questions of racial identity and equality, and also of gender equity via two main modes of inquiry. First, it investigates how Shakespeare's plays relate to the social codes and conventions by which early modern Europeans defined non-European and non-Christian people and races they encountered. Second, it explores the more recent history of the reception of Shakespearian drama within non-Western societies and settings – in Africa, India, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

Thus, post-colonial criticism of a play like *Othello* not only draws our attention to Renaissance attitudes toward Moors, Africans, and Turks, among others, but it also examines how the play may have been interpreted and performed in countries involved in recent colonial and post-colonial struggles, for example in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. This process was, of course, a complex one. On the one hand, Shakespeare was an export to the colonies of European literature and language as a part of their policy of cultural domination. On the other hand, it also enabled the colonized groups to revise and remake Shakespeare's works in ways which related to their own social conditions.

#### 23.3.2 Early post-colonial responses to *The Tempest*

Early postcolonial responses to *The Tempest* were varied and complex, reflecting the diverse perspectives and experiences of colonized peoples grappling with the legacies of European colonialism. These responses often focused on reclaiming agency, challenging colonial narratives, and exploring the power dynamics inherent in the play.

One notable early response to the play came from Aimé Césaire, a Martinican poet and playwright, in his play *Une Tempête* (A Tempest) published in 1969. Césaire's adaptation reimagines the play from a Caribbean perspective and presents a postcolonial critique of the original work. Césaire portrays Caliban as a revolutionary figure and a symbol of resistance against colonial oppression.

Through this portrayal, Césaire challenges the racial and power dynamics in Shakespeare's play and confronts the dehumanizing effects of colonization. In addition to Césaire, other postcolonial writers and theorists engaged with *The Tempest* to explore themes of colonialism and its aftermath. For instance, Frantz Fanon, an influential figure in postcolonial studies, analyzed the play in his book "The Drowned and the Saved" as an example

of the colonizer's anxiety and fear of the colonized subject. Fanon argued that Prospero's control and manipulation of Caliban mirrored the oppressive tactics employed by colonial powers.

Another influential postcolonial scholar, Edward Said, referenced the play in his work *Culture and Imperialism*. Said examined the play as a metaphor for colonialism and explored the ways in which it reinforced European notions of superiority and domination. He highlighted the parallels between Prospero's control over the island and the colonizer's control over colonized territories. These early postcolonial responses to the play challenged the dominant narratives of colonialism, sought to reclaim marginalized voices, and interrogated the power dynamics inherent in Shakespeare's play. By reinterpreting characters like Caliban and presenting alternative narratives, these responses aimed to subvert and disrupt the colonial gaze and reclaim agency for colonized peoples.

Moreover, these responses explored the themes of power, identity, and resistance, drawing attention to the legacies of colonialism and their impact on postcolonial societies. They interrogated the portrayal of indigenous cultures, critiqued the use of language and discourse in perpetuating colonial ideologies, and explored the complexities of identity and belonging. It is important to note that early postcolonial responses to the play were not limited to literary adaptations or theoretical analyses. They also inspired theatrical productions that aimed to challenge and subvert colonial narratives. Performances such as the 1978 Royal Shakespeare Company's production of the play directed by John Caird, which incorporated elements of African and Caribbean cultures, were influential in presenting alternative perspectives and highlighting the play's colonial themes.

In summary, early postcolonial responses to the play were diverse and multifaceted. Aimé Césaire's adaptation, as well as the work of scholars like Frantz Fanon and Edward Said, contributed to the reevaluation of the play's themes and characters from a postcolonial perspective. These responses aimed to challenge colonial narratives, reclaim agency for colonized peoples, and explore the power dynamics and legacies of European colonialism. They played a crucial role in shaping the field of postcolonial studies and continue to influence contemporary readings and adaptations of *The Tempest* in the context of decolonization and cultural reclamation.

Overall, whether one considers *The Tempest* as an allegory of Caliban's liberation or of Prospero's colonial paternalism, post-colonial readings of the play's reception in the developing world clearly establish that we can no longer recuperate *The Tempest* as a historically 'innocent' text, uncorrupted by later historical readings.

### Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. Caliban is often interpreted as a symbol of the \_\_\_ subject in postcolonial theory.
2. An ecocritical reading explores the relationship between humans and \_\_\_.
3. Prospero's control over the island reflects a \_\_\_ mindset.
4. From a feminist lens, Miranda is seen as largely \_\_\_ in decision-making.

### Answers

1. colonized
2. nature
3. colonial
4. passive

### 23.3.3 *The Tempest* as an allegory of European discovery and colonisation

*The Tempest* can be interpreted as an allegory of European discovery and colonization, exploring the themes, motivations, and consequences of European expansion and domination during the Age of Exploration. Several elements of the play contribute to this allegorical reading.

**The Island:** The setting of the play, a remote island, symbolizes the newly discovered territories during the Age of Exploration. The island is presented as a pristine and untamed land, untouched by European influence. This mirrors the portrayal of the Americas and other lands encountered by European explorers, which were seen as exotic and ripe for exploitation.

**Prospero as the Colonizer:** Prospero, the powerful magician and usurped Duke of Milan, represents the European colonizer. His arrival on the island and subsequent dominance over its inhabitants parallel the European conquest and colonization of foreign lands. Prospero's use of magic to control the elements and manipulate the indigenous characters reflects the technological and military advantages that European colonizers possessed.

**Caliban as the Colonized:** Caliban, the native inhabitant of the island, embodies the colonized subject. He is depicted as savage, subhuman, and subject to the control and oppression of Prospero. Caliban's characterization reflects the dehumanization and othering of indigenous peoples by European colonizers, who often justified their actions by considering the natives as inferior and in need of civilization.

**Ariel as Indigenous Resources:** Ariel, the spirit bound to serve Prospero, can be interpreted as a representation of the indigenous resources that European colonizers sought to exploit. Ariel's abilities and powers, similar to the natural resources of the colonized lands, are harnessed for the benefit of the colonizer. This parallels the European desire to exploit the resources and labor of the lands they encountered.

**Themes of Power and Control:** The play explores the dynamics of power and control inherent in colonization. Prospero's dominance over the island and its inhabitants mirrors the imperial ambitions of European colonizers. The play raises questions about the ethical implications of such power, the impact on the colonized, and the potential for abuse and exploitation.

**Language and Cultural Suppression:** Prospero's control over language, demonstrated through his manipulation of communication and his ability to punish those who do not adhere to his rules, reflects the efforts of European colonizers to impose their language and culture on the colonized. The suppression of Caliban's native language and culture mirrors the erasure and marginalization of indigenous languages and traditions during colonization. Overall, *The Tempest* can be seen as an allegory of European discovery and colonization, exploring the power dynamics, motivations, and consequences of European expansion during the Age of Exploration. The play highlights the themes of dominance, exploitation, cultural suppression, and the dehumanization of indigenous peoples, shedding light on the complex legacy of European colonialism.

Given these changing responses to Shakespeare's *The Tempest* in the former 'Third World', it is not surprising that by the 1980s, Anglo-American readings of the play began to join in such interrogations of Prospero's rule and in empathy for Caliban. In doing so, post-colonial criticism in the West was somewhat belated in acknowledging the significance of the play's historical background. Since the 1980s, burgeoning post-colonial criticism has brought new light to bear upon the play's sources in the narratives of 'discovery' and colonisation

of the Americas. Most critics agree that Shakespeare used Elizabethan travel writing, both for his dramatisation of the opening storm and shipwreck and his depiction of the European confrontation with a ‘savage’, Caliban.

In particular, he drew on William Strachey’s account written in 1610 –probably circulating in unpublished form – of the shipwreck and redemption of Sir Thomas Gates’s expedition in the Bermudas in 1609, while on his way to Jamestown in the Virginia colony established by the British. Gates was wrecked in a most dreadful tempest on an island that proved to be so habitable and rich in food that his men were reluctant to leave. Thus, one strand of post-colonial criticism follows the play’s journey literally to the European ‘discovery’ and settlement of the Americas. In that context, critics note how the figure of Caliban easily merges into the image of the cannibal, the mythical ‘savage’ whom many European travellers claimed to have encountered. Fantasies of real and imagined cannibals in the Renaissance gave an important impetus to European ventures of bringing ‘civilisation’ to the natives.

Such a post-colonial focus on *The Tempest*’s relation to geographical exploration – with an emphasis on the colonisation of the Americas – produces a reading of the play that differs radically from traditional European validations of Prospero’s dominant role. It calls for a reappraisal of Prospero’s and Caliban’s competing views of history and settlement of the island. According to Prospero, Caliban’s mother was the ‘damned witch Sycorax’ who ‘For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible / To enter human hearing, from Algiers, ... was banished’ to this island (1.2.263–65). When Prospero recounts this story to Ariel, the spirit in his servitude, he makes sure to remind Ariel of the distinction between Sycorax’s evil magic and his own supposedly benevolent arts:

*This blue-eyed hag was hither brought with child,  
And here was left by th’ sailors. Thou, my slave,  
As thou [Ariel] report’s thyself, was then her servant;  
And for thou wast aspirit too delicate  
To act her earthy and abhorred commands,  
Refusing her grand hests, she did confine thee  
By help of her more potent ministers,  
And in her most unmitigable rage,  
Into a cloven pine; within which rift  
Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain  
A dozen years ...*

(1.2.269–79)

Once he establishes Sycorax’s supposedly evil nature, Prospero then labels her son, Caliban, as less than human – ‘freckled whelp, hag-born – not honoured with / A human shape’ (1.2.283–84). However, even as he derides Caliban, Prospero claims to have treated him with kindness in attempts to humanize him.

*I have used thee,*

*Filth as thou art, with human care, and lodged thee  
In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate  
The honour of my child.*

(1.2.348–48)

Once Prospero defines Caliban as a potential rapist of his daughter Miranda, he easily justifies taking him into forced servitude, as he explains in this exchange:

MIRANDA *'Tis a villain, sir,*

*I do not love to look on.*

PROSPERO *But as 'tis,*

*... He does make our fire,*

*Fetch in our wood, and serves in offices*

*That profit us.-What ho! Slave! Caliban!*

(1.2.311–13)

Miranda also justifies their enslavement of Caliban with the assertion that they tried to civilise him but to no avail:

*Abhorred slave,  
Which any print of goodness wilt not take,  
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,  
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour  
One thing or other. When thou didst not, savage,  
Know thine own meaning, but wouldest gabble like  
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes  
With words that made them known.*

(1.2.351–58)

Miranda and Prospero's justifications of their enslavement of the 'savage' Caliban, whose 'vile race' (1.2.358) lacks natural goodness, are strongly challenged by post-colonial criticism. Unlike generations of earlier readers, post-colonial critics view Prospero's and Miranda's relations with Caliban as an allegory of European colonialism – one that reveals Shakespeare's own ambivalence toward Prospero's power. Europeans' colonising activities among non-European natives they encountered in the Americas, Africa, and the Caribbean were based on the premise of the 'civilising mission'. This mission assumed that the natives lacked any culture or formal language until the Europeans brought them the 'gifts' of Western language and culture. If the natives resisted European paternal rule, then they were labelled as 'savages', beyond redemption. It is ironic that Shakespeare

makes Caliban articulate this dilemma when he exclaims to Miranda and Prospero: 'You taught me language, and my profit on't / Is I know how to curse' (1.2.363–64).

### Caliban's version of history

Caliban, as an indigenous inhabitant of the island in the play offers his own version of history that challenges the dominant narrative shaped by Prospero and the European colonizers. His perspective sheds light on the oppression, exploitation, and mistreatment experienced by the island's original inhabitants. Here are a few quotes that encapsulate Caliban's version of history:

*"This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother,  
Which thou tak'st from me."* (Act I, Scene II)

In this quote, Caliban asserts his ownership and connection to the island, emphasizing that it originally belonged to his mother, Sycorax. He challenges Prospero's claim to the land, highlighting the dispossession and colonization faced by the native inhabitants.

*"You taught me language, and my profit on't  
Is, I know how to curse."* (Act I, Scene II)

Caliban's quote underscores the power dynamics between him and Prospero. While Prospero claims to have educated Caliban, the language he has taught him is primarily used for cursing and abuse. This quote implies that the influence of the colonizers has brought more harm than benefit to Caliban.

*"This island's mine by Sycorax, my mother,  
Which thou tak'st from me."* (Act I, Scene II)

Caliban repeats this sentiment, emphasizing his connection to Sycorax and his claim to the island. By asserting his ownership and connection to his mother, he challenges the legitimacy of Prospero's authority and colonial control.

*"You taught me your language, and my profit on't  
Is that I know how to curse. The red plague rid you  
For learning me your language!"* (Act I, Scene II)

This quote demonstrates Caliban's frustration and resentment towards Prospero for teaching him the colonizers' language, which has been used to exploit and subjugate him. His curse reflects his anger and desire for retribution against his oppressors.

*"This island's mine, my Sycorax, my mother,  
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou camest first,  
Thou strok'dst me and made much of me."* (Act I, Scene II)

In this quote, Caliban reminds Prospero of the initial interactions between them. He accuses Prospero of betrayal, highlighting how the colonizer initially showed kindness and affection but later turned to oppression and exploitation.

Caliban's version of history challenges the dominant narrative of colonization and foregrounds the experiences of the colonized. His quotes reveal the dispossession, cultural erasure, and mistreatment suffered by the indigenous inhabitants of the island. By asserting his connection to his mother and the land, Caliban asserts his right to agency and self-determination, seeking to reclaim his own narrative in the face of colonial power. It is this rendition of history that became the battle cry for the anti-colonial movements in Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America – a rendition that became the staple of many revisions and appropriations of Shakespeare's play in these regions. While the play was written in 17th-century England, post-colonial criticism takes the play outwards towards its complicated transactions between European and African and Caribbean cultures in the succeeding centuries. Post-colonial criticism in the West has mined this new archive of the reception history of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, questioning, once again, all normative ideas of a 'common humanity', while articulating, as Shakespeare did, the voices of the seemingly marginal characters in Prospero's grand designs.

### 23.4 ECOCRITICAL READING OF *THE TEMPEST*

An ecocritical reading of Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* explores the intricate relationship between humans and the natural world, highlighting themes of environmental destruction, stewardship, and the interconnectedness of all living beings. Through this lens, the play invites us to reflect on our responsibilities towards the environment and the consequences of our actions. Leo Marx (1964) proposed that William Shakespeare's tragicomedy *The Tempest* (1611) be considered an allegory for the New World, in the midst of the social and cultural upheaval of the 1960s (26-47). David Gray argues that since the twentieth century there has been a massive proliferation in the number of ecocritical analyses on Shakespeare's works (2), an further stresses:

*This new way of reading Shakespeare shares in a long history of critical attention to natural phenomena and the complex relationships between culture and nature in his writing, but is, at the same time, distinguishable from this tradition by way of its increasing awareness of the Anthropocene, or humanity's role as a geological agent affecting the Earth's climate and environment (2).*

Let us delve into the key elements constituting its ecocritical strand.

"*The Tempest*" is set on a remote island, where the characters are isolated from the civilized world. The island itself becomes a microcosm that reflects larger ecological concerns and the fragility of the natural environment. It symbolizes a space untouched by human influence, where the balance of nature is preserved.

One of the central ecological themes in the play is the disruption and destruction caused by human intervention. Prospero's arrival on the island and his exercise of power disrupts the harmony of the natural world. This disruption is symbolized by the tempest he conjures, which represents the chaos and imbalance resulting from human actions.

The character of Caliban embodies the connection between humans and the environment. Caliban, as the indigenous inhabitant of the island, is deeply intertwined with the natural world. His knowledge of the island's resources and his ability to communicate with its spirits demonstrate a profound connection to the ecosystem. Caliban's subjugation by Prospero and his subsequent degradation reflect the consequences of human exploitation and domination over the natural world.

In contrast, the spirit Ariel represents the ethereal and ephemeral aspects of nature. Ariel's role as an intermediary between Prospero and the natural elements highlights the interconnectedness of humans and the environment. Ariel's songs and enchantments influence the natural world, revealing the delicate balance between human agency and the response of the natural environment.

Moreover, the character of Gonzalo offers an alternative perspective on the human-nature relationship. Gonzalo's utopian vision, expressed in his speech about the ideal commonwealth, promotes a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. His belief in the natural abundance and self-sufficiency of the island suggests the importance of responsible stewardship and sustainable practices.

The play also emphasizes the transformative power of nature. As the characters are marooned on the island, they undergo personal transformations. Prospero's abandonment of his magical powers at the end of the play can be interpreted as a metaphorical return to a more balanced and harmonious relationship with the natural world. It signifies a recognition of the limitations of human dominance and the need for humility and respect for the environment.

*The Tempest* also invites us to reflect on the consequences of environmental degradation and the restoration of ecological balance. The storm and the tempestuous weather throughout the play serve as reminders of nature's power and its ability to exact consequences for human actions. This emphasizes the need for responsible environmental practices and the recognition of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all living beings.

Additionally, the play presents various natural elements, such as the trees, plants, and the sounds of nature, which evoke a sense of enchantment and wonder. Shakespeare's vivid descriptions of the island's flora and fauna engage our senses and inspire an appreciation for the beauty and richness of the natural world.

In conclusion, an ecocritical reading of *The Tempest* highlights the play's exploration of the complex relationship between humans and the natural environment. Through themes of disruption, stewardship, interconnectedness, and restoration, the play prompts us to reflect on our responsibilities towards the environment and the consequences of our actions. By emphasizing the fragility and interconnectedness of ecosystems, *The Tempest* encourages us to cultivate a deeper appreciation for the natural world and to strive for a more sustainable and harmonious coexistence with the environment.

### **23.5 FEMINIST POLITICS IN *THE TEMPEST***

In *The Tempest* Shakespeare explores the role of women and the ways in which they are politically manipulated through arranged marriages. While the play reflects the patriarchal norms of its time, it also offers glimpses of feminist commentary and complexities surrounding women's agency and power dynamics.

