PREFACE

With its grounding in the "guiding pillars of Access, Equity, Equality, Affordability and Accountability," the New Education Policy (NEP 2020) envisions flexible curricular structures and creative combinations for studies across disciplines. Accordingly, the UGC has revised the CBCS with a new Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (CCFUP) to further empower the flexible choice based credit system with a multidisciplinary approach and multiple/ lateral entry-exit options. It is held that this entire exercise shall leverage the potential of higher education in three-fold ways – learner's personal enlightenment; her/his constructive public engagement; productive social contribution. Cumulatively therefore, all academic endeavours taken up under the NEP 2020 framework are aimed at synergising individual attainments towards the enhancement of our national goals.

In this epochal moment of a paradigmatic transformation in the higher education scenario, the role of an Open University is crucial, not just in terms of improving the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) but also in upholding the qualitative parameters. It is time to acknowledge that the implementation of the National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) National Credit Framework (NCrF) and its syncing with the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) are best optimised in the arena of Open and Distance Learning that is truly seamless in its horizons. As one of the largest Open Universities in Eastern India that has been accredited with 'A' grade by NAAC in 2021, has ranked second among Open Universities in the NIRF in 2024, and attained the much required UGC 12B status, Netaji Subhas Open University is committed to both quantity and quality in its mission to spread higher education. It was therefore imperative upon us to embrace NEP 2020, bring in dynamic revisions to our Undergraduate syllabi, and formulate these Self Learning Materials anew. Our new offering is synchronised with the CCFUP in integrating domain specific knowledge with multidisciplinary fields, honing of skills that are relevant to each domain, enhancement of abilities, and of course deep-diving into Indian Knowledge Systems.

Self Learning Materials (SLM's) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. It is with a futuristic thought that we now offer our learners the choice of print or e-slm's. From our mandate of offering quality higher education in the mother tongue, and from the logistic viewpoint of balancing scholastic needs, we strive to bring out learning materials in Bengali and English. All our faculty members are constantly engaged in this academic exercise that combines subject specific academic research with educational pedagogy.We are privileged in that the expertise of academics across institutions on a national level also comes together to augment our own faculty strength in developing these learning materials. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders whose participatory zeal in the teaching-learning process based on these study materials will enable us to only get better. On the whole it has been a very challenging task, and I congratulate everyone in the preparation of these SLM's.

I wish the venture all success.

Professor Indrajit Lahiri
Vice Chancellor

Netaji Subhas Open University

Four Year Undergraduate Degree Programme

Under National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (NHEQF) & Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes

Bachelor of Arts (Honours in English) [NEG]

Course Type: Discipline Specific Core (DSC)

Course Title: British Drama from Mid-14th Century to 19th Century

Course Code: 6CC-EG-04

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Open University

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Module-1: The Elizabethan Stage and Drama

Module-2: Shakespearean Drama

Module-3: Themes and Forms of Post-Shakespearean Drama

Module-4: Drama from the Restoration to the Romantic Period

Module-1
The Elizabethan Stage and Drama

Unit-1 □ The Evolution of Secular Drama in England

Structure

1.1.1 Objectives

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners are expected to:

- Understand that Elizabethan drama did not develop in isolation, but rather took shape out of the dramatic traditions that flourished throughout the previous centuries;
- Identify the traditions of classical European drama, especially Latin drama, and the native English traditionsthat helped to shape the English drama;
- Recognize that the native English traditions were deeply embedded in Christianity and in the beliefs and ideals of the Church;
- Locate how the English drama gradually came out of the religious influence and became secular, following the decline of the Medieval Age and the advent of the Renaissance.

1.1.2 Introduction

Let us begin from the beginning. The birth of drama can be traced back to classical Greece when it reached its pinnacle of glory. After the Greeks, the Romans too produced high-quality drama. Classical Europe gave birth to tragedy and comedy. With the decline of Roman civilization, drama altogether disappeared from Europe. In the early Medieval Age, there was no drama in England. However, the revival of drama was one of the most significant achievements of the later Middle Ages with the advent of Christianity. Drama in the Middle Ages in England originated from the Church. By the twelfth century the plays connected with the festivals of the Church had reached a considerable degree of complexity and dramatic effect. By the end of the fourteenth century the cycles of Biblical plays were well established, and in the fifteenth century they reached their greatest development. The rise of the Morality plays marked a significant development in Medieval English drama. These plays dramatized the struggle between personified virtues and vices for the possession of man's soul.

As Michael Alexander points out, "English drama is Catholic in origin" (Alexander 63). After the tenth century, liturgical drama gained popularity across Europe. Such drama represented Biblical history in Latin and in local tongues. One of the local tongues was English. It is ironic that early Catholic Church considered late Antiquity as a time of degeneration. Therefore, it made all efforts to suppress drama that was a product of late Antiquity. The notion the Church had was that such forms of entertainment was not desirable for good Christians. However, it was the same Church that took recourse to drama for the purposes of religious edification of the people.

Scriptural rituals were in Latin that was not comprehensible for the laity. So, intrusions were allowed in the performance of the rituals like mass. The rituals of the Church that were based upon Scripture were very colourful, emotionally intense, and essentially dramatic. Liturgical occasions and festivities like Easter and Christmas elicited drama-like performance of rituals inside the Church. Since the purpose was to preach to ordinary people, a language commonly understood by people was used. Gradually dialogue was born out of this language on the occasion of Corpus Christi. In-Church performances were brought out of the Church, especially because procession and performance were entangled with the festivity of Corpus Christi.

Throughout the later Middle Ages these dramas were extremely popular, creating in England a tradition of drama as a form of popular entertainment.

This culminated in the professional theatre in the sixteenth century. Alongside the popularity of professional theatre, English drama in the sixteenth century got secularised and lost the religious essence that the Medieval drama fostered.

1.1.3 Medieval English Drama–An Overview

➢ Liturgical Drama

The Roman Catholic Church was responsible for the rebirth of European theatre between the tenthand twelfth centuries. This happened as Europe had been mostly converted to Christianity in this period. The Church needed ways to teach the illiterate parishioners. Cathedrals with stained glass windows, sculpture, painting and drama were all part of the Church's liturgical preaching. Religious rituals like the mass, baptism, etc. embodied theatrical elements that the Church exploited in religious teachings. The priests began to incorporate the ritualistic dramatic elements into the gospel lessons of the masses. The first short plays were called 'tropes' that were written in Latin. These tropes were performed by the clergy during the mass in the cathedral setting. To reach the commoners, the clergy began to translate the liturgical plays into vernacular languages. As the plays became more elaborate, they were moved from the altar of the church to the churchyard. As more roles were added, commoners were used as amateur actors in addition to the priests.

➢ Mystery Plays

These were dramatic renditions of Biblical stories. 'Mystery' comes from the French word *mystere* meaning secret Biblical truths or secrets of the crafts held by the guilds who were responsible for producing the plays. Mystery Plays were produced in cycles like a series of plays depicting Biblical history from the Creation to the Last Judgment. These 'Cycle Plays' were usually performed at the religious festival of Corpus Christi in spring or early summer. The plays were written by the clergy and overseen by the Church. The performances were produced by the merchant and craftsmen's guilds of each town. These plays were mostly performed by amateur actors and productions were considered a religious duty. Each guild invested considerable resources into the productions. The Mystery Plays were often assigned to guilds associated with the subject matter of the play and became a kind of advertisement. The story of the Flood was assigned to the guild of shipbuilders or barrel makers, the Nativity was the responsibility of the shepherds, and the story of the Magi belonged to the guild of goldsmiths. Each cathedral town had its own cycle. The cycles were very popular amongst commoners

and the nobility. The plays combined teaching with entertainment by mixing high seriousness and low comedy. The Biblical stories of the Old Testament and Jesus's life and mission were highly serious while low comedy was used by incorporating slapstick sketches of contemporary medieval daily life. Mystery Plays were set in contemporary settings with recognisable contemporary characters.

➢ Miracle Plays

Miracle plays were similar to Mystery plays in dramatic techniques. Miracle plays dramatised the lives of Roman Catholic saints. The most popular subjects were that of the Virgin Mary, St. George (dragon slayer and patron saint of England), and St. Nicholas (associated with Christmas festivities).

➢ Morality Plays

Morality plays were built around the theme of how to live a Christian life and be saved from perdition. Each of these plays dramatised stories that were allegorical in nature, that is, the story in these plays were told at two levels: the literal and the symbolic. The plots usually consisted of journeys, generally through life or to death. In the Morality plays English drama switched from Biblical and saintly protagonists to the common man like Everyman, Mankind, etc. The action focused on free will. Morality plays were the first major English drama to use professional acting companies.

Medieval English plays were staged in both processions and in stationary condition. In the case of processions, pageant wagons would travel a set route and perform at several locations. The plays could also be set up around a town square. The audience would travel from one wagon to the next to see the performances. Mansions, or a series of stages, would also be set up around the town square, anchored at either end by Heaven and Hell. Elaborate special effects such as floods, flying, and fiery pits were very popular. Theatre was performed in found spaces: town squares, taverns, churches, and banquet halls. There were no specifically designated theatres. Thus theatre was intimate and the audience interacted with the performers. Elaborate special effects were used. Characterisation was often dependent upon costume and makeup.

➢ Folk Plays

Beside the predominantly religious medieval drama in England, there existed the Folk plays that were largely secular in character. Folk plays were often performed at such holidays as Christmas, New Year, and May Day. These plays incorporated

remnants of pagan rituals like Mummers, Morris Dancers, etc. The story of Robin Hood was a favourite subject. Feast of Fools, gross comedies to execute nonsensical and often ribald travesties, were also popular.

1.1.4 The Interlude–An Important Development

The Interlude was a new form of drama that emerged in England in the 16th century. The term 'Interlude' was derived from the Latin, *inter-ludum*, meaning 'between plays'. This form of drama originated in the Tudor period and was an important shift in the tradition of theatre for at least two reasons. Firstly, earlier medieval plays generally received their public performance on fixed festival days. This tradition was discarded with the Interludes. Secondly, the Interlude marked a departure from religious to secular theatre in England. It, however, employed morality themes, especially in John Heywood's plays. But Heywood broadened the scope of the morality themes. Often these plays were farces with no moral lesson. The plays had comic subplots and could be parodies of the main theme. Shakespeare's comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595/1596)provides an example of a comic Interlude with the villagers performing a romantic play, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, as a play-within-the-play. The comic and parodic subplots could develop into plays with debates over various issues because the noblemen's houses often had such debates wherein women and men both participated.

Henry Medwall, a chaplain, wrote *Nature* an Interlude that was staged in 1497. It was the first secular play in English. John Skelton's *Magnificence* (1515) was a satire attacking Cardinal Wolsey. *King John* (1538) and *Three Laws* (1538) by John Bale (1495–1563) were also satirical Interludes that dealt with controversial issues.

The most popular writer of Interludes was John Heywood (1497–1580). His plays contained a prominent moral tone. Heywood's play *The Play called the four PP; a newe and a very mery interlude of a palmer, a pardoner, a potycary, a pedler* or *The Four PP*(early 1540s) is a debate between a pedlar, an apothecary, a palmer, and a pardoner. This play set the tone for the realist comedy that flourished in the later 16th century. Many works, such as *The Pardoner and the Frere* and *John Johan the Husband, Tyb his Wife and Syr John the Priest*,have been attributed to

Heywood. Heywood is considered to be the playwright who marked the transition from Medieval drama to Renaissance drama, from religious to secular drama.

Interludes generally took place in the banquet hall before or during a meal in a nobleman's house from which, perhaps, it received its name. The Interludes were plays that were performed at court, in the halls of the nobles, at the Inns of Court, and in colleges. These plays were generally performed by professional actors. Each of these plays dealt with a short episode and with a limited number of characters. Interludes were sometimes performed by villagers. The vogue of Interludes was chiefly in the 15th and 16th centuries and succeeded Morality plays in the history of drama. Sometimes Morality plays and Interludes are not always clearly distinguishable from each other. The characters in Interludes were still frequently allegorical as in Morality plays, but the comic or farcical element was more prevalent and shorter than the Moralities.

The Interludes combined elements of allegory, classical myth, and courtly entertainment. Music, dance, and spectacle were included in Interludes that were short plays performed between courses at court banquets. Farces were longer plays ridiculing such human follies as greed and dishonesty.

1.1.5 The Renaissance–A Watershed

According to Andrew Sanders, "The most important effect of the Tudor Reformation on contemporary writing was in many ways the result of its increasingly secular, as opposed to devotional, emphases" (Sanders 102). The Tudor dynasty ruled England from 1485 to 1603. It ended with the death of Queen Elizabeth I (reign 1558-1603). This period saw the emergence of the modern English language along with a firm sense of England as a nation state. King Henry VIII's 'imperial' sovereignty was established earlier with England's declaration of independence from papal overlordship that was asserted in 1533. This period also marked the advent of the English Reformation whereby the English Parliament cut off future legal reference to the superior authority of Rome. Thereby it was proclaimed that England was ruled by "one supreme head and king" who governed without interference from "any foreign princes or potentates." The Crown imposed upon the English people the English language as it was spoken and written at court.

This was also the period of the 'New Birth' in England. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries together marked the period of the European Renaissance, an impulse by which the medieval society of scholasticism, feudalism, and chivalry was to be made over into what is known as the 'modern' world. Renaissance came from Italy to England. Like the rest of the Roman Empire, Italy had been overrun and conquered in the fifth century by the Teutonic tribes. Devastation, however, had been less complete in Italy than in the more northern lands. Italian culture, therefore, recovered far more rapidly than that of the northern nations and, consequently, the bulk of the people remained Latin in blood and in character.

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Italians had become intellectually one of the keenest races in Europe. In the fifteenth-century Italy, therefore, the movement for a much fuller and freer intellectual life had begun. In literature the impetus came from writers like Petrarch and Boccaccio. Something of this spirit was transmitted to Chaucer. In England, Chaucer was followed by the medievalizing and religious fifteenth century, but in Italy there was no such interruption. The Italian spirit was, to a large extent, responsible for a new literary sensibility which also touched England. This was the fallout of the Renaissance.

The Renaissance movement first received definite direction from the rediscovery and study of Greek literature. It revealed the unbounded possibilities of life to men who had been groping dissatisfied within the now narrow limits of medieval thought. The taking of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 was the immediate trigger for the birth of the Renaissance. As a consequence of Turksih sacking of Constantinople, Greek scholars and manuscripts were scattered to the West. The study of Greek, almost forgotten in Western Europe during the Middle Ages, was renewed in Italy.

The medieval Church had for the most part frowned on the joy and beauty of life. The Church permitted pleasure to the laity but as a thing that was dangerous. It declared that there was perfect safety only within the walls of the nominally ascetic Church itself. Intellectual life was nearly restricted to priests and monks and formalized and conventionalized. Consequently, religion had become largely barren and unprofitable. The whole sphere of knowledge had been subjected to the mere authority of the Bible. All questions were argued and decided on the basis of the Church's assertions and validation. Scientific investigation was almost entirely

stifled, and progress was impossible. The whole field of religion and knowledge had become largely stagnant under an arbitrary despotism.