One of the primary instances of women being politically used in contracting marriage is through the character of Miranda, Prospero's daughter. Prospero orchestrates a union between Miranda and Ferdinand, the son of his enemy Alonso. This marriage serves to solidify political alliances and reconcile past conflicts. Miranda, however, willingly embraces the match, and her agency in choosing Ferdinand is evident. Despite being used as a political pawn, she actively participates in the courtship and expresses her desire for Ferdinand, exhibiting a degree of agency in her own fate. On the other hand, the character of Caliban attempts to use Miranda as a means of overthrowing Prospero and reclaiming the island. He sees her as a tool to further his own political agenda and

asserts his right to her body in his attempt to enlist her as his ally. This highlights the problematic and gendered power dynamics at play, where women are often objectified and used as tools in political struggles.

Moreover, the presence of the character Ariel complicates the exploration of gender dynamics in the play. Ariel, a genderless spirit, challenges traditional gender roles and expectations. Ariel's obedience and servitude to Prospero can be interpreted as a commentary on the way society, including women, are often expected to conform to societal norms and expectations. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning the absence of female characters who have agency and power in their own right. The play lacks female characters who can actively challenge or subvert the patriarchal order. This absence, however, might be a reflection of the social and cultural context of Shakespeare's time, rather than a deliberate suppression of feminist voices.

It is essential to analyze *The Tempest* within its historical context, where women's agency and power were often limited by societal norms. While the play does reflect patriarchal attitudes towards women, it also presents moments of female agency and challenges to traditional gender roles. Miranda's active participation in choosing her own partner and Ariel's fluid gender representation disrupt the patriarchal order and offer possibilities for feminist interpretations.

Overall, *The Tempest* offers a complex portrayal of women and their involvement in political alliances through arranged marriages. While the play reflects some patriarchal norms and the use of women as political tools, it also provides glimpses of female agency, challenging traditional gender roles. Examining these dynamics within their historical context allows for a nuanced understanding of feminism and the political use of women in the play.

### **Miranda**

From a feminist lens, Miranda's character in "The Tempest" can be seen as emblematic of the commodification and objectification of women, particularly through the emphasis on her chastity. While Miranda is portrayed as a virtuous and innocent young woman, her characterization raises important questions about the societal expectations and limitations imposed on women.

Throughout the play, Miranda's chastity becomes a topic of discussion and control. Prospero, her father, carefully guards her virginity, using it as a tool to ensure her desirability and bargaining power in the context of arranged marriages. This emphasis on her purity reinforces the notion that a woman's worth is tied to her sexual innocence and availability, perpetuating the idea that women are objects to be traded and controlled. The play also highlights the notion of Miranda as a commodity when her father refers to her as his "only treasure" and speaks of her as an asset in his political plans. This reduces Miranda to an object to be bartered and traded, stripping her of agency and reducing her to a possession.

Furthermore, Miranda's lack of agency is evident in her limited interactions and isolation from the outside world. Prospero actively controls and restricts her experiences, denying her exposure to other people and cultures. This portrayal reflects the patriarchal notion that women need to be sheltered and controlled for their own protection, ultimately reinforcing gendered power dynamics.

However, it is worth noting that Miranda does exhibit moments of agency within the constraints of her circumstances. For instance, she actively expresses her own desires when she falls in love with Ferdinand. Her feelings for him are not orchestrated or controlled by Prospero, and she takes the initiative to engage in a courtship

with Ferdinand. These instances highlight Miranda's individual agency and desire for personal fulfillment, challenging the notion of her passivity.

When examining Miranda's character through a feminist lens, it is crucial to consider the historical context of the play. During Shakespeare's time, societal expectations for women were deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and ideals. The portrayal of Miranda reflects the limitations and objectification that women faced within this framework.

In conclusion, from a feminist perspective, Miranda's commodification and the discussion of her chastity in the play underscore the objectification and control of women prevalent in patriarchal societies. While the play presents moments of agency and desire for personal fulfillment, it also highlights the societal constraints imposed on women and the reduction of their worth to their sexual purity. By exploring and critiquing these aspects, feminist analysis of Miranda's character invites a deeper examination of gender dynamics and the oppressive nature of societal expectations.

### Where are all the women?

At the end of *The Tempest*, Miranda says, "O brave new world / That has such people in't." However, the only human beings she's seen so far are men, and, in fact, Miranda is the only female human character the audience sees in the whole play. The lack of female characters in *The Tempest* says a lot about how the men in the play imagine the role of women in society. Perhaps the most obvious instance where a male character explicitly situates women in a broad social vision occurs when Gonzalo describes how he would run the island if he had an opportunity to rule. Gonzalo outlines a society defined by leisure and the lack of commerce: "No occupation: all men idle, all. / And women too, but innocent and pure" (2.1.). Gonzalo's inclusion of women seems like an afterthought, as if he had all but forgotten about them, then remembered that they play a necessary role in society, provided that they are "innocent and pure." Just as Gonzalo consigns women to the social background, so too does *The Tempest* as a whole keep its female characters backstage.

Aside from the goddesses Iris, Ceres, and Juno, who are non-human projections created by the male spirit Ariel, the only female character with an active role in the play is Miranda. Even Miranda remains somewhat passive, as she is subject to her father's command. Even though she feels sincerely attracted to Ferdinand, Prospero manipulates her psychologically in order to stoke the fire of her attraction further. The fact that Prospero manipulates Miranda like a pawn in his larger political game indicates how men in *The Tempest* subordinate women to their desires. His speech, in blessing the upcoming wedding, indicates Prospero sees his daughter as his property: "Then, as my gift, and thine own acquisition / Worthily purchased..." (IV.i.) For Prospero, Miranda's value lies mainly in her virginity, which makes her politically advantageous marriage to Ferdinand possible. Miranda's marriage represents the promise of a new beginning, which Prospero desperately wishes for himself. Prospero's future therefore depends on Miranda's virginity, which is why he must guard against all sexual advances, whether from Caliban or Ferdinand.

Shakespeare names but never introduces several other female characters in *The Tempest*. Of these characters, Sycorax serves as Prospero's evil female alter ego. As the mother of Caliban and the previous ruler of the island who died before Prospero could take direct action against her, Sycorax bears the brunt of Prospero's misogyny. He refers to her variously as a "damned witch" (I.ii.) and a "blue-eyed hag" (I.ii.), and he relishes recounting how cruel a mistress she was. For instance, he reminds Ariel "once [every] month" (I.ii.) that Sycorax

locked him in a tree for twelve painful years. Prospero also narrates the story of how she came to the island in the first place. Pregnant with her monstrous child, Sycorax was banished from Algiers for committing unspeakable crimes. If Prospero places so much emphasis on Sycorax's abominable nature, he does so to highlight his own comparative benevolence, and thereby secure his underlings' obedience. In contrast with the evil Sycorax, Prospero appears a rather benign ruler, and he must continuously revive her cruel memory to make himself look good.

### **23.6 LET US SUM UP**

William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* can be examined through various critical lenses, revealing its rich thematic complexity. From a postcolonial perspective, the play explores themes of colonization and power dynamics, particularly through the relationships between Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel, highlighting issues of exploitation and cultural hegemony. Feminist criticism addresses the limited roles and agency of female characters like Miranda, scrutinizing the patriarchal structures that shape their identities and interactions. Ecocritically, the play engages with the natural world and human impact on the environment, as seen in the island's transformation under Prospero's control, raising questions about stewardship, dominance, and harmony with nature.

### **23.7 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. From a postcolonial perspective, Prospero's relationship with Caliban can be seen as representing:
  - A. Friendship
  - B. Father-son bond
  - C. Colonizer and colonized
  - D. Teacher and student
2. Caliban's character is often interpreted in postcolonial readings as a symbol of:
  - A. European nobility
  - B. The native oppressed by colonial power
  - C. The ideal servant
  - D. A magical creature
3. Which aspect of *The Tempest* is most scrutinized in ecocritical analysis?
  - A. The political intrigue
  - B. The romantic subplot
  - C. The natural environment of the island
  - D. The use of magic
4. In feminist analysis, Miranda's role is often viewed as:
  - A. Empowered and independent
  - B. Marginalized and controlled

- C. Equal to Prospero
- D. Representative of colonial power

5. A feminist reading of the play might argue that Miranda's marriage to Ferdinand primarily serves to:

- A. Highlight her autonomy
- B. Reinforce patriarchal structures
- C. Demonstrate her rebellion
- D. Undermine her father's authority

6. Ecocritical interpretations often examine the island as a symbol of:

- A. Industrial progress
- B. Pristine nature untouched by humans
- C. Urban development
- D. Technological advancement

7. From a postcolonial perspective, Prospero's control over the island's resources can be seen as a metaphor for:

- A. Sustainable development
- B. Colonial exploitation of native lands
- C. Harmonious living with nature
- D. Scientific exploration

8. In feminist criticism, which character's treatment highlights the gender dynamics and limitations placed on women?

- A. Ariel
- B. Gonzalo
- C. Miranda
- D. Antonio

9. Ecocriticism might interpret Prospero's renunciation of magic as:

- A. Embracing industrialization
- B. Rejecting his role as a colonial ruler
- C. A return to a more harmonious relationship with nature
- D. Abandoning his power over people

10. Postcolonial readings of *The Tempest* often highlight the theme of:

- Technological progress
- The superiority of European culture
- Resistance and rebellion against oppression
- The inevitability of colonization

**Answers:**

- C. Colonizer and colonized
- B. The native oppressed by colonial power
- C. The natural environment of the island
- B. Marginalized and controlled
- B. Reinforce patriarchal structures
- B. Pristine nature untouched by humans
- B. Colonial exploitation of native lands
- C. Miranda
- C. A return to a more harmonious relationship with nature
- C. Resistance and rebellion against oppression

**23.8 SUGGESTED READINGS:**

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## WEBSTER AND HIS TIMES

### STRUCTURE

- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Objectives and Outcomes
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### 24.1 INTRODUCTION

John Webster holds a unique position among the Jacobean dramatists. The age called Jacobean followed the Age of Elizabeth, which ended in 1603. From the death of Elizabeth to 1625, the period in history of English literature is called the Jacobean Period. Unlike many Jacobean dramatists, Webster was not a traditionalist, such as Dekker and Heywood were. Surely, he cannot be grouped with them without some blurring of his uniqueness. At the same time, he cannot be classed with the more typical Jacobeans. We cannot do that because, unlike the typical Jacobeans, he was neither a satirist, nor a defeatist, nor an escapist. It will not be an exaggeration to insist that the tone of his greatest tragedies allies him more closely with Shakespeare and Marlowe than with any of his more immediate contemporaries.

### 24.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

#### Objectives

Learners will:

1. Learn about the life, times, and dramatic milieu of John Webster.
2. Identify Webster's major tragedies and their place in Jacobean drama.

3. Understand the thematic and stylistic distinctiveness of his works.

### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Recall key facts about Webster's life and dramatic influences.
2. List his major tragedies such as *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The White Devil*.
3. Discuss the dark, complex themes and psychological depth in his tragedies.

## 24.3 HIS LIFE

The record of Webster's life is almost non-existent. The bibliography of his works also is, exceptionally obscure and fragmentary. Two facts, however, do indicate his status as dramatist. One of these is, as indicated in his prefaces, that Ben Jonson had a serene confidence in the merit of his work. The other is that the publishers gave his name on title pages an emphasis equal to that of Shakespeare. Also, several of his contemporaries paid him high tributes. One outstanding example of these tributes is, the set of complimentary verses which Middleton, Rowley and Ford wrote for *The Duchess of Malfi*. These are great tributes by any standard, a great achievement for dramatist.

John Webster was born in London in 1580. His father was a coach-maker and a freeman of the Merchant Taylors Company. He is first mentioned in Henslowe's Diary in 1601 as an author of several plays, none of which seems to have survived. One of them, *Lady Jane* (viz., Grey), can probably be traced in Sir Thomas Wyatt, printed in 1607 as by Dekker and Webster. It is a loose chronological play, in casual verse and prose, and is quite close to the first part of Heywood's *If You Know Not Me*, which it likewise resembles in being preserved in a very faulty text. In 1604, Webster wrote for Shakespeare's company the famous induction to Marston's *Malcontent*, which, even though very brief, gives a valuable view of what went on a performance at the Globe. About the same time he collaborated with Dekker again in two city comedies for the Children of Paul's, *Westward Ho!* and during a *Northward Ho!* The former received notable admiration from Ben Jonson in the prologue to the oppositely-named *Eastward Ho!*: "For that was good, and better cannot be." Both these pieces are lively and well-plotted. Both are written in prose. Also, both deal with the amorous amusements of London wives. It is naturally very difficult to trace in them the later Webster. At the same time, they do not seem to be predominantly Dekker's work. They are quite devoid of the caustic satire which was the fashion of the day. And though the language and situations are pungent enough, the citizens' wives are a good deal better than their reputations.

The loss of Webster's play *Guise* is something to be deplored. Evidently, he thought well of this play. The very fact that he chose to bracket it with *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi* in the dedication of his *Devil's Law-Case* shows how well he thought of it. It seems most likely that this play was founded on Marlowe's *Massacre of Paris*. That would probably emphasize the Marlowian strain in Webster's work. But in the absence of *Guise* his reputation rests now almost wholly upon his two well-known tragedies just mentioned. We must note that these two tragedies are very different from all other tragedies of the Jacobean period.

## 24.4 THE GREAT TRAGEDIES

One of these famous tragedies of Webster is *The White Devil*. It was acted by the Queen's company of Heywood in 1612, and was printed the same year. It concerns the rather recent case of Vittoria Accoramboni,

Duchess of Bracciano, who lived from 1557 to 1585. By following the available accounts of her brief and stormy life he could have produced a much more plausible tragedy than the one he wrote. But Webster as dramatist is never plausible. Whenever he deviates from his sources, he usually does so in order to emphasize the brutal irrationality of life. And by so doing he increases his constructional difficulties. In Webster's play, Vittoria is neither white nor a devil. Her complicity in her husband's murder, though morally certain, is not avowed. In the great scene of Act III, in which she is arraigned before Cardinal Monticelso and the embarrassed ambassadors, Webster allows her all the honours of the conflict. It is a scene which perhaps John Fletcher may be thought to have done well to copy a year or two later, when he wrote Katharine of Aragon's defence of herself before Cardinal Wolsey and Campeius.

Vittoria has a brother whose name is Flamineo. He is one of the most bloodcurdlingly real villains in English drama. She also has a mother whose name is Cornelia. She is one of the most pathetic creations of the play. She is a kind of ancient Ophelia of Shakespeare's Hamlet. Webster works with terror and pity, undiluted, and in copious outpourings. He employs ghosts and horrid dumb-shows after the manner of the early Senecans. He also has in his play many of the grisliest stage deaths in drama. Isabella dies by kissing a poisoned picture of her husband. Camillo's neck is broken by his companions while vaulting. Brachiano is killed by a poisoned helmet. The pain drives him mad. Marcello is, without warning, run through the body by his brother in their mother's presence. Vittoria, Zanche, and Flamineo are all stabbed after a scene in which Flamineo has most horridly pretended to be shot with pistols. The deaths pile up so lawlessly that one is tempted to retort upon the author the last question in the play :

*By what authority have you committed  
This massacre?*

But between these many and horrid deaths are some small and moving voices that protest and indicate the pity of it. For instance, the boy Giovanni's talk with his uncle in Act III, Scene-ii and Cornelia's mad song in Act V, scene-i:

*Call for the robin redbreast and the wren,  
Since ov'r shady groves they hover,  
And with leaves and flowers do cover  
The friendless bodies of unburied men.*

The brutality of Webster's villains notwithstanding, his poetry in this play, as well as in The Duchess of Malfi, is as powerful as, that of Marlowe and Shakespeare.

The more famous of the two great tragedies of Webster has been The Duchess of Malfi. It was acted by Shakespeare's Company by about 1613. It was revised later. It is considered better than The White Devil because, even though it has as much terror, it has more pity, and so gives Webster's view of life in better Malfi. Its plot is derived from William Painter's Palace of Pleasure, which was a storehouse of plots for the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, including Shakespeare. Painter's book made available in English the tales and fables of Italian and French writers, such as Boccaccio and Bandello. Webster's story of the Duchess came from Bandello. Based on very early sixteenth century history Webster made it as absurd as possible. The Duchess, contracting a marriage of love with her honest and knightly master of the household, must keep it a secret from her two brothers. They place a super-spy in her palace, whose name is Bosola, to inform them of just such matters. An

average detective would do Bosola's business in a day. But in this play the obvious is never discernible. Years pass, while Bosola pries and plots, children are born and even grow to maturity in the way Sidney deplored, before the wicked brothers discover the reality of their sister's marriage with the steward.

The fourth Act of *The Duchess of Malfi*, is wholly devoted to the Duchess's death. It may well be considered the greatest death scene in Elizabethan literature. The fifth Act, which presents six deaths more, should be an anticlimax. But it is kept aloft by Webster's mastery of the macabre. It is Webster's poetry which again salvages his play. All absurdities of the play get overlooked under the powerful sweep of his poetry. A large number of memorable aphorisms flow from the mouth of the villain himself. When outwitted by his employers, he utters some grand truths of life. Added to the beauty of Webster's poetry is his creation of the character of the Duchess. She remains in the play the most memorable figure. Her nobility makes her a towering figure in the play. Her case also raises in our time the question of gender justice. We shall have occasion to discuss all these issues in the subsequent lessons.

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Meanwhile, resuming the subject of Webster's career as a dramatist, it almost carries us back to the work of Thomas Kyd, one of the University Wits who wrote plays before Shakespeare in the age of Elizabeth. Of course, the strange art of Webster is far more intelligent than that of Kyd. His style is curiously unrhythmic, except in the songs which crash in, like the trumpets of doom, upon the cacophonies of mundane speech. His dialogue is often patched with sayings from Sidney, Montaigne, or Donne. He is said to have stored these sayings in his notebooks. Webster quite often introduces formal "characters" such as he was writing for the overbury collection.

#### 24.5 HIS VIEW OF LIFE

Webster's view of life is said to be Elizabethan rather than Jacobean. The sharp distinction he maintains between good and bad and the straightforwardness with which he faces death and horror bring him closer to Elizabethans than his own Jacobean contemporaries. He is considered one of the most romantic of dramatists. In his view, life is like a labyrinth. His Duchess says near the beginning of the play, "Wish me good speed"

*For I am going into a wilderness,  
Where I shall find nor path nor friendly clue  
To be my guide.*

In Webster's world, the only constant is death. He leads his characters relentlessly upto this constant. And he dismisses them under the glare of death's great illumination. He seldom makes theological assertions. But a reading of his plays is a kind of religious experience. If any affinity must be sought among the Stuart writers, it

will be found in such mystic poets as George Herbert, and Henry Vaughan. Like them, Webster, too, seems to be constantly whispering :

*Dear, beauteous death, the jewel of the just,  
Shining nowhere but in the dark,  
What mysteries do lie beyond thy dust,  
Could man outlook that mark*

These lines from Vaughan's "They are all gone into the world of light" the kind of view Webster seems to hold of Death. None of the Jacobean dramatists seem to hold the same view of death. It is Webster's colleagues among express the Metaphysicals who seem much closer to him in this matter of Death.

No one however, is more like Webster than Shakespeare in the latter's darkest moods. Shakespeare's play that most resembles Webster's two great tragedies is King Lear. Lear says something very much like "I am Duchess of Malfi still", and Gloucester parallels Bosola's cosmic despair,

*We are merely the stars' tennis-balls, struck an bandied  
Which way please them  
And Webster's most famous line  
Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young,*

may have had its cue in King Lear, Act V, Scene iii, line 242. Perhaps only Shakespeare can bedew his horror with such appeals to simple pity as the Duchess's

*I pray thee, look thou giv'st my little boy  
Some syrup for his cold, and let the girl  
Say her prayers ere she sleep.*

King Lear's gloom, Gloucester's cosmic pessimism, Cordelia's barbaric death, Edmund's villainy, all find very close parallel in the greatest tragedy of Webster. It is for this reason, this comparison with the greatest of dramatists, which makes Webster taller than all other Jacobean writers.

Webster's two later plays, The Devil's Law-Case (1623) and A Cure for a Cuckold (printed 1661)- the latter in unfortunate collaboration with Rowley - do not seem to have much merit. They do not deserve much attention, not because they are altogether inferior, but because Webster seems to attempt here tragicomedy and finds that form perhaps too light for his heavy hand. The central character of The Devil's Law Case, Romelio, the wealthy merchant of Naples, who in one scene disguised as a Jew, is a not unworthy imitation of Marlowe's Barbas (The Merchant of Venice). His mother and sister belong to Webster's greatest women. The long court scene (Act IV, scene ii), which occupies a fifth of the play, is comparable with the one in The White Devil. Some of Webster's most characteristic lines come from this play, as well as one of his greatest songs:

*Courts adieu, and all delights,  
All bewitching appetites!  
Sweetest breath and clearest eye,*

*Like perfumes, go out and die.*

Thus, very much like Shakespeare, Webster's tragic vision and powerful verse stand out in his plays. Although minor in terms of his total output, his two great tragedies alone make him next only to Shakespeare and Marlowe. He surpasses all other writers of tragedy, Jacobean as well as Elizabethan.

#### 24.6 WEBSTER'S TIMES

It is interesting to note that the best description of the Jacobean plays is prophetically given in Shakespeare's Hamlet. In the closing moments of the play, Horatio looks back on the trail of intrigue and violence which had reached its tragic climax in the death of Hamlet, the prince of Denmark. Horatio utters the following words, which are addressed to both the people assembled on the stage as well as to the audience sitting beyond the stage:

... *So shall you hear*  
*Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,*  
*Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,*  
*Of deaths put on by cunning and forced cause*  
*And, in this upshot, purposes mistook*  
*Fall'n on the inventors' heads.*

These lines sum up more than the action of Shakespeare's play. They give us airily accurate idea of a whole set of plays we call by the name of "Revenge Tragedy", or more widely called "the tragedy of blood," or the "Jacobean dy". These tragedies of the Jacobean period follow immediately after Hamlet, which had been acted in or around 1601.

#### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. John Webster was a leading dramatist of the \_\_\_\_ age.
2. His two most famous plays are *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The \_\_\_\_*.
3. Webster is known for his exploration of corruption, \_\_\_\_, and death.
4. His tragedies are marked by intense \_\_\_\_ and philosophical pessimism.

#### Answers

1. Jacobean	2. White Devil	3. violence	4. darkness
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#### 24.7 REVENGE THEME

The dramatists' preoccupation with the revenge theme during the Jacobean period is actually a reflection of a general interest in the social and ethical implications of revenge, which is a feature of the age. In his essay "Tourner and the Tragedy of Revenge," L.G Salinger cogently summarizes the nature of this interest:

*The theme of revenge (the 'wild justice' of Bacon's essay) was popular in Elizabethan tragedy because it touched important questions of the day;*

*the social problem of personal honour and the survival of feudal lawlessness; the political problem of tyranny and resistance; and the supreme question of providence, with its provocative contrasts between human vengeance and divine.*

As a matter of fact, the age lived in a tension between two conflicting attitudes centred on the notion of revenge. On the one hand, the law of the land was equivocal in condemning private revenge as an attempt by man to usurp the prerogative of God. Its political equivalent was the attempt by powerful individuals (like Henry IV) to assume the powers of the sovereign. "Vengeance is mine; I will reply, saith the Lord" Thus, the law of the land and the moralists of the time both were united in affirming this viewpoint. By and large, the general mass of people adopted it as a sacred belief. On the other hand, the older tradition of private revenge was still alive. It had come down from the more turbulent times when the power of the state to punish crime was neither codified in law nor always effective. When it comes down to Webster's times, it had become by then linked with certain extreme notions of personal honour which tended to make the revenger appear in a sympathetic light. The most striking justification of revenge, and perhaps the most important, was the situation of blood-revenge for murder. Murder was considered the crime of crimes by the Elizabethans. It was viewed as a violation of God's commandment. There was even a current though wholly erroneous idea that a son could not inherit from his murdered father unless and until he avenged his father's murder.

It is because the theme of revenge struck a responsive chord in society at large that the dramatists of this period, beginning with Kyd, were so strongly drawn to the tragedies of Seneca. In Seneca, we can trace most, though not all, the features which distinguish the Jacobean "tragedy of blood." The Seneca's tragedies, such as Clytemnestra and Medea, the crimes are described with horrifying realism. Also, there are detailed accounts of physical torture. Of course, Seneca's plays were meant to be recited, not staged. The theme of blood revenge for murder is also emphasized. Other features include characters who unwittingly become accomplices to the act of revenge, or are tricked into becoming accessories. The ghosts of the dead clamouring intermittently for revenge is also an aspect of the Senecan tragedy. Machiavellianism was also a strong influence from Italy on the tragedy of the Jacobean period. In the tragedies of the period, one of the protagonists, often but not always the avenger, is recognizably Machiavellian figure. In many of the plays, we can see the avenger moving between the two extremes of sympathetic hero; and Machiavellian villain. Since Marlowe put Machiavelli on the stage in the prologue to *The Jew of Malta*, the Machiavellian figure had been the embodiment of conscious and intricately contrived villainy, usually delighting in its own virtuosity.

#### **24.8 SATIRICAL TEMPER**

The fact that these revenge tragedies invariably have Italian plots clearly shows the Senecan and Machiavellian influence on the Jacobean period more than on the Elizabethan. In these later tragedies, the Machiavellian villain is also in most cases a railer against society or 'malcontent'. One very important aspect of Jacobean tragedy is that it combines with tragedy satire as an equal partner. Thus, these tragedies strongly link together the theme of revenge and an attack on the corruption of society. Normally, we tend to think of satire as part of comedy. But an intimate connection between tragedy and the satirical temper is one of the aspects that distinguish the drama of the Jacobean period. The reasons for this temper of the plenty. One of these was the political uncertainty surrounding

the ccession in the last years of the Elizabethan period. This led to instability and period were delusion on the early years of King James' reign. Also responsible for this temper which the Renaissance emphasis on the richness of sensual experience colliding with the Machiavellian' cynicism with regard to all human experience. Still another actor responsible for the satirical temper of the age was the revival of a medieval notion that the world was running down and civilization was on the brink of dissolution

A summary account of the main characteristics of the Jacobean tragic satire as distinct form of art is given by Alvin Kernan. In his view, its setting is densely crowded with people and things, so that the satire is usually found against an urban background. Its personages are grotesque caricatures, distorted by the imperfections which they embody. There is also some hint of an ideal standard by which they embody. There is also some hint of an ideal standard by which the perverted activities of these characters are to be judged. This implied standard is, of course, remote or impotent. There is, on the contrary, an obsessive concentration on the purely animal aspects of human existence, such as eating, drinking, defecation, and copulation. The satirical hero has his public personality as blunt, truthful, simple, forced into utterance by the wickedness and hypocrisy of the world about him. It also traces him to adopt violent expression as the only effective protest. Thus, it brings into play the darker 'private' aspect of his character. All this leads him to a kind of sadistic relish in Scourging humanity. Hence, the brutal satirical tragedies or tragical-satires of Webster and the other Jacobean dramatists.

#### **24.9 LET US SUM UP**

John Webster was an English dramatist whose *The White Devil* (performed in 1612) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (performed in 1614) are generally regarded as the paramount seventeenth century English tragedies apart from those of Shakespeare. His preface to Monuments of Honor, his Lord Mayor's Show for 1642, says he was born a freeman of the Merchant Taylor's Company. He was probably a coachmaker, and possibly he was an actor. The White Devil, like Macbeth, is a tragedy of action and The Duchess of Malfi, like King Lear, is a tragedy of suffering.

#### **24.10 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS**

- Q1. Discuss the themes of Webster's Tragedies.
- Q2. Discuss the biography of Webster.
- Q3 Satire constitutes the main part of Webster's writings. Discuss

#### **24.11 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- John Webster: English Dramatist. Britannica.com, n.d.
- <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Webster-English-dramatist>
- Berry, Ralph. *The Art of John Webster*. Routledge, 1972

## THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

### STRUCTURE

- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 25.3 Plot Summary in Detail
- 25.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.5 Multiple Choice Questions
- 25.6 Suggested Readings

### 25.1 INTRODUCTION

John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, first performed in 1614, is a dark and powerful tragedy that explores themes of corruption, power, and revenge within the Italian court. The play centers on the Duchess, a young widow who defies her brothers' oppressive control by secretly marrying her steward, Antonio, and having children. Webster's masterful use of language and his intricate portrayal of psychological torment and moral ambiguity make *The Duchess of Malfi* a compelling examination of human nature and the devastating consequences of unchecked ambition and cruelty. This work remains a significant contribution to Jacobean drama, renowned for its intense atmosphere and complex characters.

### 25.2 OBJECTIVES AND OUTCOMES

#### Objectives

Students will:

1. Understand the major plot events and characters of *The Duchess of Malfi*.
2. Trace the Duchess's secret marriage and its consequences.
3. Recognize the tragic arc and structural flow of the play.

#### Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Summarize the key acts and character decisions in the play.

2. Describe how the Duchess's defiance of her brothers leads to her downfall.
3. Identify the climax and resolution of the tragedy.

## 25.3 DETAILED SUMMARY

### Act One, Scene One

The play opens in its primary setting, the “presence-chamber” of the Duchess’s palace in Malfi, Italy, in the sixteenth century.

At the Duchess’s palace, Delio welcomes his friend Antonio home from a trip to France, and asks him how he liked it there. Antonio admits his admiration for the French prince, who had rooted out the sycophants and corrupt officials in order to prohibit corruption from spreading through the rest of the country. Antonio hears Bosola arriving with the Cardinal, and jokes to Delio how Bosola rails against vices only because he cannot afford to commit them himself.

As they enter, Bosola laments to the Cardinal how he (Bosola) has not been fairly rewarded for a service he performed for the Cardinal and which cost him a prison sentence in the galleys. In response, the Cardinal complains about Bosola’s dishonest character and leaves. Bosola complains more to Antonio, describing how both the Cardinal and his brother, the Amalfi duke Ferdinand, are corrupt and unjust for having treated him improperly.

Delio tells Antonio that Bosola served seven years in the galleys for having committed a notorious murder, and the rumor was that the Cardinal did indeed commission him to do it. Antonio says it’s too bad that the Cardinal won’t give him Bosola due, as this will likely “poison all his goodness” (1.1.72).

### Act One, Scene Two

The second scene plays continuously, without any stage interruption.

Delio reminds Antonio that the latter had promised to tell the former about the figures who populate the Amalfi court, their personalities and moral characters. Antonio agrees, but they are distracted by the entrance of several characters.

Almost immediately, Ferdinand enters with Silvio, Castruccio, Roderigo, and Grisolan. Ferdinand is informed that Antonio had won the most jousting contests and so rewards him, lamenting that they can only play games instead of fighting in a real war. Castruccio tells him he thinks it best for princes to send deputies to fight in their stead, since when rulers fight themselves, it breeds discontent at home. Castruccio further insinuates that his wife had been less than faithful while he was gone away, and Ferdinand continues to pun on his cuckoldry throughout the conversation. They further discuss Roderigo’s new horse, and Ferdinand compliments Antonio’s riding. The Cardinal enters with the Duchess and her lady, Cariola, and the three distract all of the group save Antonio and Delio.

In private, Antonio gives Delio a summary of the Cardinal and Ferdinand’s characters. He says the Cardinal’s rumored bravery and light-heartedness is superficial, and that he is truly a melancholy and corrupt man who will destroy anyone he is jealous of, so much so that he tried to bribe his way to becoming pope. He says

Ferdinand is never what he seems, has a “perverse and turbulent nature,” (1.1.160), is vengeful, and uses the law to destroy people at will and for his own gains.

Lastly, he describes their sister, the Duchess, as a great conversationalist, a beautiful woman, and a completely virtuous person. Delio accuses him of overstating her assets, but Antonio responds, “All her particular worth grows to this sum:/She stains the time past: lights the time to come—” (1.1.213-4). Cariola brings message to Antonio, to attend to the Duchess in half an hour’s time.

Ferdinand asks the Duchess if she would take Bosola on as manager of her horses on his recommendation, and she accepts. In private, the Cardinal then tells Ferdinand to use Bosola as an informer as to their sister’s behavior. When Ferdinand suggests they use Antonio instead of Bosola, the Cardinal protests that Antonio is far too honest for such an assignment. They see Bosola approaching, and the Cardinal leaves to avoid him.

Ferdinand tells Bosola that the Cardinal doesn’t trust him. Bosola warns that to be distrusted without cause can lead one to actually deceive. Changing the subject, Ferdinand offers him gold to spy on the Duchess, explaining that she is recently widowed and they do not want her to remarry; he does not give a reason for their concern. Bosola tries to return the money because he does not want to be a spy, but Ferdinand tells him he has already arranged Bosola the post of horse manager, and that to refuse would appear ungrateful. Bosola begrudgingly accepts and leaves.

### **Act One, Scene Three**

The next scene has Ferdinand, the Duchess, Cardinal and Cariola on stage.

The Cardinal and Ferdinand prepare to leave the Duchess, and tell her that in their absence, she must be responsible for acting appropriately. They warn her not to be tempted by a man, as it would be shameful for a widow to remarry. The Duchess protests that she has no intention of marrying again, but they tell her that’s what widows always say before they forget their vow and remarry anyway. After a few more warnings, they leave.

The Duchess ponders to herself whether her brothers’ warnings should worry her, but decides that she will conversely let her fear spur her into action. She tells her lady Cariola of her intent, and insists that trusting Cariola with that secret is of greater value than trusting the maid with her life. Cariola vows that she will guard the Duchess’s secret carefully. The Duchess tells her to hide behind the arras where she can overhear the scene to follow. Antonio enters to fulfill his appointment with the Duchess.

The Duchess asks Antonio to take dictation of what she says—she wants to write her will. They discuss the institution of marriage, and Antonio says that he thinks it is either heaven or hell; there is no in between. Impressed, she gives Antonio her wedding ring by way of proposal, insisting that her social status would prohibit him from wooing her, and so must she woo him. He accepts, and then Cariola reveals herself. Because she has witnessed the exchange, it is a binding ceremony.

The Duchess excuses Cariola so she can retreat to her marriage bed with Antonio—she tells him that he can lay a sword between them to keep them chaste if he likes, but she wishes to discuss how to get her brothers to accept their marriage—”We’ll only lie, and talk together, and plot/T’appease my humorous kindred” (1.1.570-1). When they leave together, Cariola wonders aloud whether her mistress is taken with greatness or madness.

## Analysis

The opening lines of *The Duchess of Malfi* set the tone for the struggle between good and evil that is to follow. Antonio, who we learn later in the scene is, by the Cardinal's own judgment, too honest to spy on the Duchess, praises the French court for its lack of sycophants and corruption. Then the Cardinal and Bosola enter, and Antonio tells Delio that Bosola "rails at those things"—vices—"which he wants" (1.1.25), so not only is his appearance of virtue false, it is hypocritical and based around self-interest. The audience quickly realizes that these characters are the antithesis of the virtues Antonio praised as reflected in the French court. Further, in his private conversation, we learn immediately that Antonio is an archetypal man of virtue, one who not only lives honestly but esteems it in others. This analysis is validated throughout the play, and makes him something of an anomaly in this twisted court.