Pre-Christian, pagan Greek literature brought the inspiration for which the intellectually paralyzed longed. It was discovered as the literature of a great and brilliant people. The Greeks did not attempt to make a divorce within man's nature. They aimed to see life steadily and see it whole, giving free play to all their powers. They found in pleasure and beauty some of the most essential constructive forces of life. Thus, the Greeks had embodied beauty in works of literature and art where the significance of the whole spiritual life was splendidly suggested. The enthusiasm, therefore, with which the Italians turned to the study of Greek literature and Greek life was boundless. The Italians also had the example of the Romans before them who developed a great civilization while borrowing much from their prececessors, the Greeks.

What had never been lost were reinterpreted with much deeper insight by Renaissance Europe. Aristotle was again vitalized while Plato's noble and idealistic philosophy was once more appreciatively studied and understood. Closer in time to the Renaissance, Latin literature took on a far greater human significance in the sixteenth century. Virgil and Cicero were regarded no longer as mysterious prophets from a dimly imagined past but were seen as real men of flesh and blood speaking out of experiences remote in time but no less humanly real and full of vitality.

The Renaissance was marked by a new creative enthusiasm that came from the discovery of the old treasures leading to a gush of the creative spirit in literature and all the arts. Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, and Michelangelo in art embodied this creative spirit. The Renaissance became a breaking away from the medieval bondage into the unhesitating enjoyment of all pleasures. Resulting from this spirit, Renaissance humanism celebrated the unbridled possibility of man. Man was now seen as the centre of all enquiry, not God. Humanism believed that "nothing human was without appeal" (Fletcher 42).

The Renaissance humanists often overleaped all restraints and plunged into wild excesses, often sensual. Many Englishmen travelled to Italy and brought back ideas of this intellectual and creative emancipation that was flourishing in Italy. It gave a great stimulus to literary culture and forever changed the creative direction of English drama.

There was a great stimulus to literary culture with the invention of printing, multiplying books in unlimited quantities. The Renaissance was marked by a vast expansion of the physical world through geographical exploration. Vasco da Gama and Christopher Columbus revealed the New World and virtually proved that the earth is round. The marvels which were constantly being revealed as actual facts seemed no less wonderful than the extravagances of medieval romance. There was an unprecedented growth of interest in science. The Polish, Nicolaus Copernicus, mathematician and astronomer, placed the sun at the centre of the solar system around which the earth goes around. This was a stunning revelation that displaced what the Church taught.

1.1.6 Early Elizabethan Drama

Since the Church was against the drama of Antiquity, Medieval drama developed on its own terms rather than borrowing from classical drama. The distinctions between tragedy and comedy and the serious and comic were, therefore, irrelevant. Very serious religious and moral issues could be presented through low comedy. The importance of character and action was downgraded and what was important was morals and dogma. The classical unities of time, place, and action were unknown notions in theatre. The subject matter was limited, restricted to a familiar paradigm of the conflict between good and evil. There was hardly any scenery. Verbal descriptions fed audience imagination in building the scene. But costumes were elaborate. The audience was gathered in front of the stage if the play was performed in a church chancel, on three sides if the performance was in an inn-yard, and on all sides if there were pageant wagons. The acting was vigorous and comic possibilties were eagerly seized, especially in case of some typical characters like the proud tyrant, the braggart soldier, the comic yokel, the shrewish wife, and the witty servant, to name a few.

Medieval drama bequeathed these features to early Elizabethan drama. Two distinctive features can be discerned in this new development. Firstly, drama became increasingly secular in subject matter as Medieval drama became less and less religious. Secondly, with the advent of the Renaissance the influence of the revived tradition of classical drama became more prominent, particularly the tragedy of Seneca and the comedy of Plautus and Terence. The first influence affected all of

Europe; the second affected especially Italy and France and thereafter England. Also, with Reformation and the conversion of England into Protestantism, anti-Catholic sentiment rapidly discarded the religious aspect of Medieval drama as it was essentially inspired by the influence of the Catholic Church.

Despite the strong religious flavour in Medieval drama, the early signs of the secularizing influence were not altogether absent. A twelfth-century play, *Antichrist*, for instance, combined with its religious theme a defence of the emperors against the popes; and a play called *Adeodatus*, from the same century, tells a purely secular story which is given a religious flavour by the intervention of St. Nicholas. This device the introduction of a saint as *deus ex machina* into an otherwise secular story was one of the main bridges between Medieval religious drama and Renaissance secular drama.

Change in the trajectory of English drama was not abrupt but gradual. By the end of the fourteenthcentury significant change was taking a distinct shape. While the seeds of secular drama existed in the Medieval Age, increased exposure to classical drama, especially Plautus and Terence, developed comedy. In England the Roman comedies began to be acted soon after 1500, and by the middle of the sixteenth century they started to influence medieval types of drama still flourishing.

Original tragedies in Latin, with their highly superior structure and characterisation, were unprecedented in English. Latin tragedies began to be performed in the 1540s in England, but in the sixties and seventies English dramatists struggled with the problem of transferring improved techniques into vernacular plays. The problem was solved with the arrival of the University Wits in the eighties. Roman drama left an indelible mark on English drama in the five-act structure and in the increased coherence and compactness of plot. Furthermore, a number of the comic devices of Plautus like beatings, the clever servants, and the braggarts, for instance fitted in with and enforced the Morality tradition, while the cruel tyrants of Seneca were not new figures as the English audience was accustomed to the deeds and the rantings of Herod and Pontius Pilate from Medieval drama. However, in early Elizabethan drama, comedy established itself some time before tragedy. The native element of comedy was strong in the first extant English play *Gammer Gurton's Needle* (1550). The central issue of the play is the trivial and farcical loss and discovery of a needle. But the play shows

the gift of the playwright in creating dialogue, characterisation, and rustic life. Latin comedy was the model for Nicholas Udall's comedy *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553). Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus* provided the model for the boasting character in Udall's play. Though having Interlude humour, Plautus helped Udall to overcome the restrictions of the structure of comic dialogue, fitted in a few situations, to a well-structured full-length play.

Classical drama, especially Latin drama, was the model for early Elizabethan tragedy. George Gascoigne, for example, mentioned in the title page of his play *Jocasta* (1566)that it was a rendering of Euripides' play. The play was was traslation of the Italian play *Giocasta* by Lodovico Dolce. There was no notion of tragedy in Medieval native English drama. Modelled exclusively on the classical model of tragedy, therefore, the sixteenth century was a new beginning in English drama. Seneca's plays were translated, published, and performed between 1559 and 1581. In 1562 a tragedy called *Gorbuduc* or *The Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex*was acted before queen Elizabeth. Although Senecan in manner, this play by Thomas Sackkville and Thomas Norton had an English theme, that of the dangers of an unsettled succession, which was of topical interest in Elizabeth's reign. The play is marked by heavy blank verse speeches and a complete lack of on-stage action.

One noteworthy trend in early Elizabethan drama was the highly popular history plays. Often, they would contain comic interludes. The Elizabethan audience did not mind straightforward history regardless of whether it was celebratory or tragical as long as there were stirring incidents in them. The lack of action in *Gorbuduc* was adequately compensated by these chronicle plays. Thus, both the anonymous *The Famous Victories of Henry V* (1588) and *The True Tragedy of Richard III* (1594) were equally popular. Along with these plays, some other Elizabethan plays like *The Troublesome Reigns of John, King of England* (1590) and *King Leir (1594)*, provided Shakespeare with his more famous plays of the same titles. These Elizabethan plays had plenty of action but were rather formless.

Reformation had, by now, transferred much of the spectacle from the Church to the State that explains the growing interest in secular themes in drama like history and politics. Parallelly, the Mystery cycles depicting biblical stories continued even in Shakespeare's time. The importance of the Church was reduced and theatre became the site for ventilation of everyday concerns. Thus, there was an insatiable

appetite for drama that led to commercialization of theatre. Commercial theatres were built by private enterprises on the south bank of the Thames in London and theatre companies were formed. Elizabethan drama, consequently, turned professional.

1.1.7 The University Wits

The Elizabethan Age saw the secularisation of the Medieval dramatic tradition. This meant that English drama wrested freedom from the constraints of medieval theology. A significant development in this period was the discovery of pre-Christian values and culture, that is, the great achievements of classical Europe. A growing interest in ancient Greek and Roman culture helped in the development of English drama in a direction that rapidly uncoupled itself from the native tradition of drama that existed in the Medieval Age. This was marked by the emergence of the learned men of theatre from the hallowed universities in England. The intellectuals from the universities like Oxford and Cambridge learned about classical European drama. The chief model for tragedy were the plays of the first-century Roman Seneca as the chief models for comedy were the plays of the Romans Plautus and Terence.

About 1590 emerged Thomas Kyd who attained a meteoric reputation with his crude 'tragedies of blood'. He specialised as a descendant of Senecan tragedy. One of the 'tragedies of blood' he may have been the writer of was the early play on Hamlet called the *Ur Hamlet*. The play that was a sensation in the genre, and that made Kyd famous overnight was *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587). It became a model for revenge tragedies in England.

In 1587 Christopher Marlowe astonished the public with the two parts of his play *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587/88). This play was a dramatisation of the stupendous career of the bloodthirsty fourteenth-century Mongol conqueror. The play is a splendidly imaginative and poetic study of lust for power and military achievement. It established tragedy as a distinct form on the English popular stage. *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* (1592) is a treatment of the medieval story in which Marlowe created the first great Elizabethan tragic hero. Marlowe's Faustus is a character who is torn between conflicts of moral choice. Marlowe's *Edward the Second* (1592) is the first really artistic chronicle play in English. If the first two plays were Marlowe's studies of strong characters, then *Edward the Second* is the study of a weak character. *The Jew of Malta* (1589) is a treatment of the theme of avarice. Marlowe's greatest contributions to English drama include blank verse (that Ben Jonson called Marlowe's "mighty lines") and the creation of tragic heroes like Tamburlaine and Doctor Faustus who are very strong characters

with unbridled passion, monumental ambition, and intense emotion that make these characters, as Harry Levin calls it, "the overreacher[s]".

Like other Elizabethans, however, Marlowe did not fully understand the distinction between drama and other literary forms. In almost all his plays, he did attempt scenes of humour, but he attained only the coarse and brutal horse-play. His plays lacked historical perspective although to a large extent they drew their materials from history. Marlowe lacked the mature skill in characterisation as well. His charcters were exaggerated types and the women dull.

John Lyly was the first Elizabethan dramatist of permanent individual importance. Lyly wrote comedies for the Court entertainments that were of light and spectacular nature. The subjects of his plays were from classical mythology or history or English folk-lore. They were allegorical presentations of court intrigues. The plots of Lyly's plays were very slight. The humorous sub-plots sometimes had little connection with the main plot. His characterisation was rudimentary. Lyly's plays included *Alexander and Campaspe* (1583), *Sapho and Phao* (1584), *Gallathea* (1587), *Endymion* (1588), *Love's Metamorphosis* (1589), *Mother Bombie* (1590), *The Woman in the Moon* (1590); etc.

Other Elizabethan dramatists of comedy were Robert Greene, George Peele, Thomas Nashe, and Thomas Lodge. Greene's works are *Friar Bacon and Friar Bongay*, *The History of Orlando Furioso*, *A Looking Glass for London and England*, *The Scottish History of James the Fourth*, and *The Comical History of Alphonsus, King of Aragon*. Greene is especially known in history because he developed the theme of romantic love with real fineness of feeling that paved the way for Shakespeare. Peele wrote *The Arraignment of Paris*, *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First*, *The Wives' Tale*, and *The Love of King David and Fair Bathsabe*.

1.1.8 William Shakespeare

Arguably, the greatest Elizabethan playwright was William Shakespeare (1564-1616). Shakespeare's early plays deal with historical figures. Historical background and the glorious history of the Englsh nation are the primary concerns in these plays. But even these early plays bear the marks of the importance of character and motive that became more prominent in his mature plays. Apart from being deeply embedded in the popular professional theatre of his time, Shakespeare was the most significant flag bearer of Renaissance humanism in all its complexities on the Elizabethan stage. In this sense, his Hamlet is the epitome of the humanist tragic

hero. Written for performance in professional theatre, his plays merged elements of popular theatrical entertainment, a high level of artistry, deeply searching philosophy, morality, politics, psychology, and history. These resulted in the completion of the secularisation of the theatre in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

His earlier plays showed a concern with kingship and dynasty, especially in his plays like the three-part *Henry VI* (1591-1592), *Richard III* (1593), *Richard II* (1596), *King John* (1597), the two-part *Henry IV* (1597-1598), and *Henry V* (1599). The physical geography and history of his plays expanded beyond England, gradually to encompass Rome, from his early revenge tragedy*Titus Andronicus* (1594) to his three mature Roman tragedies *Julius Caesar* (1600), *Antony and Cleopatra* (1607), and *Coriolanus* (1608). He moved between Denmark in *Hamlet* (1601), ancient Greece in *Troilus and Cressida* (1602), Venice and Cyprus in *Othello* (1605), medieval Scotland in *Macbeth* (1606), and an ancient and mythologised Britain in *King Lear* (1606), to name only his tragedies. His comedies were set in rather fictional frames of time and space although they bear the names of places. The broad canvas of time and space in Shakespeare's plays paralleled a wide expanse of the geography of the human soul, revealing the mastery of the playwright in exploring a wide variety of humanity.

Shakespeare's ability to portray a broad spectrum of life was evident in his comedies. Some of his comedies, especially the early ones like *The Comedy of Errors* (1593), were examples of classical low drama. *The Taming of the Shrew* (1594) was a farce. His comedies like *The Merchant of Venice* (1597), *As You Like It* (1600), and *Twelfth Night* (1600) explored the themes of romantic love, fantasy and reality, and fools and folly. These plays were profound statements on the complex interplay between the attractive social order and the darker and problematic private motivations, feelings, and desires of individuals. Thus, he explored in his comedies the gap between public facade and private life. Consequently, his comedies dealt with the themes of role-playing, disguise, deception, and cross-dressing. Role-playing also featured in his histories and sometimes in his tragedies.

In his tragedies Shakespeare depicted some of his most powerful characters. A theme that he had explored in his history plays revisits his tragedies. His creative imagination was stretched to its highest limit in his depiction of heroes who are strong and yet fraught with some fatal weakness that brings them down. Macbeth's ambition for power, Othello's jealousy, Lear's misjudgment of his daughters and giving away his entire kingdom to his two evil daughters, Hamlet's philosophic disquisition on the moral decay of man and his constant deferral of taking revenge for his father's murder are all examples of the exploration of flawed heroes. Shakespeare's characters thus reveal psychological realism unparalleled in drama.

His plays encompass all of humanity without favouring any particular section of society. Thus, he could seamlessly merge tragedy and comedy, the serious and the hilarious, in his plays. This prompted Dr Samuel Johnson to comment in his *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765):

> Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolick of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design. (Johnson 4)

Shakespeare wrote about humanity in all its complexities and diversities. The aspirations, strengths and failings, moral dilemmas, joy and sorrow, greatness and wickedness, wisdom and folly of his characters have the flavour of universality.

In Shakespeare's drama the near-complete absence of religious reference marks the final dissociation of Christianity from English drama and total secularisation of Elizabethan and post-Elizabethan drama. As the American humanist philosopher Corliss Lamont says in his book *The Philosophy of Humanism* (1949), "Shakespeare himself indicated little interest in or support of religious supernaturalism" (70-71). Shakespeare's secular sanitisation of his plays is the stepping stone to understand his humanism. In his essay "The Absence of Religion in Shakespeare", George Santayana writes that the Bard-of-Avon (as Shakespeare is called), "chose to leave his heroes and himself in the presence of life and death with no other philosophy than that which the profane world can suggest and understand" (Lamont 71).