Antonio's character sketches to Delio present a fuller picture of the Cardinal and Ferdinand's evil—the Cardinal is cold and calculating, Ferdinand hot-tempered and deranged. There is nothing to temper these judgments—not one virtue is named for either character. In contrast, Antonio sees the Duchess as "right noble," "full of rapture," "divine," and completely virtuous. Though this view of the Duchess will be complicated somewhat later in the play, the beginning of the first scene lays the ground for what will essentially become a battle of evil trying to corrupt and destroy good.

It also quickly becomes clear that Bosola does not fit perfectly into this dichotomy. Antonio's first description of him, combined with Delio's information that he committed a notorious murder, would seem to place him firmly on the side of the brothers, but Antonio himself quickly says, "I have heard/He's very valiant" (1.1.70-1), and worries that the Cardinal's mistreatment of him will "poison all his goodness" (1.1.72). So Antonio, at least, believes him to have some goodness. Thus from the beginning the audience is given hints that Bosola is an enigma, and will represent the battleground where the fight of good versus evil will play out.

This contradiction is quickly made manifest when Ferdinand recruits Bosola to be his informer. When Ferdinand hands him gold, Bosola's immediate reaction is to ask "Whose throat must I cut?" (1.1.240). That he immediately assumes he is being hired to murder says much about his character, but so does the fact that he says "must." Until Act Five, Bosola's defining trait, besides his cynical melancholy, is his unflinching loyalty to Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Here we see the first hint of this—having been handed a piece of gold, he already feels compelled to do whatever Ferdinand asks, whether he wants to or not. Considering that he remains not only uncompensated but also unthanked for whatever the murder he had previously committed for the Cardinal, the loyalty is all the more befuddling and interesting.

Bosola's situation is further complicated when he learns he is being hired not to murder, but to spy. This seems like a significantly less evil task, especially as Bosola has no particular loyalty to the Duchess, yet he is dismayed. Even though he has already murdered for money, he declares in reference to the coins, "should I take these they'd take me to hell" (1.1.257). Yet even against such strong reservations, Bosola gives in—"I am your creature" (1.1.278). And "creature," with its connotations of unthinking loyalty and inhumanity, is just the right word.

The distinction between Bosola and his masters has in it a touch of class commentary. First of all, the depravity represented by Ferdinand the Cardinal is most contemptible because of the hypocrisy their positions add to it. That the Duke and the religious figure, both authority figures of 'high' birth, would be the most ugly ensures an ugly world beneath them. In the same way Antonio praised the French prince for inspiring goodness through

his realm through his positive example, so is the poor example of the Malfi authorities somewhat responsible for the depravity of their court. In contrast, Bosola's depravity or evil is conditioned, as discussed above. He believes himself to have less agency than they do, which helps explain Antonio's view of him as one who is valiant but whose valiance could be compromised if he is treated poorly. In some ways, Bosola is the central character of the text - Webster lists him first in the cast list, a rare occurrence in the day for characters of low rank - and he survives longer than the Duchess, ostensibly the heroine. This fact further suggests the way that questions of class and rank, especially in contrast to an individual's natural, moral virtues, provide a means to understand the play's central themes.

The dialogue between the Duchess and her brothers contains much foreshadowing. Most obviously, it reveals their desire to control her, and their incredible degree of concern over her marriage situation. A threat of violence hangs over the scene, with Ferdinand's pulling out a knife—"This was my father's poniard" (1.1.322)—and the Cardinal's warning, "Wisdom begins at the end: remember it" (1.1.319), which rings ominously with its reference to the end of life.

This scene also hints, however, that the Duchess will not obey her brothers blindly. She uses her diamond analogy to argue that women who remarry are not so easily condemned or depraved, and when they ignore her, we see her impatience when she demands of them, "Will you hear me?" (1.1.292). The practiced rhythm of their lecture, which she points out to Ferdinand, suggests that the filial dynamic is long-gestating, and suggests that her willfulness to disobey them might have in it some share of petulance as well. Of course, even if this is the case, what is a game to her will soon be revealed as much more to them.

Her defiance is made much clearer once her brothers leave. Not only will she not be dissuaded from her planned marriage, she will "make them [her] low footsteps" (1.1.334), using them, in effect, to do what she wants in direct opposition to them. This is real defiance, not just of her brothers but of societal and religious mores of the time, and it is a first look at the Duchess's great vitality, which is further reflected when she takes the lead in the proposal scene.

The marriage scene, in addition to contrasting the Duchess's vivid personality with Antonio's rather passive one, also foreshadows the tragedy to come. It opens with the Duchess telling Antonio she wants to write her will, immediately evoking the thought of death. The Duchess's metaphors and allusions, too, often invoke death—she is not an alabaster statue kneeling at her husband's tomb; she refers to her marriage to Antonio as a Gordian knot, a knot that could not be untied unless cut with "violence" (470); and she says they can put an unsheathed sword between them in bed to keep them chaste, which introduces a weapon into their intimacy. Thus while this end of the act is largely happy, Webster gives the audience plenty of warning that such happiness will not last. The contradictions in the Duchess's character - between her valiant refusal to bow before social mores and her willfulness on directly and imprudently countering the protestations of her brothers - are summarized in Cariola's final soliloquy, which questions whether the Duchess is a model of greatness or simply a madwoman.

## Act Two, Scene One

The scene is set in an apartment in the Duchess's palace. It begins with Bosola and Castruccio enter.

Bosola mocks Castruccio for being a fool and having unrealized ambitions of being a great courtier. An Old Lady enters, and Bosola criticizes her ugliness and mocks her attempts to mask it with makeup. She and Castruccio leave, and Bosola muses on his suspicions that the Duchess is pregnant. He has bought the first

apricots of the season, which he will use to try to find out if she is indeed pregnant. The apricots were believed to induce labor.

Delio and Antonio enter. Antonio has just told Delio of his secret marriage, and emphasizes that Delio must never breath a word of it to anyone, after which insistence they join Bosola. Antonio accuses Bosola of trying too hard not to appear “puffed up” (2.1.80-1) with his promotion, and of continually putting forth a mean and melancholy appearance instead.

The Duchess, out of breath, enters with her ladies, and asks Antonio if she has gotten fat. Bosola offers her the apricots, and the Duchess eats them. She immediately says they have made her ill and goes off to her bedroom. Antonio and Delio discuss how best to cover up that she has gone into labor, and Delio recommends saying that Bosola has poisoned her with the apricots.

## **Act Two, Scene Two**

In a different location, Bosola muses to himself that the Duchess’s reaction to the apricots means she is almost certainly pregnant. The Old Lady enters in a rush, and after Bosola berates her and women in general, she rushes off, presumably to act as midwife to the Duchess.

Antonio, Delio, Roderigo and Grisolan enter. Antonio tells them to shut and lock the court gates, claiming some of the Duchess’s jewels are missing. A group of gossipy servants enter, and one reports a rumor that the Duchess has a Swiss mercenary in her bedroom with her. Antonio reports that, due to the Duchess’s illness and the theft of her jewels, she would like all the officers to lock themselves in their rooms and send her keys to their chests and doors. They agree, and everyone leaves except Antonio and Delio.

Antonio tells Delio to go to Rome to keep watch over the Duchess’s brothers. Though he trusts Delio, he is fearful, and Delio tells him it is just superstition and “Old friends (like old swords) still are trusted best.” (2.2.87). He leaves.

Cariola enters carrying the new baby, a son, and the new father rejoices.

## **Act Two, Scene Three**

Outside the palace that night, Bosola enters with a lantern. He thinks he heard a woman shriek from the direction of the Duchess’s chambers, and is made more suspicious by Antonio’s order to confine the officers to their rooms.

Antonio enters with a candle and his sword drawn, having heard someone. When he realizes it is Bosola, he asks if he heard a noise from the Duchess’s chamber. Bosola denies hearing anything, and offers that he is ignoring the curfew order solely because he wanted to pray in peace.

Antonio claims he is calculating a horoscope to figure out who stole the jewels, and tells Bosola that he is the main suspect, as his apricots seem to have poisoned the Duchess at the same time that her jewels went missing. Bosola denies his guilt, and insults Antonio.

Antonio gets a sudden nose bleed, which is considered a bad omen. He tells Bosola not to pass the Duchess’s chambers on his way back to his room and leaves. Bosola finds a piece of paper Antonio dropped, which contains the infant’s horoscope—it warns of a short life and violent death. Bosola knows now that the

Duchess has had a child and that Antonio is in her confidence, but he doesn't realize Antonio is the father. He plans to send a letter to the brothers in Rome in the morning.

## Act Two, Scene Four

At the Cardinal's palace in Rome, Julia, the Cardinal's mistress and Castruccio's wife, explains how she convinced her husband to let her go to Rome without him. Julia worries about the Cardinal's constancy, but he dismisses her concern as evidence of her own guilt over her infidelity. A servant enters to tell Julia that someone carrying post from Malfi desires to see her.

Delio, one of her former suitors, enters, and offers Julia money as a favor. Another servant enters to tell Julia that her husband is in Rome and has delivered a letter to Ferdinand that has left him in a foul mood. After the servant leaves, Delio asks Julia to be his mistress. She says she will ask her husband—he doesn't know if she's joking or not—and leaves. Delio fears Castruccio's delivery of bad news to Ferdinand means that Antonio and the Duchess have been found out.

## Act Two, Scene Five

In a different location in the Roman palace, Ferdinand, carrying a letter, tells the Cardinal the news of the Duchess—he knows only that she is pregnant, not that she is married. He confesses that the knowledge has made him crazy. The two men rue her wantonness and the infidelity of women in general, but the Cardinal keeps his cool, while chiding Ferdinand for his extreme emotional reactions. Ferdinand threatens everyone—the Duchess, the unknown father, the child, even himself and the Cardinal—and then retires, saying he won't take any action until he figures out who the father is.

## Analysis

Act Two shows a new side to the Duchess that will become thematically very important—that of a reproductive figure and mother. This side of her stands in opposition to what her brothers would have her be, which is a monument, chaste, “alabaster,” representing a good reputation and nothing else. When she appears on stage, she is out of breath, and Bosola tells the audience that she

*Is sick o'days, she pukes, her stomach seethes,  
The fins of her eyelids look most teeming blue,  
She wanes i'th' cheek, and waxes fat i'th' flank (2.1.60-2).*

He is obsessed with her physicality, and soon afterwards she eats apricots greedily. Considering they have been ripened in horse dung, the apricots stand as a strong image of the Earth, she is now characterized not as “alabaster” or as the untouchable saint Antonio described in Act I, but as a woman very much in touch with the physical Earth. Her love for Antonio and its resulting pregnancy has brought her closer to nature.

The Duchess's attempts to hide her pregnancy are a minor example of a theme that is significant in Act Two, that of disguising, of the contrast between being and seeming. In almost all cases in the play, this theme deals with the disguising of evil, and only with the Duchess and her family is this not the case. Rather, their disguising is necessitated by the evil of the characters around them and the way that evil has warped the world. So depraved is the world that the truly good characters are forced to disguise their love and domestic bliss to protect them.

Bosola himself, who later wears multiple disguises, and as spy is constantly pretending, rails against having to disguise oneself in this act. For instance, he mocks the Old Lady for wearing makeup, leading him to scornfully meditate on how man delights “to hide” his true form “in rich tissue” (2.1.53-4). Immediately after, however, the audience sees his two-faces in stark clarity as he tricks the Duchess into eating apricots while showing his real motivations in his asides. Webster’s use of asides, hidden characters, and disguises creates several levels of dramatic irony throughout the play that both raise the dramatic tension and elucidate his pessimistic view of human nature.

Superstition is a motif throughout the play, and it is used in Act Two to both foreshadow what is to come and to further develop the characters. At the end of the second scene, Delio says, “How superstitiously we mind our evils” (2.2.73) before listing possible bad omens, but though he uses the first person plural, in this case the only character showing superstition is Antonio.

In the very next scene, one of the bad omens Delio had just listed comes to pass—Antonio gets a nose bleed. Though he pretends that he is not affected by it, separating himself from “One that were superstitious” (2.3.43), his repeated insistence that “it merely comes by chance” (2.3.44), “mere accident” (2.3.47), shows that he is trying to convince and reassure himself because of how terribly the omen disturbs him. Further, this incident occurs while he is divining a horoscope for his son—another superstitious act.

The audience’s knowledge that Bosola is a spy on the verge of discovering the Duchess and Antonio’s secret makes these superstitions more ominous, but Antonio’s superstitious nature itself is not meant to be admired, as it makes him appear weak and highlights his ineffectual nature. This also further distinguishes Antonio’s and the Duchess’s natures when, later in Act Three, the Duchess calls Cariola a “superstitious fool” (3.2.321), showing her disdain for such things.

Act Two takes us from the pregnant Duchess and her worried husband in Malfi, all the way to Rome and the Cardinal’s sinful relationship with the married Julia, and finally to the evil brothers’ reactions to what they believe is the Duchess’s deep shame. This final scene strikingly presents the contrast between the characters, fully clarifying what each brother signifies—the hot-tempered Ferdinand, the cold and calculating Cardinal.

Both brothers mention blood and use blood imagery throughout the scene. However, they use it very differently, in ways that represent the difference between their reactions to their sister’s behavior. The Cardinal says, “Shall our blood,/The royal blood of Aragon and Castile,/Be thus attainted?” (2.5.21-3). Here, he means blood metaphorically, as a stand-in for lineage, for family pride and honor, for rank. When Ferdinand speaks of purging “infected blood, such blood as hers” (2.5.26), he is not being figurative—he truly wants to spill her blood. His attitude is further emphasized when he says it is only her “whore’s blood” (2.5.48) “that shall quench [his] wild-fire” (2.5.47). He believes his rage can only be calmed by the spilling of her blood. Fire imagery is connected to Ferdinand throughout the play, and in this scene alone he connects his fire to her blood twice. Earlier, he says that only fire can purge the infection in her blood. These two lines together show that he has already determined she must die—to cure her, his anger must spill her blood, and to cure his anger, her blood must spill. Forgiveness, clearly, is impossible.

One is left to wonder about the sexual nature of Ferdinand’s intense obsession with his sister, who is his twin. Where the Cardinal - an ambitious man who has used his conniving skills to try and be Pope, according to Antonio - thinks in terms of wealth and Earthly protection, Ferdinand has a moral tone in his disdain for his sister’s impurity. Though incest is never mentioned explicitly, it is hardly a rare theme for Jacobean dramatists and

can provide an interesting lens into the motivations that drive Ferdinand, as well as a lens into the theme of repression that equally helps understand the Duchess's desire to declare her independence through.

### **Act Three, Scene One**

Act Three begins some time later.

At the Duchess's palace, Delio has very recently returned from Rome with Ferdinand. Antonio tells Delio that since he left, the Duchess has had two more children. Delio asks if the brothers know about this yet, and Antonio says that he fears they do, because Ferdinand has been behaving suspiciously since his arrival in Malfi. Delio asks what the common people in Malfi know, and Antonio says they call the Duchess a strumpet, but no one has any idea that they are married.

Ferdinand, the Duchess, and Bosola enter. Ferdinand tells the Duchess that he has found a husband for her, Count Malatesta. The Duchess protests and asks to address the rumors about her honor, but Ferdinand insists, "Let me be ever deaf to 'it'" (3.1.58), and that even if such rumors were true, his powerful love for her could forgive her anything.

Everyone leaves except Ferdinand and Bosola, and Ferdinand asks Bosola what he has uncovered. Bosola shares the rumor that the Duchess has birthed three bastards, but that he has no idea who the father is. Bosola thinks a man unworthy of her has used magic to seduce her, but Ferdinand will have none of it, saying that no herbs or potions can force the will.

Bosola has purloined a key to the Duchess's bedroom for Ferdinand, and though the latter accepts it, he will not tell Bosola what he intends to do with it. He says that anyone who can predict his behavior would have to know everything, but Bosola tells him he is overestimating himself. Ferdinand is pleased that Bosola speaks honestly instead of flattering him.

### **Act Three, Scene Two**

In the Duchess's bedroom, she tells Antonio he can't sleep in her bed this night, but Antonio says he must, and they tease each other good-naturedly. Antonio teases Cariola about being single, and then they leave the Duchess alone so she can prepare for bed.

The Duchess muses to herself how she would expect Antonio to avoid her bed while Ferdinand was in the palace, but she imagines Antonio's response would be that "love mixed with fear is sweetest" (3.2.66). While she soliloquizes, Ferdinand sneaks in. When she notices him, he hands her a knife for her to kill herself with.

She tells him that she is married, and he warns her that he doesn't want to know who the husband is because it would lead to such violence as would destroy them both, and he warns the Duchess that she must do everything she can—including cutting out her own tongue—to make sure Ferdinand never discovers his identity.

The Duchess protests that she has done nothing wrong—she is not the only widow to remarry, and she remains pure. Ferdinand tells her that once gone, a good reputation can never be regained, and since she has lost hers, he will never see her again.

He leaves, and Antonio and Cariola return, Antonio carrying a gun. Antonio suspects that Cariola let Ferdinand into the room, and threatens her with the gun, but the Duchess tells him he came in through the gallery and gave her a knife, presumably for her to kill herself with. Bosola knocks at the door and Antonio exits before they let him in.

Bosola reports that Ferdinand has left for Rome, and asks the Duchess why she seems upset. She makes up a story about Antonio falsifying her accounts, a lie that will force him to flee Malfi and hence escape potential harm. She tells Bosola to get her officers to arrest Antonio, and Bosola leaves.

Antonio returns, and the Duchess tells him of her plan. She demands he flee to Ancona, where she will send her treasure to him. When Bosola returns with the officers, the Duchess berates Antonio, but tells them to let him go freely, as she doesn't want the public to find out about his crimes and blame her. She banishes him, and he leaves.

The Duchess asks for the officers' opinions of Antonio, and they complain of his tight-fisted behavior towards them. When they leave, Bosola says they were flattering parasites to Antonio when he was doing well, and tells the Duchess that she has made a big mistake and treated the honest and virtuous Antonio unfairly. He speaks at length about Antonio's virtue, until the Duchess, moved to trust him, admits that he is her husband.

Bosola declares himself impressed that she would marry him for his virtues in spite of his lack of rank. The Duchess, comforted, asks him to help keep her secret, and to take her money to Antonio in Ancona where she will meet them in a few days. The Duchess and Cariola exit, leaving Bosola alone to lament that he must tell all to Ferdinand, although he looks forward to the promotion he will receive for doing so.

### **Act Three, Scene Three**

Scene Three is again set in the Cardinal's palace at Rome.

Count Malatesta is showing the Cardinal plans for a new fortification at Naples, when Ferdinand enters with Delio, Silvio, and Pescara. Delio and Silvio explain to Ferdinand that Malatesta is a soldier only in name—he avoids any real battles and only studies theories of war without actually engaging. They mock the care he takes with his mistress's scarf.

Bosola arrives and speaks to Ferdinand and the Cardinal privately, while the others discuss what his presence there could mean. They note that Ferdinand and the Cardinal both look furious in reaction to whatever Bosola is telling them.

Ferdinand and the Cardinal are especially distressed that the Duchess is escaping to meet Antonio by pretending to be on a pilgrimage, which Cariola had warned her against. The Cardinal says he'll have them banished from Ancona immediately, and Ferdinand orders Bosola to tell the Duchess's son from her previous marriage—who is not mentioned anywhere else in the play—the news. Ferdinand makes plans to intercept her.

### **Act Three, Scene Four**

Scene Four is set at the Shrine of Our Lady of Loretto. Here, the Cardinal gives up his cardinal's hat in a ceremony so that he can fight as a soldier. Antonio, the Duchess, and their children arrive, and are banished from Ancona. This all happens in pantomime while the churchmen sing a solemn song. They all exit except for two pilgrims, who discuss what happened and explain that the Pope, spurred by the Cardinal, took the Duchess's dukedom from her.

## Act Three, Scene Five

Scene Five takes place nearby Loretto, following the banishment.

The Duchess and Antonio mourn their current state to Cariola, their children, and their last remaining servants. Bosola brings them a letter from Ferdinand, which asks for Antonio to be sent to him, using double-talk so as to threaten his murder while pretending to offer amity. The Duchess sees through his “riddles” (3.5.41) easily, and so Antonio refuses to go. Bosola scorns his refusal and leaves.

The Duchess, fearful of an ambush, pleads for Antonio to take their oldest son to Milan. He accepts, and they all say their farewells. After Antonio and the older son leave, Bosola and a troop of armed men approach to apprehend the Duchess and her remaining family. Bosola entreats her to forget her lowly husband, but she says that a man’s actions, not his rank, are what matter. She and her family are taken back to her palace as prisoners.

### Analysis

The theme of class becomes most developed here in Act Three. Interestingly, it is first explicitly discussed between Bosola and the Duchess, both of whom are speaking disingenuously in an effort to hide something from the other. They each thus end up acting as the other’s mouthpiece on the issue, as when Bosola berates the Duchess for saying of Antonio, “But he was basely descended” (3.2.160), in response to Bosola listing Antonio’s virtues, for those virtues, he says, matter more than “men’s pedigrees” (3.2.262). The ironic presentation does not mean that the opinions voiced are not honest considerations of the way people approach an individual’s status.

When, as a result of Bosola’s protestations, the Duchess admits that she is married to Antonio, Bosola pretends to be filled with joy and admiration that the Duchess would look past rank and wealth to give a man his true due for his character alone. The audience knows not to trust his effusive praise, of course, but it is worth noting that the final tragedy for the Duchess and her family comes out of this very moment, when Bosola uses this praise of looking beyond rank to get her to admit who her husband is.

Yet, as is often true with Bosola, it is impossible to know just how much truth is mixed in with his lies. Once he is alone again on stage, he expresses some reluctance to give his new information to Ferdinand, even though it’s the very information he has been trying to get for about two years. This implies that there may have been some truth to his “friendly speech” (3.2.301), especially since his pervasive melancholy is centered on his own inability to improve his position, and now he sees, embodied in Antonio, that it is, in fact, possible to rise past what custom usually dictates.

Though this contradiction may indicate that Bosola has some respect for the Duchess’s choice in marrying Antonio, he does much to dispel such an interpretation later in the act. For once he has told Ferdinand about Antonio, and so can speak forthrightly without having to lie to try to ensnare the Duchess, he shows much more snobbery about class. For example, when Antonio refuses to act as Ferdinand, through Bosola, wants him to, Bosola says, “This proclaims your breeding/Every small thing draws a base mind to fear” (3.5.52-3). Ferdinand is an obviously dangerous figure, and his attempt to get Antonio to come to him has a double, threatening meaning which is barely even hidden. The Duchess, the embodiment of pedigree, is the first to notice this, and yet Bosola would have it that it is only Antonio’s lack of breeding that makes him fearful of it.

After the sad parting of Antonio and the oldest son with the Duchess and the rest of the children, Bosola comes to take the Duchess into custody. In this powerful scene, Bosola holds up Antonio’s rank as reason enough

for the Duchess to forget him completely—“Forget this base, low fellow” (3.5.116). This admonition is all the starker in juxtaposition to the sad leave-taking that preceded it, making Bosola’s directive, and thus his blind judgment based on rank, seem absurd.

When the Duchess responds angrily, he doesn’t even bother to use a full sentence in his reply—“One of no birth” (3.5.119)—as though his meaning is so obvious that he doesn’t even need to declare it. This leaves the Duchess an opportunity to stand up for Antonio, and for the unimportance of birth, and she does so beautifully, having the last word in the argument for the moment. Though she first defends him positively, explaining that since a man who is great for his own actions, not his birth, is happiest, then the reverse is also true—“So, to great men, the moral may be stretched:/Men oft are valued high, when th’are most wretch’d” (3.5.140-141). The fixation on Antonio’s rank in the third act, then, becomes also related to question of Ferdinand and the Cardinal’s evil. They have the birth, the power, and the standing that Antonio lacks, but they are the symbol of evil throughout the play.

Act Three also further elucidates the stark differences between what the Duchess actually is, what Ferdinand believes her to be, and what he wants her to be. The image of the Duchess of a reproductive figure and mother that first came in Act Two is expanded here—one of the first things the audience learns in Act Three is that in what has been only moments in the time of the theater, the Duchess has had two more children—she has been an “excellent/Feeder of pedigrees” (3.1.5-6).

In the next scene, the domestic bliss of the Duchess’s marriage is made clear. The Duchess, Antonio, and Cariola tease each other kindly in the Duchess’s bedroom while she prepares to go to bed. The simplicity and easy domestic happiness of this scene create a very different image than all of Ferdinand’s imaginings of the Duchess two scenes earlier, when he sees “her in the shameful act of sin” (2.5.41) in his mind, “Haply with some strong thighed bargeman,/Or one o’th’ wood-yard, that can quoit the sledge” (2.5.42-3).

Ferdinand is incapable of imagining her in a loving relationship. If she has had a child, it must have been a product of her uncontrollable lust and resulting promiscuous behavior. The only other option he can imagine for her, that which he wants, is as a monumentalized figure, forever bowing chastely over her first husband’s tomb, “cased up, like a holy relic” (3.2.140). The irony is of course that for someone so harshly moral about sex, he is most fixated upon it, again a contradiction that can be seen through a lens of repressed incestuous feelings for his twin.

Antonio marks the distinction between this chaste, marble figure the Duchess’s brothers would like her to be and the more earthly figure she actually is when talking to Cariola:

*O fie upon this single life. Forgo it.  
We read how Daphne, for her peevish flight,  
Became a fruitless bay-tree; Syrinx turned  
To the pale empty reed; Anaxarete  
Was frozen into marble: whereas those  
Which married, or proved kind unto their friends,  
Were, by a gracious influence, transshaped  
Into the olive, pomegranate, mulberry. (3.2.24-31)*

The women who remain single are “fruitless,” “pale,” “empty,” “frozen,” “marble,” while the married women become fruit-bearing trees, both beautiful and nourishing to the world around them. This is so preferable to the marble women that Ferdinand and the Cardinal would have, and so far from the lusty widow that they believe the Duchess to be, that their evil against her and her family becomes all the more pronounced.

Finally, a word can be said about the inventive theatricality Webster employs to detail the Duchess and Antonio’s banishment from Ancona. Performed as a pantomime dumb-show under a sung hymn, the scene has a great theatrical power both for its economy of storytelling and the irony of pilgrims celebrating through song such a perverse, demented, self-interested line of action.

### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. The Duchess secretly marries her steward, \_\_\_\_.
2. Her two brothers are Ferdinand and the \_\_\_, a corrupt churchman.
3. The Duchess is imprisoned and later \_\_\_ by her brothers.
4. The play ends in a violent \_\_\_ of the main characters.

### Answers

1. Antonio	2. Cardinal	3. executed / killed	4. massacre
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## Act Four, Scene One

Act Four begins back in Malfi, at the Duchess’s palace.

Bosola tells Ferdinand that the Duchess is bearing her imprisonment nobly. Ferdinand is dissatisfied and leaves, and the Duchess enters. Bosola tells her that Ferdinand has come to visit her, but does not want to go against the vow he made to never see her again, so entreats her not to have any light in her room tonight so he can address her. She agrees, and Bosola walks away with the lights.

Ferdinand enters in the dark, and tells the Duchess that she has his pardon. He gives her a dead man’s severed hand wearing her wedding ring on one of its fingers, hoping that because it is dark, she will believe it to be Antonio’s. However, she assumes it is Ferdinand’s and wonders why he is so cold. Ferdinand exits and Bosola brings up the light, and she sees what she holds. Bosola then pulls back a curtain, revealing the corpses of Antonio and their children. He says that Ferdinand wants her to see them so that she will stop grieving for them.

The Duchess believes him, and asks to be bound to Antonio’s lifeless body and left to die there. Bosola tells her to forget her sorrow—now that everything is at its worst, it can only get better—but she ignores him. She continues to mourn and finally asks Bosola to tell her brothers to come and kill her, and not prolong her torture.

She exits and Ferdinand enters, telling Bosola that the bodies are only wax figures and they have accomplished his goal—“to bring her to despair” (4.1.116). Bosola entreats him to stop torturing her and to simply

send her to a convent, but Ferdinand wants her to go completely mad. He further insists he will have madmen placed near her chamber so that the sounds of their torture will rankle her. Bosola says in that case, he would prefer to never see her again, but Ferdinand says he must, so Bosola insists he will not do so as Ferdinand's spy. Ferdinand sends him to Milan, where Antonio waits.

### Act Four, Scene Two

Cariola explains to the Duchess that the noises they hear are coming from the madmen that Ferdinand has placed all around her prison. The Duchess tells her that it is actually comforting—silence is worse—and that though she is in despair, she remains sane.

A servant enters to explain that Ferdinand has sent her several madmen to try to cure her sadness by making her laugh at them, a trick that previously worked on the Pope. The servant tells her about each one, and then brings them in. They sing, dance, and act crazy. The madmen include: the Mad Astronomer, who lost his mind when his prediction of the apocalypse proved incorrect; the Mad Doctor, who lost his mind due to jealousy; the Mad Priest; and the Mad Lawyer. Bosola, disguised like an old man, enters last, after which the madmen leave.

Bosola, whom she does not recognize, tells the Duchess that he has come to design her tomb. She protests that she isn't ill, and that she is still Duchess of Malfi, and he tells her that such glories mean nothing up close. The executioners enter with a coffin, cords, and a bell, and Bosola tells her this is her present from her brothers.

Cariola wants to call for help, but the only ones that might hear her are the nearby madmen. Bosola orders the executioners to shut her up, and Cariola says she wants to die with the Duchess. She is taken off stage. Bosola tells the Duchess she will die by strangulation, and is surprised that she is not afraid, but rather anticipates meeting her family (who she does not know are still alive) in the afterlife.

The executioners strangle her, and Bosola tells them to next kill Cariola and the children. Cariola demands to know what crime she has committed to deserve death, and Bosola tells her she is being punished for keeping the Duchess's marriage a secret. She protests as they try to kill her, saying she is engaged, she hasn't been to confession, and she is pregnant, but they kill her anyway.

Ferdinand enters, and Bosola shows him the dead bodies. Ferdinand is unmoved by the corpses of the children, but cries at the sight of the Duchess, and berates Bosola for following his orders and not taking her away to safety or defending her from Ferdinand. Ferdinand admits he was hoping she wouldn't remarry so that he could inherit her fortune, which is why her marriage so incensed him.

Bosola, seeing Ferdinand is quickly turning against him, asks for his reward. Ferdinand refuses to give him anything beyond pardoning him for the murder. Bosola insists he be paid, but Ferdinand tells him to banish himself from Ferdinand's sight forever. Ferdinand, showing signs of his coming madness, says he is leaving to hunt badger, and exits.

Bosola is greatly distressed, seeing that he has done all this evil for no reward. He notices the Duchess is still alive, but fears calling for help since Ferdinand might still be within range. She says, "Antonio," (4.2.42), and Bosola quickly tells her that he is alive and has been pardoned, not dead as she believed, and then she dies. He confesses in a soliloquy that he feels repentant, and wonders how he can make amends or gain revenge.

## Analysis

In Act Four, the final showdown between the Duchess and Ferdinand occurs, acted largely through Bosola. In the most basic sense, Ferdinand is the victor—the Duchess is killed and so truly becomes a monument, a name only, with no domestic or life-bearing side remaining. The purity he demands of her will not again be compromised. The symbolic reality is more complicated, however, for Ferdinand fails to destroy her spirit, “to bring her to despair” (4.1.116), and his attempts to do so only further highlight how far her spirit rises above him. She does not die despairing, but bravely and honorably, and the only one truly brought to despair in this scene is he himself.

Though, at the beginning of the act, the Duchess has been separated from her loving husband and oldest child, stripped of her wealth and power, and imprisoned, she bears it “nobly” (4.1.2). When Ferdinand cruelly tries to fool her into thinking she holds Antonio’s dead hand, the trick fails and she at first thinks it is Ferdinand’s own hand, and even after all his awful treatment of her, she shows worry for him, saying, “I fear you are not well after your travel” (4.1.52). Rather than be moved by this, Ferdinand takes the trick further, showing her the faked corpses of her family. That the Duchess stands for good and Ferdinand for evil is nowhere more clear than this.

At this moment, when the Duchess believes her family to be dead, she is now deprived of the last external thing she had to derive strength from—her hope. Her title, her standing, her freedom were gone, and now she truly has nothing left. But still, she shows profound strength in her death scene, which allows her to defeat the cruel machinations of her brothers, even in her death, for she never gives in to despair, never regrets her choice to marry Antonio and create a family, never is brought down to her brothers’ level in any way.

The madmen surrounding her room only make her calmer, and those brought into her room only stand as an example of what she could have been brought to, and how very far she still is from that. When she learns that it is her time to die, she shows no fear, no anger, no remorse. The true courage this takes is made clear to the audience through the contrast of Cariola. Where Cariola at first showed bravely in insisting she wishes to die alongside her mistress, she acts quite differently in the moment, in which she begs, lies, delays, and fights physically to try to fend it off.

The grotesqueness of the theatricality surrounding the Duchess’s death also highlights her majestic nature. She is at peace while madmen dance and sing around her, while fake corpses surround her, while Bosola changes personas again and again, and while Cariola fights desperately for her life. Further, there is a great theatricality in the use of the madmen, whose several speeches creates a creepy theatrical atmosphere. Her ability to ignore them is another sign of her strength. The horrors surrounding her also serve to show that her dying is not synonymous with her being defeated by her brothers, for she is escaping this hell on earth that they have created, and into which they will fall prey to themselves during the final act.

Act Four also serves as a turning point for Bosola. In keeping with the pattern of contradiction in his character, his showings of remorse are seemingly genuine, but far from pure. Within the course of one scene, he orders the Duchess’s murder, then her children’s and Cariola’s, without any hesitation or remorse. His regrets come only after Ferdinand has made it clear that Bosola will not be rewarded for these gruesome tasks. But even then, his remorse is not pure, for when the Duchess shows signs of life again, and he prays, “Return, fair soul, from darkness” (4.2.334), it is so that she can assuage his guilt, lead him “out of this sensible hell” (4.2.335), save him, not so that she can live for her own sake.

Bosola has, with Ferdinand's regret at the sight of the Duchess's corpse, lost his one excuse for all of his evil deeds. He has throughout the play "rather sought/To appear a true servant than an honest man" (4.2.324-5)—he has chosen to be loyal to Ferdinand and the Cardinal rather than act according to his instincts "to do good" (4.2.352). But Ferdinand, who most gained from this unblinking loyalty, berates him for it—"Why didst not thou pity her?" (4.2.265). Even this man who embodies mindless evil, who shows no remorse at the sight of two infant corpses, thinks that Bosola should have felt enough in himself to prevent him from following his orders.

These contradictions reframe all of Bosola's actions in the play, and makes it clear just how meaningless his expressions of remorse, of hesitation, of regret that he must do such evil action are, for he, in fact, could have said no, and if Ferdinand is to be believed, he would have been rewarded for that better than for going through with it. When Bosola tells Ferdinand he executed "this bloody sentence" (4.2.290) on Ferdinand's authority, Ferdinand responds,

*Mine? Was I her judge?*

*Did any ceremonial form of law*

*Doom her to not-being? Did a complete jury*

*Deliver her conviction up i'th' court? (4.2.291-294)*

completely dismantling Bosola's attempts to believe that he was acting within a system, and that it was the system that was malicious, not he himself. It is a tribute to Webster's talent that we can both despise Bosola for his actions and pity him for his feelings of helplessness before social expectation, and all the while believe those contradictions.

## **Act Five, Scene One**

Act Five begins in a public place in Milan.