Shakespeare's mastery of poetic expression was of the highest quality. He took Marlowe's blank verse and perfected it with fluency, variety, and melody. However, he used the rhyming couplet too on certain occasions for purposes like the signaling of scene endings. He also used prose, both for the same reason and in realistic or commonplace scenes, in comedy, and as the speech of low characters. Shakespeare found poetry the fittest form of expression of the most delightful and phrased the greatest ideas with the utmost power of condensed expression and figurative beauty. He is known for his wide use of images and symbols that reinforced the underlying philosophy and vision of life. In dramatic structure, Shakespeare's plays bear the mark that they were written for commercial success on the Elizabethan stage. He seldom attempted to go beyond the romantic licenses for the perfection of an

absolute standard or a set of rules that classical drama had. Plays like *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), *Hamlet*, and indeed most of his plays, contain unnecessary scenes, interesting to the Elizabethans, which the classicists would discard. He violated the classical rule of the three unities in his plays and without any hesitation, mixed the comic and the tragic, the trivial and the serious. He even perfected the mongrel form of tragi-comedy in such plays as *Pericles* (1609), *The Winter's Tale* (1611), and *The Tempest* (1612). Yet, when Shakespeare chooses, as in *Othello*, he could develop a play with the sternest and most rapid directness like a master dramatic technician.

1.1.9 Summing Up

Let us sum up what we have learned from this unit. We have learned that Elizabethan drama is indebted to the native tradition of drama that was deeply religious and moral in nature. The themes and the forms were generated by this character of the native drama. But it was the influence of classical, especially Latin, drama that had the most telling effect upon Elizabethan drama. The distinctive genres of tragedy and comedy received their determining contours by the influence of both traditions. English drama achieved its secular nature by imbibing the ideas of Renaissance humanist philosophy that reached its apogee in Shakespeare. This would determine post-Elizabethan drama in the early seventeenth century that you will learn in the following modules.

1.1.10 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Trace the origin and development of Medieval drama.
2. What were the major traits of the Renaissance?
3. Why would you say that Elizabethan drama was influenced by two earlier traditions of drama? Explain clearly with suitable examples.
4. Explain clearly how Humanism contributed to the secularisation of English drama.
5. Why would you call Shakespeare a Humanist? Answer with illustrations from some of his plays.

Medium-Length Answer Type Questions:

1. In what ways did the Interlude mark a departure from earlier Medieval drama?

2. Show the contribution of John Heywood to English drama.
3. Compare and contrast comic Interludes and classical comedies.
4. In what way did the Renaissance differ from the Medieval Age?
5. Mention some of the features of Medieval drama that it handed over to Elizabethan drama.
6. Show briefly how Seneca influenced Elizabethan drama.
7. Explain how Latin comedy influenced early Elizabethan drama.
8. What were the two distinctive features of early Elizabethan drama?
9. Mention some striking features of Shakespeare's comedies.
10. Elucidate some features of the technical aspects of Shakespeare's plays.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Mention some Christian festivals that gave birth to performances inside the church.
2. What did the occasion of Corpus Christi contribute in Medieval drama?
3. What do you mean by 'cycle plays'?
4. Mention two forms of Medieval drama that contributed to the secularisation of English drama.
5. Mention the titles of two Medieval plays that contained the seeds of the secular.
6. What were the two literary predecessors that Gascoigne was indebted to for his play*Jocasta*?
7. Which plays of Marlowe have the 'overreacher' heroes?
8. What were the two main defects of Lyly's plays?
9. Which Elizabethan plays did Shakespeare model some of his plays on? Mention two plays of each.
10. Which are Shakespeare's tragi-comedies?

1.1.11 Suggested Reading

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Unit-2 □ Growth of the Theatres and Emergence of the Professional Actor

Structure

1.2.1 Objectives

Dear students, in the previous unit you havelearnt about the development of English drama from the medieval period up to the Elizabethan era which signalled a shift from the ecclesiastical to secular themes. The Renaissance opened the floodgates for humanist ideas. The revival of the ancient Greek and Latin classics generated a spirit of free inquiry which replaced the monopoly of the religion. The Renaissance ethos upheld the value of liberty and repudiated the limitations foisted upon people by the Church.In the following pages you are going to learn about the rich heritage of the Renaissance drama with particular focus on the growth of theatre and the emergence of the professional actor. After reading this unit, you will be able to assess the social and cultural impact of Renaissance theatre.

1.2.2 Introduction

The English theatre from 1558 to 1642 is generally referred to as Elizabethan theatre or Renaissance theatre. An overview of the theatres and the emergence

of the professional actor is important to understand the social relationships in contemporary England. Drama during the Renaissance age became a national institution comprising the cross-sections of the English people at large. The audience composition of the Renaissance stage was also diverse. The style of the production also varied; some had a stylised and rhetorical presentation on a plain stage, while others relied on a glossy, ornamental appearance in an effort to draw viewers with lavish costumes, well-known actors, and meticulously planned scenic elements.

The Elizabethan age witnessed a sea change in the cultural and social landscape of England with the rise of the professional actors and many theatre companies. Earlier, actors were not treated with respect. With the emergence of the wave of Renaissance, they gained prominence and respect. The emergence of public playhouses such as The Globe and The Rose also contributed to this cross-cultural communication and enhanced the theatrical experience of the time. A comprehensive knowledge of the larger cultural and social fabric of Elizabethan society entails a solid understanding of the development of theatres and the rise of the professional actor.

1.2.3 Historical Context

The Elizabethan witnessed the presence of strong monarchy under Queen Elizabeth I, whose reign provided a conducive environment for cultural and artistic development. The political stability during the Elizabethan period laid the foundation for the efflorescence of the artistic development. The stability was consolidated by the victory against Spanish Armada (1588). The queen herself was a great patron of the arts. Sheset great store by the potential of art and literature to foster a sense of unity among her subjects. In 1583, Eliabeth I gave orders to establish **Queen's Men**, a company formed after her own name which consisted of the best actors of the time. By providing the royal patronage, Queen Elizabeth I elevated the status of drama. Moreover, the Renaissance breathed new life into the theatrical practices. Taken literally, the term "renaissance" means "rebirth" and describes the postmedieval age of European history that was characterised by a revived emphasis on classical studies. The intellectual growth and its circulation that began in Italy in the fourteenth century and continued until the end of the fifteenth century is referred to as Renaissance humanism. The participation of moralists, historians, writers, and

statesmen was an intriguing feature of Renaissance humanism. It is worth noting, however, that the recovery of classical scholarship was notthe sole end of humanist engagement. The humanists were cognizant of therapid changes taking place in contemporary society and their worldview wasthus a response to this process of transformation.English playwrights, inspired by the works of Italian dramatists and the classical traditions of ancient Greece and Rome, began to experiment with new forms and themes that enriched the content and complexity of English plays.Moreover, in the designs of Inigo Jones who created perspective scenery, the Italianate influence was to be seen. The structures of the playhouse were shaped by the Italian architectural pattern. For example, the adoption of tiered seating and elaborate façades basically bore the stamp of the grandeur of Italian theatres. The early English play *Gorboduc* was presented for a private audience. In contrast, the audience for Marlowe's play *Doctor Faustus* was one that responded to theatrical productions and was familiar with certain theatrical tropes. The Elizabethan theatre was a part of the modern cultural and social life of this era, which spanned from *Gorboduc* to Christopher Marlowe's plays.

1.2.4 Growth of Theatres

The establishment of permanent playhouses marked a turning point in the history of English theatre. Many of the theatres during the early years of English stage history werelocated outside the city walls of London. This had to do with the clout of theauthorities who considered theatrical activity harmful to the society. In fact, the attitude towards the Elizabethan theatre was ambivalent. For example, William Harrison raised an objection by saying that the emergence of playhouses was a sign of a "wicked time". Puritan critics like Prynne equated theatres with bawdy houses. The London theatres in the Elizabethan age occupied two areas—the south bank of the River Thames and the northeast part through FinsburyFields. Depending on the location of the theatres, it was either taken as a noble pursuit or as a sign of moral decay.

Blackfriars, the theatre house where many of Shakespeare's playswere staged, was placed within the walls of London. Although **The Theatre**is usually credited with the honour of being the first playhouse (it was openedin 1576), it was preceded by other theatrical structures that fulfilled therequirements of

contemporary stage performance adequately. **The Red Lion**(1567), probably the first playhouse in Elizabethan London, wasstarted by John Brayne in Stepney, even though it was soon superseded byThe Theatre. Situated in the Liberty of Halliwell, Shoreditch, **The Theatre** wasplaced outside the city's jurisdiction. The Theatre had a remarkable historythat spanned twenty years. During this time many companies availed of itsfacilities: **Leicester's** (1576–8), **the Queen's** (1583–9**), the Admiral's Men**(1590–1), and the structure**Lord Chamberlain's Men** (1594–6). The Theatre did nothave a roof and was characterised by its circular design, whichaccommodated three galleries surrounding a yard. Besides having stageperformances, **The Theatre** functioned as the arena for fencing and athleticcompetitions too. James Burbage's death in 1597 led to its closure and hissons, Cuthbert and Richard, used its resources to initiate the construction of the **Globe theatre.**

Following the popularity of **The Theatre**, a number of other significant theatres appeared, each making a distinct contribution to theatrical scene of Renaissance England. William Shakespeare was a member of the **Lord Chamberlain's Men**. The Globe became identical with Shakespearean drama and was renowned for its open-air design and vibrant atmosphere.

In the new ***Globe theatre***, the Burbagebrotherscontrolled half of theshares while the rest was distributed between the members of the LordChamberlain's Men. From its inception in 1599 to its closure in 1644, theGlobe bore witness to many memorable performances. It was burnt in 1613when its thatch was inadvertently set afire by cannon during a staging ofHenry VIII. The destruction of the Globe, however, did not prevent itsreconstruction the next year. In course of the reconstruction, its originalcylindrical shape was replaced by a circular one and a tiled gallery roof. Thisreconstructed Globe was pulled down in 1644, after the Puritans closed all theatrical activity in 1642.

Another theatre, **The Rose**(1587–1605), was built by Philip Henslowe and John Cholmley. **The Swan Theatre**, built in 1595, was notable for its impressive size and elaborate stage design.

Lastly, the **Blackfriars Theatre**, an indoor playhouse, was originally a Dominican monastery before being transformed into a theatre in 1596. Unlike the open-air theatres, Blackfriars offered performances in a more intimate, indoor setting, catering to a wealthier audience. Henslowe opened another playhouse, **The**

Fortune, in 1600. Itopened to a performance by the Admiral's Men and continued to stage playsillegally even during the Puritan reign. It was dismantled in 1661.

One of thetheatres that courted controversy for the nature of the performances and thecrowd that attended it was the **Red Bull**. It was started by Aaron Holland atthe beginning of the seventeenth century (1600–05) and was characterised bythe presence of a rowdy crowd; it soon became famous as a site of vulgarity.Queen Anne's Men was one of the main groups to occupy the Red Bull (c.1600–17). It survived the Puritan regime and reopened when theatricalactivity was restored in 1660. By 1665, however, it was no longer in use.

The regulation and licensing of plays and theatres were overseen by the **Master of the Revels**, a royal official responsible for entertainment at the court.The Master of the Revels had the power to license plays and approve the construction of theatresin order to ensure that performances adhered to the moral and political principles of the day.This role was crucial in maintaining a balance between artistic expression and censorship, as the theatre was a powerful medium for conveying ideas and critiquing society.The late plays ofShakespeare were performed at the Blackfriars untilit was closed down in 1642.

1.2.5 Emergence of the Professional Actor

The emergence of the professional actor was a significant event during the Renaissance era. The growth of the theatre companies was followed by the consolidation of the status of the actors. Only boys and men were allowed to pursue careers as actors during Shakespeare's time. Although women were performing in other parts of Europe, it wasn't until 1660 that they were permitted to do so in English public theatres. In an Elizabethan theatre, men would sometimes play the role of an older women, while boys would play the role of young women, such as Desdemona in *Othello* or Ophelia in *Hamlet.*At first, amateur actors predominated the English stage. These were frequently guild members or university students who participated in plays as part of civic or religious rituals.The creation of professional performing troupes during this time signified a change from amateur performances by guilds and university students, which had a significant impact on the theatrical scene of the time.However, as the appetite for theatrical entertainment grew the

demand for more skilled and consistent performanceswas felt. This demand set the stage for the rise of professional acting troupes.

Many actors began their careers as young boys. An experienced actor could take them on as apprentices. In addition to possessing a strong memory for memorising lines, actors were required to be able to dance, sing, and fight with a sword. **The Admiral's Men** and the **Lord Chamberlain's Men** were two of the most prominent. The establishment of these businesses made acting a feasible career by enabling performers to practise, perform frequently, and make a living from their skill. These companies had a key role in the professionalisation of the craft of acting. The Lord Chamberlain's Menwas associated with William Shakespeare, who was an actor and shareholder in the company. The Admiral's Men, another well-known company of the era that staged plays by Christopher Marlowe and other well-known playwrights, was run by Philip Henslowe.

The rise of professional acting troupes also influenced the role and status of actors in society. In the past, a "wagon stage" was a mobile platform known as a "pageant wagon," which was used to move from place to place, performing plays—especially religious mystery cycles—in public spaces.The led to the tainted reputation of the early Elizabethan Actors. Many were seen as vagabonds and rogues. Travelling actors of the Elizabethan times were considered such a threat that that regulations were imposed. Licenses were given to the aristocracy for the maintenance of troupes of players. Consequently, actors were not trusted.This itinerant lifestyle was not highly respected, and actors were sometimes viewed with suspicion. However, as acting became more popular as well as professional, actors began to gain respect and recognition. The construction of theatres which were permanent, like The Globe and The Rose, gave performers a reliable stage. Over time, actors became respected members of society, celebrated for their talent and contributions to the arts. John Astington rightly opined, 'Theatre was a central cultural phenomenonof late Elizabethan London, with an international reputation, and theconsciousness of everyone involved in its production or consumption wasraised to new levels. Even actors on the fringes of the profession, or awayfrom the hub of London, working in provincial and touring troupes, musthave thought rather differently about their art by the time the seventeenthcentury began (2010:8)'.

Several notable actors appeared during Elizabethan age. They left a lasting impact on the history of English theatre. **Richard Burbage** (1567-1619) was one

of the renowned actors of the time, known for his powerful performances in many of the plays written by Shakespeare. He was celebrated for his roles in productions such as *Hamlet* and *Othello*.

Many of the most prominent Elizabethan actors went on to become wealthy men and theatre owners. They performed before royalty.

Image: Richard Burbage.

John Heminges (1556-1630) was another important actor of the company. Although he was not a particularly good actor, he did portray a number of roles in*Volpone*and *Every Man in His Humour*. The character of Falstaff, who makes appearances in four plays of Shakespeare, is believed to have been played by Heminges for the first time. Condell, Shakespeare, and Heminges were all part of the theatrical troupe known as the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later the King's Men).

Edward Alleyn (1566-1626), another prominent actor, was known for his association with The Admiral's Men. His performances in the plays of Marlowe, particularly in *Doctor Faustus* and *Tamburlaine*, were highly commended. **William Kemp (**1560-1603), another actor,was known for his comic roles. He was a member of The Lord Chamberlain's Men and was famous for his role as the clown in many of the plays of Shakespeare. The Elizabethan theatre saw a huge surge in popularity. The introduction of purpose-built theatres raised the status of Elizabethan actors.