Delio counsels Antonio that the proffered peace from the Cardinal and Ferdinand is likely to be a trap. When the Marquis of Pescara approaches, Antonio hides and Delio asks to be granted some of the land that had been seized from Antonio. Pescara denies his request, and Julia approaches with a letter from the Cardinal, asking for the same land. Pescara grants it to her, and when Delio confronts him about his refusal, Pescara tells him that he wouldn't want to give land taken from someone in such a shameful way to a friend—Delio—but as Julia is a strumpet, it's good enough for her.

Pescara says that Ferdinand has come to Milan and is rumored to be sick or crazy. He leaves to visit him. Antonio comes out from hiding and tells Delio he plans to visit the Cardinal in his bedroom tonight to either reconcile, or face his punishment and get it over with.

## **Act Five, Scene Two**

Scene Two is set in the residence of the Cardinal and Ferdinand.

Ferdinand's doctor tells Pescara that Ferdinand is suffering from lycanthropia—he believes himself to be a wolf, and goes to dig up bodies in graveyards at night. He's been doing better since the doctor started treating him, but the doctor fears a relapse.

Ferdinand enters with Malatesta and the Cardinal, and Bosola enters separately. Ferdinand asks to be alone, and then proceeds to attack his own shadow. The doctor tries to intimidate Ferdinand so that he'll follow his orders, but it doesn't work and Ferdinand leaves, followed by the doctor.

Pescara asks the Cardinal how Ferdinand came to this state, and the Cardinal makes up a story about Ferdinand seeing a ghost, which started his loss of sanity. Everyone leaves except Bosola and the Cardinal, who doesn't want Bosola to know he was involved in planning the Duchess's death, so he pretends to not know she is dead. He tells Bosola that if he finds and kills Antonio, the Cardinal will give him whatever advancement he desires.

Right after the Cardinal leaves, Julia enters with a gun, threatening to kill Bosola so that her obsessive love for him will end—which she believes he caused with a love potion. Bosola denies having given her anything, and they embrace. Bosola asks her to prove her love for him by finding out what's wrong with the Cardinal, and she agrees, telling him to hide and she'll do it right away.

Bosola hides and the Cardinal enters with his servants. He says, aside, that he is wearying of Julia and wants to get rid of her any way he can. She asks him what's bothering him, and though at first he refuses to tell, finally he confesses to having engineered his sister's death. He makes her swear to keep his secret by kissing on a bible, but he has poisoned it and she dies almost immediately.

Bosola reveals himself to ask for his reward for killing the Duchess, since Ferdinand is too crazy to give it. The Cardinal tells him he will have it once he kills Antonio, which Bosola agrees to do. The Cardinal gives him a key so he can come after dark to help him remove Julia's body. The Cardinal leaves, and Bosola reveals that he will search out Antonio to protect him, or to offer to join him in avenging the Duchess's murder.

### **Act Five, Scene Three**

Delio and Antonio are near the Cardinal's palace, discussing the haunting echo that comes from the Duchess's tomb. Antonio is particularly haunted by it, as it does indeed seem to repeat snippets of his speech that have agency and meaning. Delio tries to convince Antonio not to go to the Cardinal's chamber, but Antonio says he would rather die than continue to half-live.

### **Act Five, Scene Four**

Scene Four returns to the residence of the Cardinal and Ferdinand.

The Cardinal, Pescara, Malatesta, Roderigo, and Grisolan enter. The Cardinal tells them not to stay with Ferdinand tonight because having people around makes him worse, although in reality he simply wants to ensure that no one is around when he gets rid of Julia's body. He further tells them of a plan to imitate Ferdinand's insanity in an attempt to get his confidence, and so they should ignore any extreme sounds or cries they might hear. They swear they won't go to Ferdinand no matter what they hear from his room. Everyone leaves except the Cardinal. He confesses to himself a plan to kill Bosola as soon as Bosola has killed Antonio and removed Julia's body.

The Cardinal exits, and Bosola enters, having overheard the Cardinal's plan to kill him. Ferdinand enters, speaking of strangling, which Bosola assumes is about him. Antonio and a servant follow, and Bosola, frightened and not realizing who it is, stabs Antonio fatally. Before he dies, Bosola tells Antonio what happened to his family. Bosola is devastated by his mistake, and tells the servant to take Antonio's body to Julia's room.

## Act Five, Scene Five

The final scene is set in a different chamber in the same Milan residence.

The Cardinal enters, debating to himself the nature of hell and wondering aloud “how tedious is a guilty conscience!” (5.5.4). Bosola enters, followed by a servant who carries Antonio’s body. Bosola tells the Cardinal that he has come to kill him, and though the Cardinal first tries to call for help, then to bribe Bosola to let him live, but Bosola is determined. Above, Pescara, Malatesta, Roderigo, and Grisolan hear the Cardinal’s cries for help, but they think he is testing them as he told them he might, so they don’t go to him, except for Pescara, who thinks he sounds truly in trouble. The others follow because they want to see Pescara humiliated.

Bosola tells the Cardinal that he is going to kill him to avenge the Duchess and Antonio’s deaths, and then stabs him. The Cardinal continues to call for help. Ferdinand comes in and, not understanding the situation, wounds the Cardinal further, after which he stabs Bosola. Bosola kills Ferdinand.

Pescara, Malatesta, Roderigo, and Grisolan enter. Bosola explains why he has killed Ferdinand and the Cardinal, but the Cardinal blames Ferdinand for their sister’s death before he dies. Bosola explains that he killed Antonio accidentally, and then he too dies. Delio enters with the eldest son of Antonio and the Duchess’s marriage, the sole survivor of the family, and the men pledge to help give him a good life to honor his mother and father.

### Analysis

The Duchess is unquestionably the heroine of the play, so many critics have questioned Webster’s choice to have her tragic, heroic death scene in the fourth act rather than the fifth. This placement leaves room for the play’s themes to be tied up, and for the tragic destruction of the Duchess and her family to be avenged through Bosola, who in this act finally gets to fight on the side of the good that he claimed to have had inside him all along. In many ways, this structure suggests that Bosola is the central figure of the play. Validating this claim is the fact that Webster listed Bosola first in the cast list, a rather rare occurrence in the day for characters of low rank.

The opening lines of the act underscore Antonio’s weakness. He does not yet know that his wife and two of his children are dead, but the audience has just seen them tragically murdered, so when he asks, “What think you of my hope of reconciliation/To the Aragonian brethren” (5.1.1-2), the dramatic irony paints him as not only only naive but horrifically callous. In his insistence on meeting with the Cardinal to beg peace, his ultimate ineffectiveness as a husband and father and protector of his family is made brutally clear, and the fact that even his death is no more than a tragic accident shows how he has never really been more than a frame to the vivacity, power, and courage of the Duchess. None of this is meant to negate his honor and goodness, but rather to suggest the ineffectiveness of such virtues in a world this corrupt.

This act also reveals the cracks in the seemingly all powerful Cardinal’s strength. He represents cold, calculating, removed evil, having managed to exert his will throughout the play while keeping his hands clean, and as such he has seemed indomitable. This illusion has been maintained partially by his brief presence on stage in the previous acts—he usually comes on, has a few lines and directives, and goes off again. In Act Five, however, he is more present, and he fails to maintain control when exposed for longer periods of time.

His first mistake is to believe that he can still control Bosola with the promise of rewards to come but never intended, as he and his brother have done all along. Though Bosola does accidentally kill Antonio, as the Cardinal wished, it was the opposite of his intent, and the Cardinal’s trust allows him to access the Cardinal alone

and so kill him. The Cardinal also overestimates Julia's love for him, and underestimates her cunning, and thereby exposes the secret that gives the hidden Bosola imperative to put the final chain of events in motion. These mistakes, and the fact that he signs his own death warrant in his schemes to keep the courtiers from coming to his chamber, show that his Machiavellian scheming is in fact short-sighted and fallible.

The Cardinal and Ferdinand both, on different scales, show the destructive power that evil ultimately has on the very perpetrators of that evil. With Ferdinand, this is very obvious. Though he has shown some small signs of madness all along, and certainly irrationality, in the fifth act, he is completely undone, fighting his own shadow and digging up corpses, believing himself to be a wolf. Though there is foreshadowing of this lycanthropy throughout the play, the real turning point comes when Ferdinand is faced with the face of his sister's corpse. Her goodness, and the price she paid because of his evil, is too much for him, and he goes off to hunt a badger—clearly an indication that his total loss of sanity has begun. One can also understand this from a psychological standpoint - if we think of his intense hatred of his sister's sexuality as symptomatic of repressed incestuous feeling, then his insanity here represents a transference of those perverted feelings once she has died and can no longer serve as a receptacle for his displaced feelings.

For the Cardinal, his self-destruction is more subtle, but still distinct. Besides the chips in his facade already mentioned and the mistakes that allow Bosola to kill him, in the last scene his spirit is diminished. The scene opens with him fearing hell, and what it has in store for him, and for the first time he shows signs of guilt for all of the evil he has done. In stark opposition to the Duchess and her calm, dignified death, he cries for help repeatedly as he is attacked. Bosola tells him, "Now it seems thy greatness was only outward,/For thou fall'st faster of thyself than calamity/Can drive thee" (5.5.42-44), and this is reflected in his powerlessness to draw aid, to help himself, and in his final, melancholic plea to "Be laid by, and never thought of" (5.5.89).

The pattern of death in Act Five is utterly distinct from that in Act Four, further cementing the image of the courageous Duchess. The Duchess gets a long lead up, elaborate rituals, and her body is left isolated on the stage to set her apart, not to mention the courage and dignity with which she faces her executioners, and the hope with which she looks to the afterlife. In Act Five, however, Antonio dies in a case of mistaken identity, the Cardinal calls uselessly for help while both Bosola and Ferdinand attack him, Ferdinand gives Bosola his death blow seemingly at random—all is chaos, cowardice, and hopelessness in the face of death. For she who lived her life virtuously and in pursuit of her own happiness, a dignified death is possible. For most of us, who it seems Webster believes would live our lives mired in self-interest, deception, and cruelty, death will come in an undignified manner.

Though the play is mostly overwrought with evil, it does end on a hopeful note. One member of the Duchess's family survives, her and Antonio's oldest son. The representatives of evil have all destroyed each other, and "These wretched eminent things/Leave no more fame behind 'em than should one/Fall in a frost, and leave his print in snow" (5.5.112-4) which will melt in the sun. They can do no more harm from beyond the grave, but though the Duchess is also dead, she can do good, for it is in the Duchess's "right" (5.5.112) that Delio and the surviving gentlemen intend to raise the son, this symbol of hope, who the Duchess and Antonio created in and left as a testament to their love. The only dark spot on this otherwise hopeful ending is the worldview that Webster paints so vividly, one where evil and human self-interest is the status quo, and so even what starts pure has the potential to grow corrupt.

## 25.4 LET US SUM UP

*The Duchess of Malfi* follows the tragic tale of the titular Duchess who, against the wishes of her controlling brothers Ferdinand and the Cardinal, secretly marries her steward, Antonio, and has children with him. When her brothers discover her defiance, they employ Bosola to spy on her, leading to a series of brutal and vengeful acts. The play culminates in a cascade of violence and death, including the murder of the Duchess and her children, as well as the eventual downfall of her brothers and Bosola. Through its intricate plot and dark themes, the play explores issues of power, corruption, and the struggle for autonomy.

## 25.5 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. Who is the main antagonist in the play *The Duchess of Malfi*?
  - a) Antonio
  - b) Bosola
  - c) Ferdinand
  - d) The Cardinal
2. What is the primary reason the Duchess's brothers oppose her remarriage?
  - a) They dislike Antonio
  - b) They want to maintain control over her and her wealth
  - c) They are against marriage in general
  - d) They fear political repercussions
3. How does the Duchess's secret marriage come to light?
  - a) Ferdinand discovers a letter
  - b) The Cardinal overhears a conversation
  - c) Bosola spies on her and reports back to her brothers
  - d) Antonio accidentally reveals it
4. Which character serves as the spy for the Duchess's brothers?
  - a) Delio
  - b) Cariola
  - c) Bosola
  - d) Julia
5. What is Bosola's occupation when he is first introduced in the play?
  - a) A soldier
  - b) The Duchess's steward
  - c) A horseman
  - d) A doctor

6. What are the Duchess's last words?
  - a) "I forgive my murderers"
  - b) "Heaven gates are not so highly arched as princes' palaces"
  - c) "Antonio, I am dying"
  - d) "Let me be laid by, and never thought of"
7. How does Ferdinand react to the news of the Duchess's death?
  - a) He feels guilty and remorseful
  - b) He is indifferent
  - c) He is overjoyed
  - d) He becomes mad and suffers from lycanthropy
8. What role does the Cardinal play in the death of Julia?
  - a) He ignores her plight
  - b) He poisons her with a book
  - c) He orders Bosola to kill her
  - d) He stabs her
9. What motivates Bosola to turn against the Cardinal and Ferdinand in the end?
  - a) Desire for power
  - b) Sympathy for the Duchess
  - c) Guilt and a sense of justice
  - d) A personal vendetta
10. What is the fate of Antonio?
  - a) He escapes with his son
  - b) He is murdered by Bosola
  - c) He commits suicide
  - d) He is imprisoned by the Cardinal

**Answers:**

1. c) Ferdinand
2. b) They want to maintain control over her and her wealth
3. c) Bosola spies on her and reports back to her brothers
4. c) Bosola
5. c) A horseman

6. b) "Heaven gates are not so highly arched as princes' palaces"
7. d) He becomes mad and suffers from lycanthropy
8. b) He poisons her with a book
9. c) Guilt and a sense of justice
10. b) He is murdered by Bosola

## **25.6 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-duchess-of-malfi/study-guide/summary>
- Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi* Dover Publications, Inc., 1623

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## THE DUCHESS OF MALFI

### STRUCTURE

- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 26.3 Themes
- 26.4 Symbols
- 26.5 Imagery
- 26.6 Metaphors and Similes
- 26.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.8 Multiple Choice Questions
- 26.9 Suggested Readings

### 26.1 INTRODUCTION

John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* delves deeply into themes of power, corruption, and the struggle for autonomy, highlighting the destructive nature of unchecked ambition and tyranny. Central to the play are symbols such as the Duchess's wedding ring, representing her defiance and personal freedom, and the use of dark and claustrophobic imagery to underscore the oppressive atmosphere of the court. Allegorical elements are present in characters like Bosola, who embodies the conflicted soul torn between duty and morality. Motifs such as madness, secrecy, and death recur throughout the play, enhancing its tragic and ominous tone. These literary devices not only enrich the narrative but also invite readers to explore the profound moral and philosophical questions posed by the play.

### 26.2 OBJECTIVES

#### Objectives

Students will:

1. Explore major themes such as power, corruption, death, and resistance.
2. Analyze recurring symbols and dark imagery in the play.
3. Interpret how Webster uses poetic devices to build mood and meaning.

## Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Discuss themes of gender, class, and fate in the play.
2. Identify key symbols like the wax figures, darkness, and the madmen.
3. Explain how Webster's use of visual and symbolic imagery reinforces tragedy.

### 26.3 THEMES

#### Politics and Corruption

The Duchess of Malfi takes place in Roman Catholic Italy, which English Renaissance audiences would have associated with the stereotype of "sophisticated corruption." The play begins with Antonio's speech about his recent return from the French court; he praises France and offers the play's notion of an ideal royal state. The French king, Antonio reports, in order to bring everything to order, has rid himself of all flatterers and "infamous persons" because he rightly understands that a court "is like a common fountain." Usually goodness flows, but if it is poisoned near the head (i.e., the monarch), death spreads throughout the entire fountain (the entire nation). The French court is especially good because there is a council unafraid to inform the King of the "corruption of the times." Some advisors tell rulers what to do, but in France the advisors tell the King what he should foresee. It's ideal that France is filled with nobles willing to speak against corruption and give genuine advice to rulers.

Webster juxtaposes the ideal court of France with the political situation in Italy, whose corruption is exemplified by Duke Ferdinand and his brother the Cardinal, who deal illicitly throughout the play. Both men make efforts to appear temperate, courtly, and honorable, but inside, they are both evil and corrupt. The Cardinal, for example, lays elaborate plots against anyone he is jealous of or doesn't like, and he surrounds himself with flatterers, spies, and "a thousand such political monsters." He is so corrupt as to have attempted to bribe his way into becoming Pope. Likewise, Duke Ferdinand is perverse and corrupt. He is duplicitous and relies heavily on spies. Delio even describes the Duke as a spider and the law as his web: he uses the laws of the country as a means of security for himself and as a weapon against his enemies. It is through spies that the two find out about the Duchess' marriage and children, and through continual abuse of power that they break her family apart and ultimately slaughter them.

The play makes an argument about ideal government and the dangers (both physical and spiritual) of corruption. Though there are momentary gains and successes achieved by the brothers' plans, ultimately the play ends with the slaughter of nearly everyone involved in their web of influence. This ending suggests that corruption yields disastrous results; even beyond death, corruption can lead to damnation. This point is made explicitly when Bosola tells Ferdinand that taking a higher position in exchange for spying on the Duchess would make him a traitor and Ferdinand a corruptor, thereby leading both of them to hell.

Finally, the death of all of the play's major figures of political power leaves a vacuum at the end of the play; there is no new leader to take over. To show this, the play's final lines, often reserved for the highest-ranking character, are spoken by a mere courier. Ferdinand and the Cardinal's positions aren't filled, but are merely left vacant at the play's end. Thus political corruption and duplicitous behavior has the potential to lead to dire personal and religious consequences, and possibly to the collapse of government itself.

## **Love and Male Authority**

The play explores love and male authority in a traditional society in which women are subjected to the wills of men. The Cardinal's illicit relationship with Julia provides an example of a woman successfully controlled by a man. Julia is depicted according to the stereotype of a fickle woman, while the Cardinal is the constant figure of authority. Webster even uses animal imagery to describe their relationship: the Cardinal is metaphorically a falconer who tames Julia, the falcon. Later, when Julia becomes infatuated with Bosola, she begs for him to tell her to do something so that she can prove that she loves him—clearly, she understands love to be an experience controlled by men.

The Cardinal and Ferdinand also try to exert their male authority over the Duchess. In order to preserve her honor and reputation (supposedly) and to take her fortune, the brothers seek to prevent her from remarrying. They deliver a rehearsed argument, in which they characterize marriage as a prison and forbid her from marrying again. Once she does so behind their backs, they use all of their power to correct the situation and get revenge on her. We should also note that Ferdinand's initial argument for the Duchess not to marry has undertones of incest.

The Duchess, however, inverts the pattern of male authority over love. Refusing to remain a widow, she covertly goes against her brothers' order and marries for love. What's more, she does so outside of the normal confines of courtship in which the man pursues the woman; in part due to her high birth, she is "forced to woo" Antonio. This marriage between Antonio and the Duchess is figured as a true partnership; the Duchess married Antonio purely out of love, in spite of custom and opposition, as he had no special status or nobility.

Throughout the play, the Duchess continues to defy male authority and assert her own agency, for love, for the sake of her children, and for her own self interest. Even facing her own execution, she remains proud and unafraid, and she undercuts the power of the men executing her by ensuring that her body will be cared for by women after her death. Even so, the Duchess's final, dying thought is that her husband is still alive. This gestures towards the fact that male authority is still powerful, despite the Duchess's assertions of her own power, for which she is being executed. The Duchess, then, can be seen both as a proud example of a woman exerting her will and a tragic example of society's refusal to relinquish the power of male authority.

## **Guilt, Death and Suffering**

Put simply, this play is filled with death and suffering. In a tragedy, the deaths of most of the main characters are pretty much guaranteed, but Webster achieves a spectacular level of horror with the way that characters are killed and the tortures they undergo beforehand. In light of the Duchess being subjected to imprisonment, torture, and execution, it's notable that death itself doesn't frighten her. The Duchess possesses composure and dignity in the moments leading up to her death, even to the point of asking for her violent death in order to put her to sleep. In this way, death is shown as an escape that is preferable to a life of suffering. Death, no matter how gruesome, leads to "excellent company in the other world," and it frees the Duchess from the control and torture of her brothers. We can also note that the Duchess' death showcases the play's exploration of the permanence of death, as an echo rises from her grave in an attempt to tell Antonio of her fate.

While Ferdinand and the Cardinal are directly responsible for much of the suffering and death in the play (including and beyond what's mentioned above), the suffering they create does not lead to satisfaction or pleasure. Instead, it leads to guilt, as well as to more suffering and more death. Ferdinand, for example, begins to regret his actions immediately after seeing that the Duchess has died; he shows signs of guilt right away when he sees the Duchess' body. Soon this guilt progresses so far as to drive him mad. He acts so strangely that the doctor believes he has the disease of lycanthropia (that he is a werewolf), and at one point he starts attacking his own shadow. He shows himself to be obsessed with the crime of the Duchess's death, saying to himself "Strangling is a very quiet death." Guilt, therefore, has the power to drive someone insane (and ultimately to his death).

As the Cardinal is a religious figure, his guilt (which, in a way, also leads him to death) is expressed in terms of faith instead of insanity. After killing Julia, he is plagued by guilt. He cries out, "Oh, my conscience!" and says that he would pray, but the devil is preventing him. Thus we see that guilt has the power to stop even a Catholic Cardinal from offering prayer. Since he cannot pray, he cannot be forgiven, and he later offers a brief soliloquy in which he explains that he has been thinking about hell, a symptom of his guilty conscience. The association with hell continues, as, in his insanity, Ferdinand becomes convinced that his brother is the devil, and he stabs the Cardinal. Guilt transforms a Cardinal into the devil and apparently indicates that he will go to hell. It's among the severe consequences of murder and evil.

Finally, Bosola is in a unique situation, as he is forced into killing and experiences guilt throughout the play. In all of his actions, he feels guilty, but this guilt is overwhelmed by a sense of duty to the Duke, emphasizing the play's suggestion that guilt or preemptive guilt is not enough to deter murder or bad behavior. Ultimately, though, guilt and desire for revenge take precedence over duty. Overwhelmed by guilt for the suffering he has caused, Bosola seeks to right his wrongs. Since he is guilty, however, he also suffers the fate of the diabolical brothers.

## Religion and Sin

Sin—and the religious consequences of sin—run rampant in *The Duchess of Malfi*. The tragic forces of the play's major plotline are primarily driven by sin: it is because they are greedy for her fortune and prideful of their noble blood that the Cardinal and the Duke do not wish the Duchess to remarry. Ferdinand also exhibits a strange incestuous desire for his sister (another glaring sin), which leads in part to his horrible treatment of her. Ferdinand's rage, lust, pride, and greed all upset him to the point of deformity, and he shocks the Cardinal with the horrible things he talks about doing to punish the Duchess. But Ferdinand also believes that his and the Cardinal's sins are being avenged by heaven through the Duchess. Further, his last lines before dying echo and reinforce the sentiment that we are punished and suffer fates according to our sins: "Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds we are cut with our own dust." These lines indicate that our own sins and our own actions are responsible for our downfalls.

The Cardinal is a religious figure, and most of the characters acknowledge the dangers of sin, the devil, and hell. Bosola knows, for example, that the devil makes sins look good and calls gracious whatever heaven calls vile. Likewise, the Cardinal at one point enters the stage carrying a religious book and, after murdering Julia, he ponders the nature of hell like a scholar and a believer. But despite this knowledge, most figures (especially the evil ones) are not deterred from sinning, even egregiously. Religion, then, is not presented as a force that prevents bad behavior.

The Duchess, we can note has a particularly conflicting view of religion. She is able to face death with such poise, in part, because she believes that she will meet greet people in her next life (i.e. in heaven). Her last

spoken word is even “mercy.” But during her life, she implies that certain religious practices or beliefs are mere superstition. When devising a plan for the Duchess to escape, Bosola suggests that she pretend to make a sacred pilgrimage. The Duchess thinks it is a good idea, but Cariola says that she should not “jest” with religion, and that it is better to avoid a fake pilgrimage. The Duchess doesn’t take this advice seriously, calling Cariola a “superstitious fool.”

Her brothers, though, recognize this tactic. The Cardinal says that she is making “religion her riding hood” to keep her from attention and trouble. Ferdinand’s response is that it “damns her.” He goes on to say that the more pure she pretends to be, given her devious intentions, the fouler she is actually being. In a strange way, this notion echoes the devil’s means of profanity, which is accomplished by taking what heaven calls bad and making it good, and by inverting or twisting what is most pure and most holy. At the same time, we can note that the Cardinal uses his religious influence for immoral purposes. For example, he banishes the Duchess and Antonio in a formal ceremony at a religious shrine, thereby hypocritically doing exactly what he damned the Duchess for doing: using a religious exercise as a façade for personal gain.

Religion in this play, then, is generally acknowledged but ignored by its characters. Though the stakes of sin and mercy are real and high, and most characters acknowledge the dangers of sins, those sins simply prove too tempting for almost everyone in the play. While Webster sometimes shows religion to be a tool used by the suffering to find comfort, it’s more commonly used by the powerful to seize or maintain power, and by the wicked to justify themselves and hide their terrible sins.

## Class

The Duchess’s marriage to Antonio is not just remarkable because she was the pursuer and because she married against her brothers’ will. It is also remarkable because she married someone of a lower class. During their courtship, Antonio is careful not to appear to be ambitious, which is considered dangerous for someone in a lower class. Further, in the marriage scene, the Duchess laments the misery of being high born, which forces her to woo because no one dares to woo her. Such a marriage would have been progressive and scandalous at the time. The significance of this marriage is not lost on Bosola, another one of the play’s lowerclassmen with upward mobility. When Bosola finds out about the marriage, he is stunned. He asks if in such an ambitious time, is there really a woman who would marry a man simply for his worth, without all of his wealth and honors. And when she confirms the marriage, Bosola launches into a speech about how praiseworthy the Duchess is for marrying Antonio, saying that she shows that some benefits in the world can still come from merit.

The marriage and Bosola’s reaction to it, when paired with other details, suggest the play’s treatment of class in general. First, we can note that Webster himself was not noble born; he was the son of a tailor. Next, we can note that Delio, a minor character and friend of Antonio (with whom he shares a social class), speaks the play’s opening and closing lines. While Shakespeare, for example, often gave closing lines to the character of the highest status, Webster inverts this tradition, in part to emphasize the fact that most upper class characters have died. Class is shown, on the one hand, to be binding and restricting (as it is one of the reasons the marriage is so scandalous and ends so tragically), but Webster’s play also suggests that class is fluid, that figures can rise and fall in status, and that true worth and merit should be given a greater value than birth, wealth, and social status.

### CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks

1. The theme of \_\_\_ power is central to the Duchess's conflict with her brothers.
2. The wax figures shown to the Duchess symbolize \_\_\_ and despair.
3. Darkness and shadows are symbolic of moral and social \_\_\_.
4. The use of madmen in the play reflects the theme of \_\_\_.

### Answers

1. patriarchal
2. death
3. decay
4. madness

## 26.4 SYMBOLS

### Poison

Antonio introduces the symbol of poison in the play's opening while making a political analogy about the ideal government, which, he says, should function like a fountain. Goodness should flow through the country, but if someone poisons the well then death and disease will spread. From this point forward, poisons serve as tools of the corrupt government and become symbols for corruption itself, for hidden threats, and for secrecy. The Cardinal, for example, tells Julia that his secrets are like lingering poisons that would slowly spread through her veins and cause her death. Once she gets the secrets out of him, the Cardinal then kills Julia by making her kiss a literally poisoned book.

### Disease

References to disease, both figurative and literal, are made throughout the play. In an early speech, Bosola seems to indicate that disfigurement and disease signify a perversion and animalization of humanity. Two clear examples of the way disease is used are the Duchess's pregnancy and Ferdinand's Lycanthropia. When the Duchess is pregnant, it's her morning sickness that alerts Bosola to her pregnancy. And when the Duke is driven insane by his guilt, it manifests in what the Doctor diagnoses as Lycanthropia (werewolf syndrome). In both cases, disease is an outward manifestation of some inward guilt, sin, or secret.

### Blood

In *The Duchess of Malfi*, blood works classically as a multifaceted symbol. First and most simply, blood symbolizes violence. When an act is particularly violent or cruel it is described as bloody. Blood is also used to refer to both status and family; it represents rank and lineage. Thus when Ferdinand and the Cardinal kill the Duchess, they are spilling the noble blood of their own blood (i.e. family member). Finally, blood is used by Ferdinand to represent passion when he says, "Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds we are cut with our own dust." In the Renaissance it was common to believe that people were ruled by the four humors, all of which run through the blood (blood itself was also a humor). Ferdinand's dying words contain multiple meanings for the word blood, including family and violence, but they also seem to evoke notions of passion and the four humors.

## 26.5 IMAGERY

### The Theater

The play often cited by scholars for its investment in meta-theatricality, or a self-referential performance that comments on the experience of theater itself. As such, numerous descriptions of play-going and performing appear throughout the play. For example, the Duchess describes her suffering in theatrical terms, saying, “I account this world a tedious theatre, / For I do play a part in’t ‘gainst my will” (4.1). These moments remind the audience that they are watching a play, and that elements of life often mimic the theater and vice versa.

### Bodies and Souls

In a play with so much death, there is bound to be talk or corporeality and transcendence of one’s soul. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, descriptions of bodies and souls abound as different characters reflect on death. Bosola, for example, tries to tell the Duchess that her soul is imprisoned in her body, and entrapment much worse than her literal imprisonment at the hands of her brother.

### Darkness

The play is rife with images of darkness, especially as characters reflect, at the end of the play, on the state of the world. In Bosola’s dying speech, for example, he says, “Oh, this gloomy world! / In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness, / Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!” (5.5). Bosola describes the world as a dark pit, in many ways suggesting that life on earth is the equivalent to Hell itself. This is one of the many reasons that the play is considered a bleak play with a pessimistic worldview.

### Bestiality

References to beasts, savagery, and animalistic behavior appear throughout the play as indicators of what certain characters find to be reprehensible behavior. Of course, Ferdinand later believes he himself is turned into a beast (a werewolf), becoming an embodiment of his malicious interiority. The play suggests that men are unredeemable beasts at heart, and that life is nothing but competition and suffering.

## 26.6 METAPHORS AND SIMILES

### Duchess’s Rank

The Duchess laments the fact that, because she was born a Duchess, no man would ever attempt to court her because her rank is too high. She says, “And as a tyrant doubles with his words, / And fearfully equivocates, so we / Are forc’d to express our violent passions / In riddles and in dreams” (1.1). Here, the Duchess uses a simile to compare herself to a tyrant who must deceive his people in order to get what he wants. In this case, the Duchess thinks she has to resort to deception and secrecy in order to marry Antonio.

### Duchess’s Marriage

After the Duchess promises the Cardinal and Ferdinand that she will not remarry, she turns around and immediately seeks a marriage with Antonio. She describes her decision by saying, “Even in this hate, as men in some great battles, / By apprehending danger, have achiev’d / Almost impossible actions (I have heard soldiers

say so), / So I through frights and threatenings will assay / This dangerous venture" (1.1). Here, the Duchess uses a simile to compare herself to a soldier walking over the bodies of her friends and family, suggesting that there is nothing she would not do to be able to marry Antonio.

### **Sugar Candy**

When Ferdinand proposes a new husband for the Duchess, he offers Count Malatesta as a suitor. The Duchess responds by saying, "A Count? He's a mere stick of sugar candy, / You may quite look through him" (3.1). Here, the Duchess uses a metaphor to compare the Count to flimsy and weak piece of candy, emphasizing her own strength and her desire to marry someone of equal measure.

### **An Imprisoned Relic**

When the Duchess is imprisoned by Ferdinand, she implores him to explain why he is treating her this way. She says to her brother, "Why should only I / Of all the other princes of the world / Be cased up like a holy relic? I have youth, / And a little beauty" (3.2). Here, The Duchess uses a simile to compare herself to a relic of the church, or something old that, while valuable, is hidden away from view. She argues with her brother that she is young and desirable, and that it is only fitting that she should remarry.

### **Ferdinand's Death**

When Ferdinand dies at the end of the play, he expresses his shame over what he has done and realizes that he, too, is doomed. After calling out to his (deceased) sister, he says, "Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust, / Like diamonds we are cut with our own dust" (5.5). Here, Ferdinand uses a simile to compare people to diamonds, or substances that are only "undone" by themselves.

## **26.7 LET US SUM UP**

*The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster intricately weaves imagery, symbols, metaphors, and themes to create a rich and complex narrative. The play's dark and oppressive imagery, such as shadows and confined spaces, reinforces the themes of entrapment and tyranny. Key symbols like the Duchess's wedding ring represent personal freedom and defiance against societal constraints. Metaphors, including the frequent references to disease and decay, highlight the moral corruption of the court. Central themes of the play include the abuse of power, the struggle for autonomy, and the consequences of ambition and revenge. Together, these elements deepen the audience's understanding of the characters' motivations and the tragic consequences of their actions, providing a compelling exploration of human nature and societal critique.

## **26.8 MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS**

1. Which theme is central to *The Duchess of Malfi*?
  - a) Love and romance
  - b) Power and corruption
  - c) Friendship and loyalty
  - d) Adventure and exploration

2. The recurring imagery of darkness and shadows in the play primarily symbolizes:
  - a) The beauty of the night
  - b) The mysterious nature of the court
  - c) The moral and political corruption of the court
  - d) The romantic secrecy of the Duchess and Antonio
3. What does the Duchess's wedding ring symbolize?
  - a) Wealth and status
  - b) Defiance and personal freedom
  - c) Tradition and family
  - d) Love and fidelity
4. Which metaphor is used to describe the court's corruption in the play?
  - a) A blooming garden
  - b) A festering disease
  - c) A roaring ocean
  - d) A shining star
5. The theme of revenge is most clearly depicted through which character?
  - a) Antonio
  - b) Bosola
  - c) The Cardinal
  - d) Ferdinand
6. What does the motif of madness in the play mainly highlight?
  - a) The comedic elements of the plot
  - b) The thin line between sanity and insanity
  - c) The effects of guilt and remorse
  - d) The nature of love and passion
7. Ferdinand's lycanthropy symbolizes:
  - a) His connection to nature
  - b) His supernatural abilities
  - c) His descent into madness and loss of humanity
  - d) His desire for power

8. The use of skulls and other morbid imagery in the play serves to:
  - a) Celebrate life
  - b) Reflect on mortality and the inevitability of death
  - c) Show the wealth of the characters
  - d) Add a gothic element to the romance
9. The Duchess's secret marriage represents which broader theme?
  - a) The pursuit of happiness
  - b) The conflict between personal desire and societal expectations
  - c) The importance of family
  - d) The strength of love
10. What is the significance of Bosola's character in terms of themes?
  - a) He represents loyalty and trust
  - b) He embodies the conflict between duty and morality
  - c) He symbolizes romantic love
  - d) He is a symbol of hope and redemption

**Answers:**

1. b) Power and corruption
2. c) The moral and political corruption of the court
3. b) Defiance and personal freedom
4. b) A festering disease
5. d) Ferdinand
6. c) The effects of guilt and remorse
7. c) His descent into madness and loss of humanity
8. b) Reflect on mortality and the inevitability of death
9. b) The conflict between personal desire and societal expectations
10. b) He embodies the conflict between duty and morality

## **26.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-duchess-of-malfi/themes>
- <https://www.gradesaver.com/the-duchess-of-malfi/study-guide/revenge-tragedy>

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## REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

### STRUCTURE

- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Objectives and Outcomes
- 27.3 Representation of Women
- 27.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.5 Examination Oriented Questions
- 27.6 Suggested Reading

#### 27.1 INTRODUCTION

The representation of women in Elizabethan comedy and Jacobean tragedy has been a matter of great interest among critics. It is generally agreed that women in the drama of this period are represented as strong, self-willed, intelligent, and mostly noble. They are shown doing well in different roles, including that of a lawyer or an administrator. Their love is ennobling, their charms are humanizing, their wit and intelligence are incomparable. At the same time, it will be wrong to presume that women in the seventeenth century actually enjoyed the freedom and privilege that are accorded in the drama of the period, or that the society of the time accepted women to possess all the virtues they are credited with in these plays. The non-literary sources available to us today tell us an altogether a different story. These sources give no evidence of women having been emancipated at that time. In fact, what surprises the reader of the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama is this striking difference between the actual and the represented status of women in the society of the time. Where do these ideas about women come from when their position in the society of the period was not so glorious as represented in the dramatic literature?