Image: Edward Alleyn

Other notable actors of Elizabethan age are William Rowley (1585-1642), Robert Armin (1568-1615), Nathan Field (1587-1619), John Lowin (1576-1659), and Joseph Taylor (1586-1652).

The upper class dressed lavishly during the Elizabethan day. Fashionable attire could only be observed from a distance when affluent aristocrats or members of the royal family were present. Special authorisation was given to Elizabethan actors to wear such exquisite clothing. Therefore, the rise of the professional actor in Renaissance England was a major cultural shift that changed the theatre. The formation of companies like **The Admiral's Men**and **Lord Chamberlain's Men** played a vital role in professionalizing the craft of acting. As actors gained respect and recognition, they became integral to the cultural fabric of society. Like many plays of the time, the works blend actual facts, historical fiction, tales of love, grim acts of murder and retaliation, and a healthy dose of jingoism with wordplay and in-joke references to current politics.

1.2.6 Theatrical Practices

The theatre acting companies performedusing a repertory system.Unlike the modern productions that used to run for months, the troupes and theatre companies of this era seldomperformed the same play again in a row. As they had to be prepared to perform at any time, players using this method had to be well-versed in a variety of roles and plays. The repertory system enabled the performance of a diverse range of plays which catered to the various audience tastes. Andrew Gurr opines, 'The different kinds of repertory that were maintained at the differentplayhouses confirm the evidence of these economic changes. In the seventeenth century the so-called 'citizen' playhouses, the amphitheatres in thesuburbs on the eastern and northern sides of the city–chiefly the Fortuneand the Red Bull–went on with a staple list of plays made up from thefavourites of the end of the previous century. Marlowe's plays ran at theseplayhouses until the closure. Heywood became the Red Bull's leading playwright, and his lavishly staged plays, or displays, of the Four Ages mark a highpoint of achievement for the companies who catered for citizen audiences. (2009:24)'

Elizabethan theatre witnessed the employment of metatheatrical devices. Most of the dramatists tried to avoid the illusionism on stage. The soliloquies and asides further enhanced the non-realist nature of the performances. Actors used to speak to the public between lines. In a play like Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* one can witness the employment of metatheatrical devices such as play

within a play. *Hamlet* is another example of this. In this age, the theatrical event was a shared experience where the interaction between actors and spectators was often seen. A Shakespearean audience responded actively to the theatrical event. They were not passive audience but took an active part by responding vocally and physically to the performance.

During this time, costumes were costly, vividly coloured, and captivating to look at. The actors of the troupes were fashion-conscious. Costumes were not only lavish but also symbolic which enhanced the theatrical experience. One can notice colour symbolism in Hamlet's 'nighted colour' suggestive of mourning. Malvolio's yellow garters symbolise his misguided aspirations. From the costumes one can also get the information about the locality. Specific garments signified the different times of a day. Nightcaps and candles signified nocturnal scenes. Andrew Gurr opines, 'Colourful costume was an instrument of paralinguisticmeaning as well as spectacle and the eye-catching shades of colour that Elizabethans could contrive. Henslowe's 'tyer man' at the Rose, StevenMagett, was as vital a member of the playhouse operation as the bookkeeper. Apparel and playbooks were the company's two most vital resources. (2009:238)'Props, while often minimal, were used to enhance the narrative and emphasise the setting. Thestagecraft in Renaissance theatres was new. Props had a visual impact on the audience.

The absence of female performers on stage was one of the most notable features of Renaissance theatre. The practice of men playing women on public stages has its roots in Ancient Greek theatre and is found in a number of other European theatrical traditions.Ancient Greek women were supposed to stay at home and raise their children. Like many women in Shakespeare's England, they were not allowed to vote or possess property. There is enough evidence that women used to act in street performances during Elizabethan age, and in other infamous venues.Perhaps that was the reason why all commercial acting companies of the time were made up completely of men and it was prohibited for women to act on stage until 1661, the year that marks the beginning of restoration of monarchy.

1.2.7 Influence of Playwrights and Actors

The collaboration between playwrights and actors in Renaissance England was very common.This period was marked by a boom in English drama, with the

rise of playwrights like William Shakespeare, Marlowe and Ben Jonson writing individually as well as in collaboration. The text of *The Spanish Tragedy*, attributed to Thomas Kyd, is an example of such a collaboration. Shakespeare is thought to have authored the extra passages that were included in the play's 1602 fourth quarto. Shakespeare frequently collaborated in the writing of plays, especially at the beginning and the end of his career. He co-wrote *Titus Andronicus* with George Peele, *Henry VI* with Thomas Nashe or Thomas Kyd, *Timon of Athens* with Thomas Middleton, and *Pericles* with George Wilkins.

Collaboration was arguably the standard writing style during this time. For instance, Thomas Heywood is said to have collaborated on almost 200 plays. Thecollaborative nature of Renaissance theatre was rooted in the very structure of acting companies. Playwrights frequently worked with these companies, writing their scripts to suit the strengths and talents of specific actors. This collaboration resulted in performances that were both gripping and unforgettable. This has also contributed to the enduring legacy of the plays of Shakespeare.

The design of venues like the Globe Theatre, with its open-air structure and thrust stage, necessitated a style of performance that was both direct and engaging. Actors had to project their voices and actions to reach to the audience, creating an intimate connection despite the large and often boisterous crowds.While playwrights provided the structure and dialogue of the plays, actors often had the freedom to interpret their roles, infusing them with their own creativity and spontaneity. Rehearsal time was limited due to the high turnover rate and unquenchable desire for new productions. Due to its popularity, the Globe Theatre alone was known to present 11 productions of 12 distinct plays every two weeks.Consequently, they used two theatrical techniques when it came time for actors to learn their lines. The first is called "cue acting," where someone offstage whispers the lines to the performer.The second method is called "cue scripting," when the performer is only given his lines and the cues that come right before them.The whole scene and the plot of the play became evident only when the actors were on stage.

The actors were not the only members of the theatre company that participated in the collaborative process: directors and stage managers were also involved. While the role of a director, as we understand it today, was not formalized during the Renaissance, there were individuals within the company who took on similar responsibilities and guided the overall vision of the production. A playwright

would sell it to a company, which would then modify it as per their convenience. The Master of the Revels needed to license the play text in order to censor any profanities or politically sensitive information.Monarchs were able to regulate the information used in plays in this way. This collaborative approach allowed for a more integrated and polished performance which enhanced the theatrical experience for the audience.

In conclusion, the collaboration between playwrights and actors in Renaissance England was a cornerstone of the period's theatrical success.The collaborative nature of Renaissance theatre also reflected the social and cultural milieu of the time.

1.2.8 Social and Cultural Impact

The Renaissance erawas a time of great cultural and intellectual growth in England not just in terms of theatre but also in art, architecture, and religion.The Protestant Reformation's rejection of the pastoral elements of medieval drama was its most significant impact on the drama of English Renaissance.The theatre of Renaissance England was not merely a form of entertainment; it was a powerful medium that not only reflected public opinion and social norms but also addressed the pivotal issues of the time.Plays addressing issues of power, identity, love, and morality drew large crowds of people to theatres like the Globe. Theatre dispensed withits ties with religiousnarrativesto adopt a secular stance. Playwrights turned back to the ideas of classical theatre. Acts and scenes made up the classical structure that was adopted by plays. It also borrowed elements likespectacle, music, and dance, from classical drama.The Elizabethan theatre also created a democratization of entertainment as different theatres during this time housed a unique range of people including artisans, gentlemen and even prostitutes. The general public had access to the open-air amphitheatre that created a unique social mix. Instead of becoming the exclusive privilege of the elite, theatrical experience during this age became a communal activity.

1.2.9 Challenges and Controversies

The Renaissance periodspans from the reign of Elizabeth I to the reign of Charles I. It was during the reign of Charles I that Puritans came into power that

posed a significant threat to drama. Opposition from Puritans and city authorities coupled with the outbreak of plague led to the closure of the drama.Guided by puritanical morality, they believed that "entertainment" was evil.Ben Jonson in his play *Bartholomew Fair*presented a ludicrous confrontation between the puritan character Zeal-of-the-Land Busy and a puppet to fire a salvo at the puritanical prejudices against theatre.

As political patrons of the monarchy and aristocracy, the majority of writers and actors favoured the Royalist cause. Theatres were frequently seen as centres of immorality by the Puritans and local authorities.The Puritan regime under their Lord Protector Oliver Cromwellin 1642gained control of the city in the First English Civil War. Parliamentunder Puritan influenceprohibited the staging of plays in the London theatres.

In conclusion, Renaissance drama thrived despite significant challenges. Play performances were prohibited for most of the eighteen years following the execution of Charles I, but they were reopened with the restoration of Charles II in 1660. The theatres resumed showing many of the plays from the earlier period, albeit in modified versions. New Restoration comedy and spectacle genres quickly developed, which gave the later seventeenth-century English theatre its own personality. These challenges ultimately contributed to the rich and dynamic nature of Renaissance drama, as playwrights navigated and responded to the controversies of their time. The opposition from Puritans and city authorities, coupled with the disruptions caused by plagues and political unrest, highlighted the complex relationship between theatre, morality, and society.

1.2.10 Summing Up

Thus, we see that the Renaissance period brought in radical changes in the field of English theatre making it a respected form of entertainment. Theatre played a significant role in shaping the cultural codes of the society. Playwrights like Shakespeare and Jonson hammered home the moral purpose of the theatre. The patronage of Queen Eliabeth I and the establishment of permanent playhouses played a crucial role to rachet up the glory of drama. The formation of notable theatre companies like the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the Admiral's Men also helped drama achieve a prestige hitherto unseen. The construction of iconic venues such

as The Globe and The Rose enhanced the theatrical experience. It also provided the actors with reliable venues which increased their social prestige. Prominent actors like Richard Burbage and Edward Alleyn became celebrated figures. Moreover, the collaborative nature of Renaissance theatre also reflected the social and cultural milieu of the time.As a result, the period enriched the theatrical landscape by signalling a shift from the religious to the secular tradition and enabling it achieve the status of a national institution.

1.2.11 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Analyse the transformation of the role and perception of actors from the medieval period to the Elizabethan era.
2. Discuss the growth of theatres during the Renaissance England.
3. Examine the collaborative nature of theatre during the Renaissance, focusing on the relationship between playwrights and actors.

Medium-Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Describe the significance of the repertory system in the theatrical practices of the Renaissance.
2. Comment on the social and cultural impact of Renaissance theatre.
3. Discuss the theatrical practices during the Renaissance England.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Name three important actors during the Elizabethan era.
2. Recall the names of three important playhouses during the Elizabethan era.
3. Mention the name of an indoor playhouse during the Elizabethan era. When was it set up?

1.2.12 Suggested Reading

Astington, John H. *Actors and Acting in Shakespeare's Time: The Art of Stage Playing*.Cambridge UP, 2010.

Bentley, Gerald Eades. *The Profession of Dramatist in Shakespeare's Time, 1590-1642*. Princeton UP, 1971.

Chambers, E. K. *The Elizabethan Stage*. Clarendon Press, 1923.

Gurr, Andrew. *The Shakespearean Stage 1574-1642*. Cambridge UP, 1992.

Kinney, Arthur F. *Renaissance Drama: An Anthology of Plays and Entertainments*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2005.

Wells, Stanley and Gary Taylor (Eds.). *William Shakespeare*: *The Complete Works*. Clarendon Press, 1986.

Unit-3 □ Christopher Marlowe: *Edward II*

Structure

1.3.1 Objectives

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners are expected to:

- Note the development of the history play from the Chronicle play.
- Understand how the dramatist used his source materials to mould a play that is relevant to the present time while trying to portray Renaissance England. The protagonists historically belong to the Middle Ages.
- Observe how blank verse develops in the hands of Marlowe and appreciate his mature portrayal of credible characters.

1.3.2 Introduction

You have already read about Christopher Marlowe, a 'University Wit', and the evolution of drama in Module-1 Unit-1 of this course. Please refer to that section (1.1.7) again while reading this unit as and where required. This unit will

introduce you to a play written by Christopher Marlowe, in fact one of the most powerful of the Renaissance plays, *Edward II*.

1.3.3 Christopher Marlowe: A Short Biography

"Now is he born, his parents base of stock" (*Doctor Faustus*, Chorus, 11)

Christopher Marlowe (1564-93), son of a 'shoemaker' and 'clerk of St. Mary', was baptized in Canterbury on 26 February 1564. He was born in the same year as William Shakespeare. Marlowe attended the King's School in Canterbury and then joined Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. He received both his B.A. and M.A. degrees from the latter. In 1587 he moved to London, achieving instant success with *Tamburlaine* and writing its sequel almost immediately. Marlowe's association with the playacting company of the Admiral's Men, their leading actor Edward Alleyn and the theatrical manager Philip Henslowe also began at this time. Later he was patronised by Lord Strange whose actors Lord Strange's Men performed his plays. Marlowe led a mysterious life. He was accused of atheism; homosexuality; associated with secret government business, and may have been a 'spy'. In 1593 when the playwright Thomas Kyd was arrested in possession of heretical documents, Kyd claimed the papers belonged to Marlowe with whom he shared his lodgings. Marlowe met a brutal death in a house at Deptford. He was meeting Ingram Frizer, Nicholas Skeres and Robert Poley. Frizer stabbed him fatally, claiming 'self-defence'. Marlowe was buried in an unmarked grave in Deptford while Frizer was officially pardoned of his deed. Marlowe's death is shrouded in intrigue but his plays have immortalised him.

→ **Read** Harry Levin's *Chistopher Marlowe: The Overreacher* (1952)

Charles Nicholl's *The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe* (1992)

Anthony Burgess's novel *A Dead Man in Deptford* (1993)

1.3.4 Christopher Marlowe and Drama

As one of the 'University Wits', Christopher Marlowe belonged to a group of dramatists who had attended either Oxford or Cambridge and turned their educational skills and intellect or 'wit' to producing plays. Among other members

of the group were George Peele, John Lyly and Robert Greene. The University Wits indicate the shift in English drama, moving from the guild-based Mystery cycles, through the maturing growth of the touring troupes of players to playwriting as a professional occupation for well-educated gentlemen. They were "secular professional playwrights" according to David Daiches who combined elements of Classical drama with their native tradition to cater to the rising demand for popular entertainment. They were helped by the growth of playing companies and 'public, purpose-built' playhouses.

Marlowe's literary ambitions began while at Cambridge. He wrote *Dido Queen of Carthage* (which was later completed by Thomas Nash and published with both authors' names). He translated the sequence of poems *Amores* written by the Roman poet Ovid, shocking for its frank sexual content; he also translated the first book of Lucan's *Pharsalia* which operated as a warning of the horrors of civil war and had contemporary relevance to the Elizabethan age. He tasted success with *Tamburlaine the Great, Parts 1 and 2*. During 1588-92 Marlowe wrote *Doctor Faustus*, three acts of the tragedy *The Massacre at Paris*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *Edward II*. His famous lyric "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" cannot be dated precisely. In early 1593 Marlowe wrote an unfinished poem *Hero and Leander*. Most of his plays were published after his death and *The Jew of Malta* had a dedication by Thomas Heywood praising Marlowe in the prologue as "the best of Poets in that age".