#### 27.2 OBJECTIVES

##### Objectives

1. Analyze how the Duchess challenges traditional gender roles.
2. Understand the tension between female autonomy and male control.
3. Examine other female characters and their symbolic significance.

## Outcomes

By the end of the lesson, learners will be able to:

1. Evaluate the Duchess as a strong, tragic heroine.
2. Critique the way her independence provokes repression and violence.
3. Discuss the role of women's voices, agency, and resistance in the play.

### 27.3 REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN

First of all, let us look into the leading female characters available to us in the Jacobean drama. The women who immediately occur to us in this connection are the Duchess of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, Vittoria of The White Devil, and Beatrice-Joanna of Middleton's The Changeling. These women clearly share the common attributes of passion, sensuality, courage, intelligence, cunning, and ambition. These qualities of character make these females so attractive and admirable that for centuries they have been accepted as a part of consistent and believable female heroic persona. We have leading female characters in Shakespeare's comedies, but we do not have a single leading female character in his tragedies. We have tragic heroines in the Greek drama, but not in the Elizabethan. It is remarkable that in the Jacobean period Webster should choose to have woman as the leading character in both of his great tragedies. As has been rightly acknowledged, it can be said that one of John Webster's most original contributions to English tragedy consisted in his examination of the characteristics which combine to produce a convincing tragic heroine.

When we come to consider the fact that this heroic woman is done to death by her own brothers, we cannot help asking, "What did this woman do to merit death?" Perhaps, the answer is, that the tragedy which successfully presents a sympathetic tragic heroine must also be concerned with the question, "Can this woman be trusted?" Of course, it is not a matter of one woman being able to trust another. It is, in point of fact, a matter of whether one man or many men can trust one particular woman. Also, what is important to understand here is the nature of this question. Can this woman be trusted?" is, as a matter of fact, a peculiarly patriarchal question to ask. In Webster's major tragedies this point is emphasized by the strange situation of his heroines. Both, the Duchess and Vittoria move in exclusively masculine worlds. Also, both appear to be cut off from contact with other women. Then, both are virtually isolated from the friendship or companionship of women of their own rank.

Critics have pointed out that the Jacobean dramatists, especially Webster, show great insight into female character, even female psychology. They maintain that the female portrayals are convincing. To this, the feminists have reacted insisting that the characters look convincing to the male critics because they are drawn from a distinctly male viewpoint. How men conceive of women? What do they think of women? If the female characters square up with their views, they are called convincing. Even a female critic, Una-Ellis-Fermor, endorses this view. Praising Middleton, for instance, she says: "Middleton's capacity for tragedy is inseparable from his other supreme gift, his discernment of the minds of women; in this no dramatist of the period except Shakespeare is his equal at once for variety and for penetration." The feminists of today would not accept the old-timer woman critic, who writes just as men wrote - criticism on accepted critical ethos, including ideas of malehood and feminity. They find that the qualities being praised of the women characters in the Jacobean plays are actually morally dubious. Some of these qualities are: cunning, duplicity, sexual rapaciousness, changeableness.

Let us examine the case of the Duchess in Webster's play, our immediate concern here. The first time we see the Duchess in the play, she is shown in an atmosphere fraught with explicitly offensive sexual innuendo. Here, she is involved in this offensive affair, which is made to control our assessment of her character for the rest of the play's time. Here is the scene of her appearance:

FERDINAND. *You are a widow:*

*You know already what man is, and therefore*

*Let not youth, high promotion, eloquence-*

ARDINAL. *No, nor anything without the addition, honour,*

*Sway your high blood.*

FERDINAND. *Marry! They are most luxurious*

*Will wed twice.*

DUCHESS. *Will you hear me?*

*I'll never marry :-*

CARDINAL. *So most widows say!*

*But commonly that motion lasts no longer*

*Than the turning of an hour-glass-the funeral sermon*

*And it, end both together.*

The sexual innuendo comes to a climax a couple of speeches later. The Duchess reveals the accuracy of her brothers' prediction. She confirms their dark travesty of female lasciviousness and doubleness simultaneously. Note the following conversation which reveals it all:

FERDINAND. *You are my sister-*

*This was my father's poniand: do you see!*

*I'd be loth to see 'trusty, 'cause 't was his :-*

*A visor and a mask are whispering-rooms*

*That were ne'er built for goodness: for ye well :-*

*And women like that part which, like the lamprey*

*Hath ne'er a bone in't.*

DUCHESS. *Fie sir!*

FERDINAND. *Nay,*

*I mean the tongue: variety of courtship....*

*What cannot a neat knave with a smooth tale*

*Make a woman believe? Farewell lusty widow [Exit]*

DUCHESS. *Shall this move me? If all my royal kindered  
Lay in my way unto this marriage,  
I'd make them my low footsteps.*

Antonio's picture of the Duchess, painted after his infatuation, of stereotype female virtue cannot stand its ground before this encounter here. The impact of this conversation is far more powerful than what the infatuated lover, and that too a servant of the Duchess, has to say in flattery of her.

What Ferdinand fears, the Duchess declares: she is committed to her lust/ love for Antonio. Her "luxuriousness" (or lust) drives her into secret marriage with Antonio. She flouts the wishes of her brother, just as Gertude belies the wishes of her son in *Hamlet*. Hamlet's mother too, marries Claudius, which act on her part he keeps condemning as bestial. Considered lower in her sexual drive than even "a beast that wants discourse of reason," the Duchess of Malifi steps out of the path of "duty" and marries for lust. Once the Duchess has taken this step, she remains heroically committed to it irrespective of the consequences that she knows, would follow. Of course, her resoluteness gets gradually commuted into the splendour of a resigned passive acceptance of her inevitable downfall:

FERDINAND. *How doth our sister duchess bear herself  
In her imprisonment?*

BOSOLA. *Nobly; I'll describe her:*

*She's sad, as one long us'd to 't; and she seems  
Rather to welcome the end of misery  
Than shun it; - a behaviour so noble  
As gives a majesty to adversity;  
You may discern the shape of loveliness  
More perfect in her tears, than in her smiles.*

The female tragic protagonist shows "majesty" in her most reassuring and admirable form when associated with patient suffering/We know how Griselda, the Virgin Mary, Hecuba, all prostrate with grief. Here, what has been called a "convincing" representation of the developing psychology of the female protagonist is obviously the transformation of lascivious waywardness into emblematic chaste resignation.

The typical Jacobean attitude towards women was to consider them unreliable. "Frailty thy name is woman," which the Prince of Denmark pronounces in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was universal with the 17th century male members of English society. Donne's "Go and catch a falling star" stresses the same stereotype image of the woman. Such statements about women, so common in the poetry and drama of the age, were always meant to remind the audience of the female sensuality. This image of the woman as a deceiving creature when it comes to lust or sensuality perhaps was derived from the Biblical story of the Fall. Since, the first woman failed to resist the sensual temptation, all women thereafter inherited the basic female trait. This religious sanction came handy to the male members for subjugating the female members to their stronger partners. Even Desdemona's marriage for love is given the same colouring:

*Look to her Moor if thou hast eyes to see;*

*She has deceiv'd her father, and thee.*

Such accusations against women were meant to make them feel “guilty” of their willful acts of love and marriage. Unless the act is sanctioned by the male authority-father, brother, husband - it remains an immoral act, and hence, liable to punishment.

In the eyes of Jacobean audience, these women had to be severely punished for their inordinate sensuality so that others of the race do not make the mistake. What Webster thought of the Duchess’s story and what he expected from the audience of his age in reacting to her story can be gauged from the source he relied upon for the plot of his play. The acknowledged source of Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* was William Painter’s *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566/67). This book, consisting of lively tales translated from Boccaccio and other Italian writers, was a source, in fact, for all of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, including Shakespeare. The twenty-third “novel” in this book is entitled, “The Duchess of Main, the unfortunate marriage of a gentleman, called Antonio Bologna

### **CYP: Fill-in-the-Blanks**

1. The Duchess defies her brothers by choosing to \_\_\_ for love.
2. Her brothers seek to control her body and her \_\_\_.
3. The Duchess is often seen as a symbol of female \_\_\_ in a patriarchal society.
4. Her tragic death is both brutal and morally \_\_\_.

### **Answers**

1. marry
2. inheritance
3. autonomy / strength (*accept either*)
4. unjustified / ambiguous (*accept either*)

with the Duchess of Malfi, and the pitiful death of them both.” The moral message of this novella is unequivocal from the very opening paragraph of the tale, which runs thus:

*Wherefore it behoveth the Noble, and such as have charge of common wealth, to live an honest life, and bear their port upright, that none have cause to take ill example upon discourse of their deeds and naughtie life. And above all, that modesty ought to be kept by women, as their race. Noble birth, authoritie and name, maketh them more famous, even so their vertue, honestie, chastity, and continencie more praiseworthy. And behovefull it is, that like as they wishe to be honoured above all other, so their life do make them worthy of the honour, without disgracing their name by deede or woorde, or blemishing that brightnessse which may commende the same. I greatly feare that all the*

*Princely factes, the exploits and conquests done by the Babylonian queen Semyramis, never was recommended with such praise, as hir vice had shame in records by those which left remembrance of ancient acts. Thus say, because a woman being as it were the image of sweetness, curtesie and shame-fastnesse, so soone as she steppeth out of the right tracte, and leaveth the smel of hir duetie and modestie, besides the denigration of her honor thrusfeth hir self into infinite troubles and causeth the ruine of such which should be honored and praised, if women's allurement solicited them not to follie.*

Here is characterized the image of woman created by the age, which, if violated in any manner, would invite punishment from the authority that be. The woman is made here an emblem of passive and dutiful behaviour, of sweetness, courtesy and shame. Any act violating this code will cause a woman's fall from the pedestal. An entire glorious military career is blotted out when queen Semyramis seduces her son.

In the dramatic text of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, too, active sexuality on the part of the Duchess is considered a breach of conduct carved out for the woman by the ethos of the age. In the moment of disobeying her brothers and remarrying, she asserts her sexual independence. But her act of marrying, and that too her inferior in social hierarchy, makes the widow a double sinner in the eyes of her brothers and the society of the time. This metamorphosizes her from an ideal mirror of virtue into lascivious whore, for she has preferred "lust" to "duty". The Duchess as a woman is made to stand out against all the social odds. She has shown courage in defying a social code, which debars her from marrying again if her first husband is lost, which debars her from marrying a person of her choice, if that person is from a lower class than her own. When she chooses to defy these social codes, she has decided to become a rebel. And as a rebel, she is to be punished so that others dare not question the social code. She takes the punishment, and she takes it bravely. She refuses to relent, she remains steadfast. She maintains her dignity as an individual and sacrifices for her freedom. She is, thus, ahead of her time. She is a martyr for the cause of female freedom and dignity.

For fuller appreciation of the social position of woman in the seventeenth century, in the context of which the story of the Duchess is to be viewed, we need to look into some of the relevant records of the social order in that age. In the history of England, sixteenth century can be considered a period of some of the major changes of far-reaching effects. One such change was with regard to the law of inheritance. However, the practice of inheritance was not the same as the law of inheritance. What existed in the law was not accepted in practice. Hence, there were circumventions of law to avoid smaller divisions of land holdings, also to favour sons as against daughters. Incidentally, in our own country we have the law of equal rights to property of daughters, but how many daughters in actual practice get their due? Historians reveal that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, great landowners found themselves under threat from wealthy status-seeking burghers. As a result, they preferred to tinker with the legislation so that their dwindling estates were not divided any further. The issue is said to have come down to a head on conflict between the nobleman's estate and the increasingly powerful mercantile class's cash. At the heart of every "tinkering" with the law could be found a woman in every meticulously drawn up will of the nobility and gentry of the period.

Even before the demographic accident had produced an alarming shortfall in male heirs, female kin had come to be seen as destructive of estate conservation. A daughter had to be provided with dowry, and a part of this dowry, in the case of noble families, would be in the form of land. As soon as a woman produced an heir

to her husband's line, that land would become part of the alien line's permanent holding. However, in the absence of an heir, the land would revert to her own family, either upon her death, or upon that of her husband. In the absence of any sons at all, the estate would be divided among daughters, as it is done by Lear in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Also, in the event of a nobleman's death before his wife, one-third of all his lands went to the widow for her use during her lifetime. This imposed a considerable burden on the heir, and might, if she remarried, result once again in the division of estate. One wonders whether the regular confusion of "dowry" and "dower" (entirely distinct in law) in popular parlance stemmed from the threat to the continuity of male inheritance.

The female heirs occupied prominent position in all the complex tactical manoeuvres surrounding inheritance. This prominence was in striking contrast to their enforced submissiveness elsewhere in the Jacobean social system. This contrast, in a way, sounds ironic. It was never the intention of lawyers and landowners preoccupied with patrilineal succession to involve their women as other than means to a patriarchal end. But it also remains true that the female nobles and gentry do obtrude during this period in their capacity as carriers of inheritance. We must also be clear about the fact that the law about female inheritance did not give them any real power. They are only technically strong. Their strength can be said to be limited to causing patriarchal anxiety. As a matter of fact, they remain in thrall. Middleton's *Women Beware Women*, makes the point clear. Here, the handsomely dowried Isabella bewails her lack of personal choice of a marriage partner whilst at the same time affirming her importance in the inheritance stakes:

ISABELLA    *Oh the heat breakings  
Of miserable maids, where love's enforced  
The best condition is but bad enough:  
When women have their choices, commonly  
They do but buy their thraldoms, and bring great portions  
To men to keep 'em in subjection -  
As if a fearful prisoner should bribe  
The keeper to be good to him, yet lies in still,  
And glad of a good usage, a good look sometimes.  
By'r lady, no misery surmounts a woman's:  
Men buy their slaves but women buy their masters.*

Yet in Middleton's play, it is the female characters who, even while protesting their hopelessness in relation to men, wheel-and-deal their way through adultery, murder and incest. The alliance of heart is preferred to an arranged marriage. The female drive towards independent choice leads to sexual license. Thus, the shift from passivity to bravura activity is accompanied by a marked moral decline.

With comparable bravado, the Duchess of Malfi clearly identifies her elevated fiscal position with her actual entitlement to act exactly as she chooses. In both the cases, of Isabella and the Duchess, we are made witness to the acting out of a taboo. The Duchess is shown acting out her remarriage and its consequences as if her power as royal heir, dowager of the Duchy of Amalfi, carrier of a substantial dowry in movable goods, gave her the real strength. Her presumption is, however, proved wrong. The patriarchy's relation to her behaviour

is made more than clear in the play. She loses her princely immunity through forfeiture of her dower. From now onward she is no longer, despite her protests to the contrary ("I am the Duchess of Malfi still"), the Duchess of Malfi. She is reduced to the safe composite stereotype of penitent whore. Virgin majestic in grief, serving mother, and patient and true turtle dove mourning her one love. The Duchess may act out on the stage her power of inheritance, in real life it was no power for the individual woman. In real life the verdict had been decided upon in advance. William Painter, whose *The Palace of Pleasure*, was the source book for the plot of Webster's play, had laid it down as under :

Behold here (O ye foolish lovers) a Glasse of your lightnesse, and ye women, the course of your fonde behavior... Shall I be of opinion that a household servaunt ought to solicite, nay rather suborne the daughter of his Lord without punishment, or that a vile and abject person dare to mount upon a Princes bed? No, no, pollicie requireth order in all, and eche wight ought to be matched according to their qualitie, without making pastime of it to cover our follies, and know not of what force love and destiny be, except the same be resisted. A goodly thing it is to love, but where reason loseth his place, love is without his effect, and the sequele rage and madness.

Thus, in *The Duchess of Malfi*, the spectre of real female power implicit in the structure of inheritance is ritually exercised. Headstrong, emancipated female love is chastened into figurative submission. The message for the reader is more than clear. In the first place, she is not shown to be the representative woman of her age. Both by her birth as well as by her deed she is an exceptional woman. Also, her daring/act of remarriage, of marrying a person of her choice, and of marrying a person lower in status than her own, is made an example of a woman led astray by her lust, and therefore rightly done to death. The dramatist may impart some grandeur to her person, may lend her dignity of a tragic hero. But she still remains a tragic figure because she has committed an error which must cost her dearly her fortune as well as her life. Her torturers are, no doubt, made to appear cruel and inhuman. But she too, is not shown doing the right thing in what she did. Her act is still made to appear a wrong one. Hence, the gender bias of the age is prominently displayed in the story of the Duchess.

#### 27.4 LET US SUM UP

The Duchess of Malfi is an unusual centre figure for a seventeenth century tragedy not only because she is a woman, but also because, as a woman, she combines virtue with powerful sexual desire. *The Duchess of Malfi* raises questions about the nature and gendering of political authority. The figure of the Duchess combines the roles of tragic protagonist and tragic victim, and occupies a dramatic centrality that is conventionally only accorded to male characters, such as Shakespeare's great tragic heroes: King Lear, Othello and Macbeth.

#### 27.5 EXAMINATION ORIENTED QUESTIONS

1. Write a note on the chief characteristics of Jacobean tragedy.
2. Discuss Webster as a tragic satirist.
3. Examine *The Duchess of Malfi* in terms of its plot.
4. Write a note on the character of the Duchess.
5. Discuss Bosola as a Machiavellian villain.

## 27.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

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