Marlowe excelled in the sphere of tragedy. His *Dido* is a tale of unrequited love; *Tamburlaine the Great* recounted the tragedy that arose from boundless aspiration. Tamburlaine represented the Renaissance 'virtu', the belief that man can achieve any goal through his requisite will and potential. 'Virtu' is derived from a Latin word *virtus*; it describes the qualities desirable for a man and might not be the same as conventionally defined virtue. 'Virtu', as opposed to the Christian virtues, includes pride, bravery, strength and a certain amount of ruthlessness. Machiavelli, who was concerned about state, and the achievement of great things, extended the study of classical virtue to the sense of skill, valour and leadership, to encompass the individual prince or war-leader as well. Aristotle and the philosopher Thomas Aquinas both had observed that a good citizen need not necessarily be a morally good or virtuous man.

Marlowe's heroes are 'overreachers' (the term refers to Harry Levin's book who chose the Icarus myth as representing someone whose excess ambition was

often a fatal flaw in character and proved to be a reason for their downfall). An overreacher is someone who, according to Aristotle also, contains the seeds of tragedy in his own character. The Marlovian hero was usually a man of humble birth who achieved great heights before his downfall e.g. Tamburlaine and Faustus. His other heroes Barabas (*The Jew of Malta*) and Edward II are considerably weaker in comparison. Marlowe's style was noteworthy. He contributed what Ben Jonson called 'Marlowe's mighty line' infusing his plays with powerful declamatory speeches. He made the existing blank verse more flexible by varying the metrical rhythm and giving his speeches passion. However, there were not many well-defined women characters in his plays before Queen Isabella in *Edward II*, perhaps because in those days all characters were played either by men or by boys.

1.3.5 *Edward II*–Sources, Background and Editions of the Play

➢ Sources and Background

According to Tancock, Marlowe's play is "history well dramatized". He borrows material from Holinshed's Chronicles published between 1577 and 1586-7 and Fabyan's Chronicle or *Concordance of Histories* (a chronicle history from the beginning of the world to the reign of King Henry VIII) and the Chronicle of John Stow (Marlowe took the story of King Edward II being shaved with ditchwater). Marlowe compresses 23 years of history, from 1307 to 1330. While this style is commendable it often resulted in some unexpected or sudden changes in character and action that give the play a rather uneven shape. The Plantagenet dynasty kings depicted in the play include Edward I 'Longshanks' (ruled. 1272-1307), Edward II (ruled. 1307-1327), and Edward III (ruled. 1327-1377).

→**Find out more** about these kings on Wikipedia and the website–http://www.royal.gov.uk/historyofthemonarchy/kingsandqueensofengland/theplantagenets/edwardilongshanks.aspx

During Marlowe's life many historical plays were acted and written. Two that are well known are *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* and *The Troublesome Raigne of King John*. Peele's *Famous Chronicle of Edward I, sir named Edward Longshanks, with his returne from the Holy Land* had been already acted as had the *First Part of the contention betwixt the two famous Houses of York and Lancaster* and *The True Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke.* However, as the critic Harry Levin reminds us, "Marlowe is concerned not with the state but as always, with the individual".

➢ **Edition**

The play was entered in the Stationers' Registers on July 6, 1593 and *Edward II* was published in a quarto edition in 1594. Its title was "The Troublesome Reigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England; with the Tragicall Fall of Proud Mortimer." The title page includes Marlowe's name and the acting company for which it was written Lord Pembroke's Men. The quarto text is a good one and does not contain major problems for the editor. There was a second edition of *Edward II* published in 1598 which had the slightly expanded title "The Troublesome Reigne and Lamentable Death of Edward the Second, King of England; with the Tragicall Fall of Proud Mortimer: And also the Life and Death of Piers Gaveston, the Great Earle of Cornewall, and Mighty Favourite of King Edward the Second, as it was Publiquely Acted by the Right Honorable the Earle of Pembroke His Servauntes". Other editions followed in 1612 and 1622 but the 1594 edition is the authoritative one.

1.3.6 Structure of the Play

Edward II is the greatest structural triumph of Marlowe, as it is well-planned and well-constructed. The plot is well-knit and it has dramatic conflict. He chooses important incidents and events, eliminating those that are not essential to his purpose. He creates characters or does away with some of them. The scenes succeed each other with a rapidity that compresses 23 years of rule and tension. The final catastrophe of the play arouses deep pathos. King Edward II is weak and unable to control his barons or rule his land judiciously. He alienates his nobles and queen, taking his country to civil war. Ultimately his death restores order and his successor King Edward III brings new hope. An Elizabethan ruler, more so a medieval one, was sanctioned with divine authority. The murder of such a person would have moral, political and symbolic associations. Charles Lamb says "the death scene of Marlowe's king moves pity and terror beyond any scene, ancient or modern with which I am acquainted." The passages in the play contain allusions, poetic passion and display Marlowe's classical learning.

→Textual critics draw **comparisons** with Shakespeare's *Henry VI* parts 2 and 3, *Richard II*

1.3.7 Themes and Issues

Critics like Bradbrook and Maxwell do not find any particular unifying theme or tone in Marlowe's *Edward II*. Critics like L.J. Mills see its theme as "friendship". The friendship between Edward II and his favourites is continuously focused on in the play. Edward often places his friendship with Gaveston and later Younger Spenser and Baldock above his royal responsibilities. This creates several of the crises in the play. Shakespeare's Richard II was another king who favoured friendship above duty to the kingdom. The intense friendship between Gaveston and Edward has been considered to be Marlowe's aesthetic depiction (following classical authors) of a homosexual relationship between the two. Marlowe implies but never clearly depicts the homosexuality in the play. Edward's brutal death involving a red-hot spit (a historical fact) was considered proof of a homosexual relation. Other probable themes in the play may be the irony of kingship and the interaction between power and individual weaknesses. When we consider the irony of kingship, we assess Edward II's character and his actions throughout the play. Edward inherits his kingdom from a father who was a strong ruler, King Edward I. As a king Edward is weak-willed, easily manipulated, impulsive and lacking in the necessary diplomatic and ruthless qualities of a good administrator. His son, the future Edward III, shows better instincts. Marlowe is showing us what may result when an unsuitable king is placed on the throne. The play is concerned with power and its dynamics. Edward II and Younger Mortimer are the two principal representatives of the power struggle that happens in the play. The other nobles and Queen Isabella feature importantly in various shifting power equations. Secular authority and religious authority also clash in this Marlowe play. The issues of power and authority, including the question of divine authority, were important for contemporary playgoers. Machiavelli is an important influence on the play. Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527) author of *The Prince* was an important influence during the Renaissance. The Renaissance realized the power of the individual and Machiavelli sought to free the individual from his subordination to the church as seen in the Middle Ages. Machiavelli's ideal Prince is a political actor performing the role of a sincere and virtuous ruler. Although Machiavelli's manifesto was not translated into English before 1640, his ideas concerning the justification of power, political ruthlessness and treachery were legendary.

1.3.8 The Story Covered in the Play

The play begins with the accession of King Edward II to the throne after the death of his father Edward I. Edward II instantly recalls his favourite Piers Gaveston to England (historically the son of a Gascon Knight but in the play a 'base' foreigner who had been banished by Edward I). The king's foolish infatuation, his cruelty towards his queen, alienates his noble lords who are angered by his behaviour. When the King and Gaveston misbehave with the Bishop of Coventry then the Church joins hands with the noblemen and Gaveston is banished. He is recalled on the insistence of the Queen. However, once again the King and Gaveston anger the noble peers. A civil war ensues. The King captures Mortimer (his main antagonist) and sends him to the Tower of London. Kent, the King's brother is exiled from the King's presence and joins the Barons. Gaveston is captured and beheaded. The King adopts new favourites in the Earl of Spenser and Baldock (a scholar). The Queen leaves for France with her son where she is joined by Mortimer and Kent. They decide to challenge Edward II in the name of the young prince. Another battle takes place in England. The King is defeated and he flees to Wales, where he is betrayed and captured. His new favourites are put to death. Mortimer and Isabella, who have become lovers, decide to rule England keeping the young prince as a front. The King is a threat and Mortimer orders Edward's assassination with the queen's approval. The story concludes with the discovery of the murder. The young King is a decisive ruler and he takes revenge. Mortimer is beheaded and his mother sent to the Tower. He attends his father's funeral as a strong King Edward III.

1.3.9 Characterisation

King Edward II was the son of King Edward I and Eleanor of Castile. He was born in April 1284 and came to the throne in July 1307. He was deposed in January 1327 and murdered in Berkeley Castle in September 1327. The King's character is in accordance with the views of the historians of the time.

Edward II is shown as a weak king, a poor administrator, easily swayed by his favourites, fond of pleasure and shockingly indifferent to the fate of his

kingdom. He angers his barons whom he should have kept as advisors by his side and wastes his kingdom's money. He defies religious authority too. Initially a poor soldier he becomes an admirable victor when avenging Gaveston's death. Edward hurts and insults his Queen who betrays him. His fortunes alternate with Younger Mortimer's. A good friend, he is extremely loyal and withstands great suffering for his favourites Gaveston, Younger Spenser and Baldock. Edward is ironically forced to abdicate and then murdered brutally. He seems pathetic rather than a great tragic hero as he never realises his weaknesses. His son whom he truly loves proves a better ruler.

Prince Edward was the son of Edward II and Isabella of France. He was born in November 1312 and became King Edward III in January 1327. He was made "Guardian" of the realm in October 1326. He died in 1377.

Edmund Earl of Kent was the half-brother of Edward II. He was the son of King Edward I and his second wife Margaret of France. He was born in 1301 and put to death by Mortimer in March 1330. Marlowe does not keep to history when he introduces him as a fully grown man in Act I of the play. →Kent is a choric character in the play. He points out the views of the audience in his reactions to events and characters.

Piers Gaveston was the son of a Gascon Knight, Sir Arnold Gaveston who had served Edward I in Gascony. He was brought up as the foster-brother and playfellow of Edward II and banished from the court and kingdom in 1307 by King Edward I for his harmful influence over Prince Edward. He returned after Edward I's death and was made Earl of Cornwall in August 1307. He married Margaret de Clare, daughter of the Earl of Gloucester and niece of King Edward II. He was banished in May 1308, returned in July 1309, was again banished in 1311 and recalled in January 1312; taken by the Barons in May at Scarborough and beheaded without a trial on Blacklaw Hill in June 1312.

Although Gaveston is shown to be of base birth in the play, he is not a Marlovian hero. He falls from power and dies because his ambition is not supported by any strength of character. He manipulates the King for his personal ends, had been intimate with Younger Spenser but chooses the King for the benefits Edward can offer him. He is a foreigner who dislikes England and English people. He angers the Queen, insults a religious man, mocks three poor men who seek his

help and misbehaves with the loyal nobles of the king. His treatment of the Bishop of Coventry is like a curse that backfires on him. His death acts as a catalyst for the King's courage and is a turning point in the play. Gaveston is ultimately a bad friend to the King and instigates his ruin.

Archbishop of Canterbury was Robert Winchelsey. He was Archbishop from 1294 to 1313. He was always a stout supporter of the rights of the Church and of the people. He took the side of the Ordainers in 1311. He died in May 1313.

Bishop of Coventry was Walter Langton and appointed in 1295. As soon as Edward II began his reign, Bishop Langton was imprisoned but he was reconciled to the King in 1311, and became minister again and Treasurer in March 1312. He was removed from office in March 1315.

Bishop of Winchester from June 1323 was John Stratford. He joined the Queen in her attempt to overthrow the Despensers. He was Treasurer from November 1326 till January 1327, Chancellor from 1330-1334, 1335-1337 and April to June 1340. He was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1333 to 1348.

Warwick. Guy Earl of Warwick was the son of William Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick. He was a vigorous opponent of Edward II and did not consent to the recall of Gaveston in 1309. He was one of the Ordainers in 1311 and had a chief hand in putting Gaveston to death. He was included in the general pardon in October 1313 and died in 1315.

Lancaster. Thomas Earl of Lancaster was the son of Edmund, the second son of King Henry III of Sicily and Blanche of Artois, queen dowager of Navarre. He was the most powerful subject in the realm and always in opposition to the King. He was one of the Ordainers and enemy to Gaveston. He opposed the King's Scottish policy and led the attack on the Despensers in 1321. He was defeated and taken at Boroughbridge in March 1322, tried by his peers and beheaded.

Pembroke. Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke was grandson of Isabella, widow of King John and her second husband the Count of la Marche. In the early years of Edward II, he was on the side of the Barons and one of the Ordainers. After Gaveston was taken from his custody by Warwick, he supported the King (Marlowe does not show this, choosing to portray him as a rebellious Baron throughout the play). He died while acting as envoy for the King in France in 1324.

Arundel. Edmund Fitzalan, Earl of Arundel, was one of the Ordainers and in the beginning opposed the King. Like Pembroke he sided with the King against Lancaster in 1318. He was one of the few supporters of the King in 1326 and beheaded at Hereford in November 1326 on the orders of Mortimer.

Leicester. Henry Earl of Leicester and Lancaster was the younger brother of Thomas Earl of Lancaster Like most of the nobles he joined the Queen in her attempt to overthrow the Despensers. After the accession of Edward III, he became head of the Council and Guardian of the King. He became leader of that constitutional party which opposed Mortimer. After his brother's death he succeeded to his rights in 1324 and he died in 1345.

Berkeley. Sir Thomas Berkeley was the son of Sir Maurice Berkeley. He had been dispossessed of his inheritance of Berkeley Castle by the younger Despenser. The Queen's troops restored the castle to its rightful owner on her march to Bristol.

Earl or Elder Mortimer was Roger Mortimer of Chirk, second son of the Roger Mortimer who fought on the side of King Henry III during the Barons' war. He was not an Earl but a powerful Baron on the Welsh border and Justiciar of Wales. He opposed the King in the early part of his reign, rose in arms in 1321 and surrendered to the King in January 1322. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London and died there. →In the play he is a temperate statesman who is a soldier by temperament.

Younger Mortimer was Roger Mortimer of Wigmore, also a powerful Baron of the Welsh march. He was the nephew of Roger Mortimer of Chirk and a powerful opponent of the King. He yielded to the King in 1322 along with his uncle but escaped from the Tower of London in August 1324. He joined the Queen in France and carried out the invasion that overthrew the Despensers. He was made 1st Earl of March in 1327 and was the real ruler of England till October 1330.

In the play he is Edward II's main opponent. He provides a contrast to the King's character. He is a man of action, arrogant, aware of his heredity as a Baron and determined to get due recognition and respect. He is resentful of Gaveston who is wasting the wealth of the treasury while the army gets no pay. He is angry at the weak king who misbehaves with his noble peers and loyal Queen. Initially a patriot and brave man, Mortimer is swayed by the love for power. He has an illicit affair with the Queen and towards the end of the play controls her and the future

King. Renaissance in soul, Mortimer falls because of his pride and ambition. We admire his courage as he is taken away to be killed despite his transformation into a Machiavellian villain.

Old Spenser or Hugh le Despenser had fought in the Scottish wars of Edward I and became a strong supporter of Edward II against the Earl of Lancaster. He was banished in 1321 but recalled by the King soon. After Lancaster's death, he and his son guided the King entirely. He was taken and hanged at Bristol in October 1326.

Younger Spenser or Hugh le Despenser the Younger had power and influence over the King from 1322-1326. He was made Chamberlain and was quite similar to Gaveston. He married Eleanor, eldest of the three daughters of the Earl of Gloucester and niece of Edward II and was made Earl of Gloucester. He was beheaded in Hereford in November 1326.

Baldock was Robert of Baldock was Keeper of the King's Privy Seal and became a prominent member of the King's government while the Despensers were in power. He was made Chancellor in August 1323 and was intensely unpopular. He fled with the King and was taken prisoner in November 1326. He died in 1327.

Beaumont. Henry de Beaumont was grandson of John de Brienne, King of Jerusalem and Emperor of Constantinople. He was expelled by the Ordainers in 1311 from the Council as a foreigner. Later he stopped supporting the King and was arrested in 1323. He joined the Queen in her attempt to overthrow the dissenters.

Trussel. Sir William Trussel was proctor of the parliament of Westminster in 1327 and in the name of parliament renounced the homage and fealties made to the King Edward II.

Sir John of Hainault was the brother of William, Count of Hainault and uncle of Philippa, whom King Edward III married.

Gurney. Thomas Gurney was one of the murderers of Edward II. He fled from the country, was captured at Marseilles and murdered on the way home.

Matrevis. Sir John Maltravers or Mauntreveres was made custodian of the King on the orders of Mortimer after Berkeley treated Edward II too kindly. After the murder he fled from the country.

Queen Isabella was daughter of Philip the Fair, King of France and married Edward II at Boulogne in January 1308. She was sent to France in 1325 to negotiate with her brother King Charles IV. There she became the centre of a plot to overthrow the Despensers. She landed with a force at Orwell in September 1326 and with Mortimer ruled England till 1330. After the fall of Mortimer, she was sent to live at Castle Rising in Norfolk and received an allowance of £3000 a year. She died in 1357.

The Queen is Marlowe's most successful attempt at creating a realistic female protagonist in all of his plays. Critics find the change in her character abrupt and unconvincing. We must remember that Marlowe has condensed history and she was the Queen, so he has chosen to imply rather than specify the change. Initially the Queen is a patient, virtuous, suffering wife and loving mother who adores her husband and son. She is called a "saint". It is only after repeated rejection and provocation that she turns into a she-Machiavel, determined to safeguard the interests of herself and her son. Since she has an influence over Younger Mortimer who is most sympathetic and chivalrous towards her, she allows herself to be unfaithful to her husband. She tolerates Gaveston but when the King continues to humiliate her, she takes revenge by betraying Gaveston and the King. The Queen is made responsible for Edward II's murder as she gets involved in the political power play.

Niece to Edward II was Margaret de Clare, daughter of the Elder Gilbert de Clare, Earl of Gloucester and Johanna of Acre, daughter of King Edward I. She was married to Gaveston in 1307. It is only after her brother's death in 1314 that she and her sisters became the co-heiresses of Gloucester. She afterwards married Hugh of Audley. →She is the only other woman character depicted and is responsible for reminding the King of the courtesy due to his wife.

1.3.10 Act-Wise Summary of the Play

The text referred to is *Marlowe's Edward the Second* edited by O. W. Tancock, Radha Publishing House, 1988, rpt. 1997.

→**Two other definitive editions** of the text are *Edward II* edited by R. G. Lunt, New Delhi, Bookland, 2010 and *Edward II* edited by Roma Gill, New Delhi, OUP, 2005.

❖ Act I

Scene-1: opens with Piers Gaveston reading a letter. He has returned to England because Edward I, who banished him, is dead and the new king is Edward II, his intimate friend. Gaveston is a foreigner who does not care about England but at the present moment he views London 'as Elysium' or paradise because his beloved Edward lives here. Three poor men enter, seeking an audience from Gaveston but he is very rude to them, thinking that they cannot help him in his ambitions. Instead, he plans to keep the king diverted with pleasure and amusement while he can carry out his plans.

→Gaveston's soliloquy and actions are important as they reveal his character and his plans. They also show us why the Barons do not like him.

Soon the King enters followed by his nobles—Lancaster, the Elder Mortimer, the Younger Mortimer, Kent, Warwick, Pembroke and attendants. These nobles try to persuade the King to banish Gaveston. Younger Mortimer is the most vehement in his protests because he had sworn an oath to Edward I to never allow Gaveston to enter England. Kent is astonished at the defiance of the nobles and asks the King to punish them. The nobles leave, failing to change the mind of Edward II.

→Note the speeches of the nobles, especially those uttered by Younger Mortimer.

Gaveston now comes forward and is warmly welcomed by the King. The King showers Gaveston with honours and titles like Lord High-Chamberlain, Chief Secretary to the state and the King, Earl of Cornwall, King and Lord of Man. Kent is displeased at the reckless behaviour of his brother. The King offers Gaveston a guard, gold and even his personal seal thus erasing the difference between himself and Gaveston.

→Remember the theme of friendship. How does the king rate as a friend?

The Bishop of Coventry, who is on his way to the funeral of Edward I, is surprised to see Gaveston. Edward and Gaveston insult the Bishop of Coventry, tear his clothes and want to "in the channel ('gutter or drain') christen him anew". (p.7) They mock Christianity and its religious representative. The Bishop is arrested, sent to the Tower of London and his lands and revenue given to Gaveston.

→In a tragedy how important is such arrogant behaviour? Does it lead to downfall?

Scene-2 is set in London, near the King's Palace. The nobles are very angry at what Gaveston has done to the Bishop of Coventry. They are also resentful that the King rewards 'base' Gaveston with titles and honours. The Archbishop of Canterbury (highest religious authority in England) decides to join the barons in their opposition to the King and Gaveston. He also sends a messenger to inform the Pope in Rome about the Bishop of Coventry. We meet Queen Isabella who is sad

and wondering if she should leave the palace and live in a forest since her King "dotes upon the love of Gaveston" (p.9) The Barons and the Archbishop decide to legally banish Gaveston from England and if necessary, mutiny against the king. The Queen is alarmed and requests the nobles (in particular "sweet Mortimer") to spare the King from war.

→How do you think the audience would have reacted in such a situation? Do you think the Archbishop and Barons have made the right decision?

Scene-3 shows Gaveston telling Kent how his enemies, Lancaster, Warwick and the two Mortimers have gone to Lambeth, the Archbishop's residence, to decide on his banishment. Gaveston enjoys the King's support and is fearless.

Scene-4 is a long and important scene. The scene is set at the New Temple in London. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the nobles sign the paper ordering Gaveston's exile. Again, the Barons and the King begin to quarrel over Gaveston. The King is angry at the insolence of the nobles but is helpless when the Archbishop of Canterbury tells him that he can sanction the King's deposition and excommunication. The King requests his nobles to divide and rule his kingdom but leave "some nook or corner" to "frolic with my dearest Gaveston". (p.13) The nobles are adamant and the King has to sign Gaveston's exile orders.

Left alone the king speaks lines that are anachronistic (the context does not fit the time it is being uttered at, a historical inaccuracy). The King is angry that he must obey what a priest tells him to do. He curses the Roman Church and threatens to slaughter the priests and destroy "antichristian" churches (p.14). The King's soliloquy is more apt for the Renaissance and Reformation rather than the obedient and devout Middle Ages.

→Note the contexts of Papacy and Puritanism.

The King and Gaveston are forced to part. He appoints Gaveston the Governor of Ireland. They exchange words of affection and pictures on their lockets. The King is unwilling to let Gaveston go as "I from myself am banished." (p.14). When the Queen enters on this scene of sorrow, she is called a "French strumpet (prostitute)" (p.15) and accused of having an affair with Younger Mortimer. The Queen is humiliated by Gaveston but the King asks Isabella to convince the Barons to repeal Gaveston's exile.

→Notice the intimacy of the King and Gaveston, is it a suggestion of homosexuality? The Queen is humiliated, is it a reason for wanting to take revenge?

Queen Isabella convinces the Barons to repeal Gaveston. She does this with Younger Mortimer's help and it marks a turning point in the Queen's character. Mortimer asks the Barons to recall Gaveston and have him assassinated because he

is a "night-grown mushroom" (p.19, ref Lyly's *Euphues*, meaning an upstart). The King is overjoyed to learn that Gaveston has been recalled. He kisses the Queen and promises to hang a golden tongue around her neck for her skills in persuasion. Edward II then announces a tilt and tournament in honour of Gaveston where he will marry the king's niece.

Younger Mortimer and Elder Mortimer have a private conversation at the end before Elder Mortimer goes to participate in the war in Scotland. He advises Younger Mortimer to be more tolerant of the King's infatuation. He cites many famous rulers and wise men who had intimate relations with men. Younger Mortimer has been made Lord Marshal of England but he is jealous and resentful of Gaveston. The scene ends ominously "But whiles I have a sword, a hand, a heart/ I will not yield to any such upstart." (p.23)

→Act I introduces us to the important characters and issues in the play. Who do you think is prominent among the nobles? What is your impression of Edward II so far?

❖ Act II

Scene-1 opens in the Earl of Gloucester's Castle. We are introduced to Younger Spenser and Baldock. The Earl of Gloucester is dead and these two men need to attach themselves to a new patron. They decide to seek the favour of Gaveston, who is the Earl of Cornwall, to enter the King's court. We also learn that Gaveston has been recalled and Edward's niece, the Earl's daughter will be married to him soon. Spenser advises Baldock to change his appearance and pose of a Puritan scholar if he wants to be accepted at court. The scene concludes with Edward's niece preparing to go to the King's court.

→These men are the future favourites of the King. Note how their behaviour is similar to or different from that of Gaveston.

In Scene-2 the action shifts to Tynmouth Castle. Edward II is anxiously awaiting the arrival of Gaveston. Younger Mortimer informs Edward of his responsibility; the King of France has occupied English territory in Normandy. Edward is unconcerned and wonders about the devices on the shields of the Barons for the tournament.

→Note these devices.

The devices on Mortimer and Lancaster's shields describe Gaveston as "a canker" (worm) and a "flying-fish" (Pliny/ Tancock p.29) hated by all. The King

is determined to welcome and protect Gaveston. Gaveston returns and insults the Barons again, "Base, leaden, earls, that glory in your birth" (p.29) Younger Mortimer wounds Gaveston. The King decides to fight with the Barons.

A letter arrives from Scotland informing the barons about the capture of Elder Mortimer and his ransom reckoned at 5000 pounds. Younger Mortimer and Lancaster give the news to the King. Edward II refuses to pay the ransom directly and both the nobles leave the King threatening him with civil war. They are disgusted that the King has allowed internal and external rebellion to destroy his kingdom. When he participated in the war against the Scots, they mocked his appearance with a jig (Fabyan's Chronicle, Tancock, p.32) Kent tries to caution Edward II about Gaveston but the King banishes Kent instead.

The Queen enters with the King's niece and other ladies. The King is rude to her. He is pleased to meet Spenser who is "well allied" and Baldock whose "gentry/ I fetch from Oxford" (like Marlowe, Tancock p.34). The scene concludes with the King deciding to meet the Barons in battle after Gaveston's marriage.

Scene-3 depicts the Barons' Camp before Tynmouth Castle. Kent joins the Barons who trust him because he belongs to the Plantagenet dynasty. Mortimer speaks proudly of his ancestors who were Crusaders. Lancaster asks the Barons to spare the King but destroy Gaveston and his company. → Note the importance of heredity.

In Scene-4 set inside Tynmouth Castle the King requests Gaveston to escape by sea to Scarborough while he and Spenser will escape via land. The Queen is left behind. In a sad soliloquy the Queen admits how hopeless her love for the King is. The nobles find the Queen who betrays the King and Gaveston. This marks another turning point in her character, as also in the action. When she acknowledges "So well hast thou deserved, sweet Mortimer, / As Isabel could live with thee for ever" (p.38) we realize how the Queen has changed. She decides to go to France with her son and complain about Gaveston to "the king my brother" (p.38)

Scene-5 is set in the country near Scarborough Castle. Gaveston is fleeing the Barons who are chasing him. At the moment he thinks he has escaped, they capture him. He is insulted as "proud disturber of thy country's peace,/Corrupter of thy king, cause of these broils" and like the "Greekish strumpet" (Helen of Troy) has caused the death of several brave men (p38-9). Warwick asks his soldiers to

hang Gaveston from the branch of a tree like a common thief. Lord Arundel comes to the Barons with a request that the King be allowed to meet Gaveston one last time. Lord Pembroke supports Lord Arundel and agrees to transport Gaveston to the King and bring him back. Warwick's aside to the audience is Machiavellian and ominous "Yet not perhaps, / If Warwick's wit and policy prevail." (p.41) Pembroke leaves Gaveston under the care of James and takes Lord Arundel to his "house".

→Act II has shown continuing action and further complications. The King's obstinacy and Gaveston's arrogance have caused war. The Queen breaks free of the King's influence as does Kent.

❖ Act III

Scene-1 marks an important turning point of the play. Set in the country near Deddington, Gaveston is travelling with James when he is ambushed by Warwick and his soldiers. He is taken away to be executed.

→What changes do Gaveston's death bring about?

Scene-2 is set in the King's camp near Boroughbridge, Yorkshire. Edward is waiting for Gaveston to arrive with Spenser, Baldock, other nobles and soldiers. He comments on the Barons "I know the malice of the younger Mortimer;/Warwick I know is rough, and Lancaster/Inexorable," (p.43) Younger Spenser and Baldock instigate him to punish the rebellious nobles. Spenser's father, Elder Spenser, comes to fight for the King in battle with 400 soldiers. The King creates Younger Spenser the Earl of Wiltshire and gives him money to outbid and buy the land which the Mortimers are trying to buy from Lord Bruse. The Queen arrives with Prince Edward and Levune bearing bad news. The King of France has seized Normandy. The Queen is sent with the Young Prince to "parley" or negotiate with the King of France. Lord Arundel arrives and gives the news of Gaveston's death. The King vows to take revenge. He creates Younger Spenser Earl of Gloucester and Lord Chamberlain. A messenger "Herald" arrives from the Barons. They demand that the King banish Younger Spenser. Edward II refuses and a fight begins.

→ Is revenge a sufficient reason for war?

Scene-3: Marlowe has condensed the story of the rising of the Barons over a few years into one battle, the Battle of Boroughbridge fought on March 16, 1322. In this battle, where the King participates personally, the Barons are defeated. Kent is banished, Warwick and Lancaster receive orders to be beheaded and Younger Mortimer is sent to the Tower of London as a political prisoner. Mortimer's speech is true of the Renaissance spirit "can ragged stony walls/ Immure ('imprison') thy

virtue ('his virtu') that aspires to heaven?" (p.51) Younger Spenser and Baldock convince Levune to bribe the French Lords to deny help to Queen Isabella who is trying to raise an army and depose Edward II in favour of her son.

→ Note how Edward II is at the height of power and prestige at the end of this act.

❖ **Act IV**

(The scenes alternate in this act between London and France)

In Scene 1 Kent meets the disguised Mortimer in a street near the Tower of London. Mortimer has escaped by putting the guards to sleep and now both of them will sail to France.

Scene-2: In Paris the Queen is frustrated by the hostile behaviour of her brother and the French Lords. The Prince asks her to return to his father but she refuses as their relation is destroyed. Sir John of Hainault offers them shelter and help. Kent and Younger Mortimer meet the Queen and together they decide to go to Hainault before their war with the King.

→ How does the Prince feel about his father?

Scene-3 is set in a room in the King's palace in London. He asks Arundel to read the names of all the rebellious Lords who were executed in the Tower of London. A messenger arrives with letters. They learn from Levune's letter that Mortimer has escaped to France with Kent and they have joined the Queen. They are staying in Flanders (modern Belgium) with Sir John of Hainault and his brother. The King sets out for Bristol to meet the "traitors in the field." (p.56)

In Scene-4 the Queen returns to England and sets camp near Orwell in Suffolk. Prince Edward, Kent, Mortimer and Sir John of Hainault are preparing to fight Edward II. The Queen accuses Edward II (p.57) but Mortimer prevents Isabel from making an impolitic speech. He claims that they are fighting for Prince Edward, for "our country's cause" (p.57), to remove "flatterers" from the King and to restore the Queen's honour.

Scene-5 takes place near Bristol. Baldock and Younger Spenser are in the process of escaping the Queen's victorious forces. The King shows "princely resolution "in wanting to stay and fight "And in this bed of honour die with fame" (p.58).

Kent expresses how Mortimer has become a traitor. "Mortimer/and Isabel do kiss, while they conspire". (p.58) Kent fears for his life. The Queen declares the young Prince Lord Warden of the realm and thanks all their supporters. Kent asks what will happen to Edward II and Younger Mortimer sternly replies that the King will be dealt with by "the realm and parliament" (p.59) thus hiding his intentions with hypocrisy. Rice Ap Howel and the Mayor of Bristow (Bristol) enter with Elder

Spenser as captive. The King, Younger Spenser and Baldock are trying to sail to Ireland. Elder Spenser is executed as a "rebel". He denies the charge claiming "Rebel is he that fights against the prince." (p.60)

→Who is a rebel at this point and who is a traitor?

Scene-6 is set in Wales. The King is hidden within the Abbey of Neath. He is in disguise. The king requests the monks of the Abbey not to betray them. He wishes to spend his life contemplating the philosophy they learned from the Universities. Younger Spenser fears a mower may betray them. Rice Ap Howel, the mower, Lord Leicester and Welsh soldiers enter the Abbey and arrest Edward II, Spenser and Baldock. Leicester quotes some Latin lines from Seneca's *Thyestes* to indicate how the power of the King has gone and he is a tragic figure. By the order of Mortimer and the Queen the King is taken to Killingworth or Kenilworth Castle in a litter (a humiliating mode of transport). Spenser and Baldock will be executed. The lesson conveyed is "all live to die and rise to fall' (p.64) an epigram.

→At the end of Act IV we see how the fortunes of the King have fallen and Mortimer's risen.

❖ Act V

Scene-1 is known as the Abdication Scene. This is where King Edward II is forced to give up his crown and lose his identity as King of England. The scene takes place in Kenilworth Castle. The King, Lord Leicester, the Bishop of Winchester and Trussel are present. Their presence is symbolical. The Bishop represents religious authority and Trussel represents legal or Parliamentary authority. The King is impatient with his confinement and Leicester tries to comfort him. The King laments that he is a royal lion who tears himself in sorrow when he is wounded, unlike a forest deer who would try to repair its wounds with a herb. He is angry at "ambitious Mortimer" and "that unnatural queen, false Isabel" (p.65) who have imprisoned him. He complains to the gods but he is now a king in name only:

> But what are kings, when regiment is gone, [regiment-army]
> But perfect shadows in a sunshine day?
> My nobles rule; I bear the name of king;
> I wear the crown but am controll'd by them,
> By Mortimer and my unconstant queen [unconstant-unfaithful]
> Who spots my nuptial bed with infamy; [nuptial-marriage, infamy-shame]
> Whilst I am lodg'd within this cave of care, [cave of care-dungeon or prison]
> .....

But tell me, must I now resign my crown,

To make usurping Mortimer a king? (lines 26-37)

The Bishop tells Edward II that the crown will make his son King. But the King responds by calling his son a lamb surrounded by wolves. He curses Mortimer that if Mortimer wears his crown it will burn him with fire (reference to Creusa's crown gifted by Medea) or bite him like a snake (reference to the Fury Tisiphon's head which has snakes instead of hair). He finally removes his crown in a powerful, yet pathetic scene. The lines are similar to the lines of Doctor Faustus before he gives up his soul.

Ah, Leicester, weigh how hardly I can brook [brook-tolerate]

To lose my crown and kingdom without cause;

To give ambitious Mortimer my right,

That like a mountain overwhelms my bliss;

In which extreme my mind here murder'd is!

But that, the heavens appoint, I must obey—

Here, take my crown; the life of Edward too; (takes off his crown)

Two kings in England cannot reign at once.

But stay a while: let me be king till night,

That I may gaze upon this glittering crown;

.....

Stand still, you watches of the element;

All times and seasons, rest you at a stay,

That Edward may be still fair England's king!

But day's bright beam doth vanish fast away,

And needs I must resign my wished crown.

Inhuman creatures, nursed with tiger's milk,

Why gape you for your sovereign's overthrow?

My diadem, I mean, and guiltless life. [diadem-crown] (Lines 51-73)

The King tries to keep his crown but is forced to give it up. He is ready to welcome death at this point. He sends a handkerchief wet with his tears and dried with his sighs for Queen Isabella. His sentimental actions are futile and a letter arrives from the Queen and Mortimer instructing Leicester who is sympathetic towards Edward II to let go of his charge. Lord Berkeley is the new keeper of the King and Edward II is to go to Berkeley castle.

→Compare with the abdication scene in Shakespeare's *Richard II*

Scene-2 is set in a room in the palace in Westminster. The Queen and Mortimer are discussing their dreams and desires. The king is in prison and Younger Mortimer feels he should be made Lord Protector of the new King. He and Isabella will rule over England "Be rul'd by me, and we will rule the realm." (p.69) Isabella who now considers "Sweet Mortimer" her "life" and "loves" him suggests that they put Edward II to death.

The Bishop of Winchester is Mortimer's spy. He tells them Edward II has given up his crown; Lord Berkeley is sympathetic to Edward II and, that Kent has laid a plot to free his brother.

Mortimer summons Matrevis and Gurney and asks them to take the King under their guard and torture him. He should be moved from castle to castle in secret to prevent Kent from finding him. Mortimer arrogantly claims that he "makes Fortune's wheel turn as he please" (p.71) The Queen pretends to be sorrowful and sends a ring for Edward II.

Kent and the Young Prince enter. The Prince does not want to be King of England. Kent wonders if Edward II is still alive. Mortimer and the Queen decide to get rid of Kent who has a strong influence over his nephew. The Prince does not like Lord Mortimer. Kent decides to rescue the King from Kenilworth. (According to Holinshed the king was murdered on Sep 21, 1327 but Kent thought he was still alive in 1329-30)

→ How far has the Queen's character changed from the beginning of the play?

Scene-3 is set near Kenilworth castle. Matrevis and Gurney are moving Edward II from place to place, and they treat him cruelly:

Within a dungeon England's king is kept,

Where I am starved for want of sustenance;

My daily diet is heart-breaking sobs, (p.74)

When Edward requests some water to clean the filth from his body, he is shaved in "channel water" or "puddle water". (p.74) This detail is taken from Stow. His beard is shaved off and they move in darkness to Killingworth. The Earl of Kent comes to rescue Edward but is captured and taken to Lord Mortimer.

Scene-4 is a room in the Palace in Westminster. Mortimer is afraid that the people have begun to pity Edward II "The king must die, or Mortimer goes down"

(p.75) Younger Mortimer is now an absolute Machiavel who will plot murder to preserve himself. He writes a letter of instruction in Latin to Matrevis and leaves it unpunctuated so that it is open to interpretation. He has secretly hired Lightborn who will murder Edward II. Lightborn is an Italian assassin (an anachronism). He has many techniques of murder and reminds us of the devil himself. Mortimer boasts of his power:

The prince I rule, the queen do I command,
And with a lowly conge to the ground, [conge-bow]
The proudest lords salute me as I pass:
I seal, I cancel, I do what I will.
Fear'd am I more than lov'd; (lines 47-51)

He pretends like a "bashful puritan" that he cannot bear the burden of Lord Protector and yet he must accept this duty to state. He resembles Gaveston in his misuse of power. Prince Edward is crowned King Edward III. Kent is a prisoner. Mortimer orders Kent to be beheaded despite Edward III pleading for the life of his uncle. The Queen supports Mortimer in his decision and calls Kent a "traitor".

Scene-5 is the famous murder scene. Set in Berkeley Castle, Matrevis and Gurney are discussing how Edward is surviving the tortures of the dungeon and starvation:

Gurney, I wonder the king dies not,
Being in a vault up to the knees in water,
To which the channels of the castle run, [channels-sewers]
From whence a damp continually ariseth,
That were enough to poison any man,
Much more a king brought up so tenderly. (lines 1-6)

Lightborn comes with the message and token sent by Mortimer. He needs a red-hot spit, a feather bed and a table to kill the king. Lightborn enters the king's dungeon and Edward II is instantly suspicious of him, "I see my tragedy written in thy brows" (p.81). The king narrates his misery of staying ten days in filth, unable to eat or sleep (someone plays continually on a drum) and his clothes are tattered. He asks Lightborn to remind Isabella that in his better days he had defeated the Duke of Cleremont in a tournament and won her hand in marriage. Edward gives a jewel to bribe Lightborn. Lightborn asks him to sleep instead and when he repeats fearfully "tell me, wherefore art thou come?" Lightborn replies "To rid thee of thy life". Edward II is murdered savagely. Gurney (on Mortimer's secret instructions)

stabs Lightborn, whose corpse is thrown in the moat. They take the King's body to Mortimer.

Scene-6 is the concluding scene. Gurney betrays Mortimer to Edward III. Matrevis reports to Mortimer and flees England. Mortimer thinks he is safe but the Queen enters with news that Edward III is devastated by his father's death and wants revenge. The play's resolution is then effected. Edward III accuses Mortimer of killing his father. He has a letter as proof. Mortimer will be dragged, hanged and quartered as a fitting punishment for traitors. The Queen pleads for Mortimer's life but Mortimer accepts his fate. He has touched the peak of success and can accept his death—"as a traveller,/ goes to discover countries yet unknown" (p.85) Edward III finds it difficult to believe that his mother is guilty but punishes her and sends her to the Tower of London. Edward III prepares for his father's funeral. Mortimer's head is placed on the funeral hearse, "Sweet father, here unto thy murder'd ghost/ I offer up this wicked traitor's head;" (p.86)

→ In Act V note how Marlowe has condensed history to show revenge being taken swiftly. What sort of a king does Edward III promise to be?

1.3.11 Summing Up

We should by now have an idea of the play, its main characters, Marlowe's literary style and note the relevance of the historical play in its own time and our own.

Marlowe's success lies in his use of history, portrayal of characters well-sketched, creation of a dialogue in blank verse that nears the human voice, makes a plot that is complex, an organic whole and gives classical allusions (cf. Danae daughter of King Acrisius, who was locked up in a brass tower which Zeus entered as a shower of gold and Actaeon, a hunter who was transformed into a dog and killed by the goddess Diana for spying on her while bathing) while blending poetry and drama to interest us with a Renaissance play on King Edward II.

1.3.12 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. How does *Edward II* show Marlowe's success as a dramatist?

2. *Edward II* blends history and tragedy. Discuss.
3. Discuss the importance of the Abdication Scene or the Murder Scene.
4. Describe the character of King Edward II.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Sketch the character of Queen Isabella
2. Show how Mortimer develops into a Machiavellian villain at the end of the play.
3. What is the importance of the character of Kent in the play?
4. Give a short sketch of the character of Piers Gaveston.
5. Marlowe uses many classical allusions in the play. Describe any **two**.
6. Could you suggest **two** examples (**anachronisms**) from the play where Marlowe refers to his contemporary age rather than to the reign of Edward II?
7. Write a note on the literary style of Marlowe.
8. What are the sources of Marlowe's *Edward II*?

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Describe two features of a typical Marlovian hero.
2. Name any four works of Marlowe.
3. Why is Marlowe called a "University Wit"?
4. Which religious man did Gaveston physically attack in the beginning of the play? How?
5. Where does Edward II hide in disguise after his defeat by the nobles? Who betrays him to Rice AP Howel?
6. Who captured and killed Gaveston in an ambush? Why?
7. Name the two men who come to remove the King's crown.
8. Where was King Edward II murdered and by whom?
9. How does King Edward III punish Queen Isabella and Younger Mortimer?

1.3.13 Suggested Reading

Bartels, Emily C. *Spectacles of Strangeness: Imperialism, Alienation, and Marlowe*. University of Pennsylvania P., 1993.

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Cheney, Patrick. *Cambridge Companion to Marlowe*. Cambridge UP, 2004.

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Simkin, Stevie. *A Preface to Marlowe*. Pearson Education Limited, 2000.

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Unit-4 □ Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

Structure

1.4.1 Objectives

Upon the completion of this unit the learners are expected to:

- trace the growth of tragedy in English literature;
- understand how a legend is moulded into a dramatic work to be a representative of the Renaissance in English;
- know how blank verse matures to be the fit vehicle for dramatic expression.

1.4.2 Introduction

In the previous unit, we have read *Edward II* by Christopher Marlowe. In this unit, we will be talking about another of Marlowe's plays, and probably one of the best as well as one of the most problematic plays of the pre-Shakespearean era, *Doctor Faustus*.

1.4.3 English Tragedy and Marlowe

In our previous unit, we have already learnt about Marlowe and his contribution as a university wit in the sphere of English drama. Marlowe's first play, as we know, was *Dido, Queen of Carthage***,** an indifferent tragedy of unhappy love. It is *Tamburlaine the Great***,** written for The Rose, which marked his emergence as a great dramatist writing for the professional theatre. It is a tragedy of boundless aspiration, which was to be Marlowe's special dramatic province. The play overwhelmed its first audience with a kind of subject which had never before been witnessed on the stage. Marlowe also introduced in the two parts of the play a new type of tragic hero. Tamburlaine is a shepherd who attains a dozen thrones, all won by superhuman courage and self confidence. This was to be the distinctive quality of the Marlovian hero—a man of humble birth who rises to a great height by his own merits. Faustus too is "born, of parents base of stock" (Prologue, l.11). But though Tamburlaine and Faustus are supermen, Marlowe's other heroes, like Barabas and Edward II are men of much lower stature. It has therefore been argued by some critics that the evolution of the Marlovian hero reveals his progressive disillusionment with the optimism in certain strains of Renaissance thought or his simultaneous recognition of the potentialities of man and of man's essential powerlessness.

The creation of a new kind of tragic hero was not Marlowe's only contribution to English tragedy. Most of his contemporaries were enthralled by Marlowe's poetic greatness. Ben Jonson characterised Marlowe' splendid poetry by an immortal phrase. "Marlowe's mighty line". Blank verse had been written before Marlowe, by dramatists like Sackville and Norton (in *Gorboduc*), and Peele in *The Arraignment of Paris*.But it was Marlowe who made it a flexible and supple dramatic medium by doing away with end-stopped lines which only produced an impression of monotony, by varying the pauses, by making the sentence rather than the verse line the unit of composition, by introducing enjambment or overflow, by incorporating speech rhythms into the metrical scheme and by giving his verse passion as well as dramatic urgency, (for example the famous last speech of Faustus). Marlowe was the first English dramatic poet who wrote truly dramatic poetry.

1.4.4 *Doctor Faustus*

*Doctor Faustus*is about a man who at first renounces Christianity but later repents and pleads passionately for God's mercy. Many critics, however, interpret the play as a powerfully moving Christian document and T.S. Eliot has argued that far from being an atheist, Marlowe was probably "the most thoughtful, the most blasphemous (and therefore the most Christian) of his contemporaries." Such a belief lies behind anumberof influential twentieth century interpretations of *Doctor Faustus*, which see the play as one of the most obvious Christian documents in all Elizabethan drama. On the other hand, Marlowe's reputation for atheism has prompted many other critics to read the play as a sympathetic endorsement of Faustus' defiance of divine authority.

1.4.5 Sources and Background

A. W. Ward in his edition of *Marlowe'sDoctor Faustus, Greene's Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*has said that the idea of magic as a black or evil art came with Christianity, for the Greeks regarded magical powers as the gift of the gods. Church authorities however spread stories of an unholy league between the evil powers and the men of knowledge who challenged orthodox doctrines.Whenever scientific pursuits appeared capable of challenging orthodox theology, especially in the Middle Ages, Church authorities spread suspicions of black magic. The Renaissance gave a tremendous boost to the pursuit of new knowledge and brought with it a new questioning spirit, thereby sharpening the conflict between orthodox Christianity and the tribe of freethinkers. Marlowe was one of the first writers in Renaissance England to perceive the potentialities of this conflict and his Faustus can, to an extent, be seen as an attempt to defy the limits imposed by orthodox Christianity on the pursuit of knowledge.

But the figure of Faustus was not entirely fictitious. There was a historical character named Georgius or Johannes Faustus, who was a travelling scholar and magician and whose public career extended from about 1510 to about 1541. In 1587 a German writer whose name we do not know compiled these stories in the book, *Historia von D. IohannFaustus*. An English writer, who is identified only by

the initials PF, prepared an English version with the long and didactic title, *The History of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus*, and this was the main source of Marlowe's play.

1.4.6 The Textual Problems

*Doctor Faustus*is one of the most problematic of Elizabethan play texts. It exists in two versions: the 1604 edition, referred to by editors as the A Text, and the 1616 version, known as the B Text. It used to be assumed earlier that the A Text (1517 lines), much shorter than the B (2121 lines), represents the play as Marlowe wrote it and that the 1616 edition contains some additions by William Birde and Samuel Rowley who were paid to do so in 1692 by theatre manager Philip Henslowe, whose *Diary*is a source of much invaluable information about Elizabethan drama. Most nineteenth century editors of *Doctor Faustus*considered the A Text more authentic. But some twentieth century scholars, notably W.W. Greg, have demonstrated that the B Text, despite its later publication date, represents the play, as it was originally conceived, and that Marlowe had a collaborator whose contribution was substantial and accounts for the length of the play. Greg concluded that the additions mentioned by Henslowe were best. But in subsequent Marlowe criticism the prestige of the A Text was somewhat restored, though most modern editions of the play are based on a careful study and comparison of both texts (see Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus***,** ed Kitty Datta, pp 2 5, for an extended discussion).

1.4.7 The Form

*Doctor Faustus*is too complex a work to be conveniently classified in respect of its form. The Elizabethan popular theatre assimilated many conventions from both the native English popular culture and ancient classical drama. The popular theatre of England in Marlowe's time and in the-not-so distant past absorbed a variety of forms such as dramatised folk tales, romances, Biblical stories, political satires, and allegorical plays concerned with the Christian doctrine. The last type of theatrical entertainment, known as the morality play, played an important role in the development of sixteenth century English drama. Indeed, literary historians believe

that the morality play is an element of great importance in many Elizabethanplays. *Doctor Faustus*is generally regarded both as one of the finest fruits of the English morality tradition and as the first great English tragedy.

The Prologue and Epilogue of *Doctor Faustus*assert an obviously moralistic reading of Faustus' career, although traces of an ambiguous treatment of Christian doctrine have been found by some critics in Marlowe's play. Nicholas Brooke in an interesting essay (**'**The Moral Tragedy of *Doctor Faustus*'**)** has argued that *Doctor Faustus*is an inverted morality play', since Marlowe has here deliberately inverted the normal morality pattern. Instead of heaven, his protagonist deliberately seeks hell and Satan. Whether Marlowe conceived of the tragedy as an endorsement of Faustus; rebellion against tyrannical divine authority, or whether he wanted his 'hellish fall' to be a warning example of the danger of practising 'more than heavenly power, permits' (Epilogue, ll.4 8), is still a debated question in Marlovian criticism. The very fact that such a controversy exists, coupled with the recognition of Marlowe's ambiguous treatment of his theme, in a way proves that *Doctor Faustus*is a genuine tragedy, for great tragedy always evokes a divided response.

Nevertheless, it is easy to detect in *Doctor Faustus* several features of the morality play. Faustus is visited periodically by a Good Angel and a Bad Angel who offer him suggestions true to their nature. Another typical morality feature is the appearance in Act V scene i of a character who is simply called the Old Man, in keeping with the morality practice of using generalised names, and whose function is, like that of a common morality figure, Good Counsel, to warn the central character of the dangers faced by his soul. The magicians, Valdes and Cornelius, who in Act I scene i paint magic and magicians in attractive colours to an already tempted Faustus may be regarded (Epilogue, ll.4-8) as typical morality tempters. In Act II scene ii the devils arrange for Faustus a show of the Seven Deadly Sins—Pride, Covetousness. Wrath, Envy, Gluttony, Sloth, Lechery—which are personified abstractions in the morality tradition. Again, just as the didactic themes of many morality plays are enlivened by broadly comic, sometimes bawdy, matter, *Doctor Faustus*contains a number of comic, even farcical, scenes which often parody the serious theme of the play.

But *Doctor Faustus* is also a great tragedy. It is possible to discern in *Doctor Faustus* elements of classical Greek tragedy which, like Marlowe's play, is concerned

with human pride as well as human accomplishment. In Greek tragedies generally human presumption or **hubris** invites the wrath of the gods. Faustus too is punished for his 'self conceit' (Prologue, l.20) which leads him to aspire to divine power. The pride which gives him a heroic stature despite his humble birth leads to his downfall. Finally, Marlowe makes Faustus the embodiment of the Renaissance thirst for knowledge infinite. Both extremes of Renaissance humanism—pride in the potentialities of man and despair at mankind's inherent limitations are dramatised through Faustus's career. Basically, Marlowe owed his allegiance to the Renaissance ideal of the tragic form and the Middle Ages' pattern of morality.

1.4.8 Structure: A Play without a Middle

The play is devoid of traditional act and scene division, but it consists of a series of scenes. Modern critics, however, choose to suppose that the play has a five-act structure in keeping with the usual concept and practice of other University Wits.

No discussion of the form of *Doctor Faustus* is complete without taking into account the dramatic function of the comic scenes. Many of these scenes were excluded from most nineteenth century editions of the play and as a result *Doctor Faustus* was left with a huge gap in the middle. This in turn gave rise to the critical opinion that it was a play without a middle. It was also believed that Marlowe was not responsible for these comic scenes. Most modern accounts of the plays however, insist that the comic scenes an integral part of the tragedy and that though Marlowe himself may not have written a few of these scenes, his collaborator was no doubt in tune with his overall plan.

We are, however, more concerned with the contribution of these scenes to the total effect of the work. It may be admitted that several of these scenes are written in pedestrian blank verse or uninspired prose and that the quality of the humour dished out by them is generally coarse and crude. But their dramatic importance is undeniable. These scenes solve the technical problem of filling the twenty-four years which pass between Faustus's signing of the bond with Mephastophilis and his terrifying last night on earth. But if these scenes were merely time filling they could not have much dramatic importance. The fact is that Marlowe traces through

the scenes a continuous theme which is at once intimately related to the main theme and supplies the middle of the play. In his source Marlowe found a number of incidents in the magician's life, incidents which were of an assorted nature and had little evidence of a main design. From them Marlowe selected those incidents which would keep up the suspense, which would exhibit character development and also hold a comic, occasionally distorting, mirror to the main tragic theme. In other words, he had to provide an appropriate dramatic middle.

From a structural point of view, the scenes in question provide a relief from the momentous nature of Faustus' choice of magic and his self assertion, his quest for knowledge and power, his dramatically gripping encounters with Mephastophilis and the other devils, as well as from the tragic intensity of his moments of conflict and repentance. The relief may even be seen as dramatic passage from the catastrophic confines of Faustus study, where much of the main action takes place, into the wide world of papal politics and that of the German Emperor's court as well as into the world of common people. What Faustus actually achieves in these scenes is woefully small, but the glaring contrast between Faustus' aspirations and his actual achievements is an important part of Marlowe's theme. When towards the end of his life Faustus looks back on his career and reaches self knowledge, what Aristotle would have called **anagnorisis** or recognition, he admits "For the vain pleasure of four and twenty years' hath Faustus lost eternal joy and felicity" (Act V, scene ii, ll.66 7). Instead of supposing that we are being presented with two Faustuses—the serious scholar and the ordinary magician—we should see here a decisive and inevitable change in Faustus' character brought on by the corruptions of power. In as much as the comic scenes progressively reveal change and development in the character of Faustus, they may be said to constitute a dramatic middle.

But there are other points of dramatic interest about the comic scenes. First of all, there is an element of ironic parody in some of these scenes, as when Faustus's servant Wagner adopts his master's academic jargon in his conversation with the scholars who want to know the where abouts of Faustus in Act I, scene ii, or when Wagner persuades Robin to sell his soul to the devil "for a shoulder of mutton" in Act I, scene iv. The echo of the main tragic theme is obvious in the comic scene, though it may be felt that, Faustus makes 'a much more impressive bargain with the devil, selling his soul for infinite power". The comic scenes in the tragedies of Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists, including Shakespeare, do not simply provide comic relief, but also throw an oblique light on the tragedy. The scholars' comments on Faustus's choice of magic in Act I, scene ii, (ll.29 37) represent the point of view of the university community by highlighting the unusual nature of his choice. There are other scenes in which Faustus himself

seems to indulge in gross parody of his earlier aspirations. All the mighty things he wanted to do with the help of magic (read carefully ll.52 60 and ll.78 96 in Act I, scene i) seem totally forgotten as Faustus performs cheap magicians' tricks, as in Act IV; scene i. In this scene he punishes Benvolio, who makes jokes about Faustus's magical power by making horns grow on his head. Here the titanic hero is an ironic shadow of his former heroic self.

Enough has been said to show that the comic scenes are not excrescences but an important part of the play's design. It is true that the idea of comic relief is never so artistic as it is in Shakespeare and sometimes it verges on crude horse-play and buffoonery. Of the fourteen scenes that we have in *Doctor Faustus*, there are five scenes in which burlesque, buffoonery and boisterous comedy are introduced. The main figures in the scenes are the coarse and uncultured people who are sharply projected against the intellectual world of Doctor Faustus. They frequently try to step into Doctor Faustus' shoes and are befooled in the end. But most of this is an echo of the source material—*The English Faust Book***.** These scenes restore our moral perspective by throwing critical light on a character for whom we might otherwise have felt too much sympathy. The comic scenes can also be linked to the dramatic tradition of the sub plot by seeing them as a parody of the main plot, a parody which has the effect of providing an ironic counterpoint to the main plot and this flaw thereby brings out clearly Faustus's fully. The comic scenes, which make up most of the middle of the play, are thus an integral part of the design of *Doctor Faustus***.**

1.4.9 The Main Themes

As we have already seen, *Doctor Faustus*accommodates different and divided insights. Orthodox critics, whom William Empson characterised as neo Christians, interpret the play in didactic and religious terms, as depicting the damnable life and inevitable downfall of a sinfully proud man who defies the Christian God. There is enough textual evidence to support this interpretation. The chorus presents Faustus as a man "swol'n with cunning, of a self conceit", who falls to "a devilish exercise" and "Surfeits upon cursed necromancy" (Prologue, ll . 20 25). In these lines the chorus implicitly compares Faustus with two figures of classical Greek myth, Daedalus and Icarus, father and son. The father made wings for his son and attached them with wax, but Icarus flew too near the sun so that the wax melted and he fell into the sea. Christians interpreted this myth as a prefiguration of the fall of Satan from excessive pride and as an allegory of the terrible price man must pay for challenging the power of God.

Those who interpret the play as a Christian document also point out other instances of Faustus's folly and sinfulness. Faustus's rejection of medicine on the ground that it does not enable the practitioner to raise the dead (Act I, scene i, l.25) reveals his blasphemous desire to be the equal of Christ. Faustus's rejection of other traditional disciplines in his opening soliloquy reveals his pride, for in each case his dissatisfaction is the result of his own self centred demands. M.M. Mahood maintains that Faustus is not only a bad Christian but a bad humanist as well, because he commits the "humanistic fallacy" of creating false barriers between God and mortals, barriers which will lead to the ruin of mankind **(Poetry and Humanism).** Others have pointed out instances of Faustus's cowardice, delusion, egocentricity and emotional and intellectual instability. All this would suggest that Marlowe presents Faustus as a self deluded fool. Other Christian and didactic themes have been discovered in the play. Thus,*Doctor Faustus*is seen as an inversion of the homiletic tradition of the saint's life, as seen in Faustus's career, the high points of which are conversion to evil, adherence to the devil rather than to God, performance of miraculous stunts and union after death with his great master Lucifer.

Doctor Faustus has also been seen as dramatising a problem of conscience which was topical and powerfully delineated in NathanielWoodes'morality play *The Conflict of Conscience*(1581)based on the spiritual biography of a sixteenth century figure, Francesco Spira. The Spira story highlights a typically Protestant problem—the inability to believe in the mercy of a god of anger—and this is often felt to be Faustus' problem too, in fact, there are a number of striking verbal parallels between *Doctor Faustus*and Woodes' play. The main theme in the latter work is that there is still hope for the soul of a man who is capable of fear, because fear is one of the means by which conscience operates, the other means being omens, premonitions and other inexplicable phenomena. The man who disregards and dismisses fear gradually experiences a hardening of his heart, such as Faustus does when he says, "My heart is hardened, I cannot repent" (Act I, scene ii, l.18). His condition can be compared with that of Shakespeare's Macbeth, another case of conscience, whose courage perversely manifests itself in his battle against moral terror. In the end, Macbeth resolves to make "the firstlings of his heart" the "firstlings of his hand". Similarly, Faustus claims to be "resolute" in his pursuit of black magic and goaded and bullied by Lucifer and his crew, dismisses his convulsions of conscience as signs of weakness. He also ignores omens and premonitions which are in his case as in Macbeth's, signs of the workings of conscience. Just as Macbeth sees a phantom dagger before him on his way to Duncan's sleeping chamber, Faustus has the hallucination that the words "Homo Fuge" (Fly O man) are inscribed on his arm. Macbeth's dagger and the inscription on Faustus's arm keep coming and going according to the states of their conscience.

Marlowe presents Faustus not simply as a self deluded fool and a case of conscience, but also as an aspiring titan. According to orthodox interpretations of the play, Marlowe not only presents Faustus's career and conflicts and moral dilemmas in Christian terms but also conceives his tragedy as a devout Christian world. This view fails to take note of Marlowe's ambivalent attitude to his protagonist and ignores the many powerful suggestions in the text of an opposite point of view. Marlowe also presents Faustus as a promethean figure whose tragedy lies in his self deluded courage and his doomed but heroic endeavour to master the secrets of the universe. The Epilogue speaks not only of Faustus' "hellish fall" but also of "the branch" that might have grown full straight in this man and of "Apollo's laurel bough" that is now burnt; both metaphors suggest great intellectual potential as well as its wanton destruction. Faustus's "longing for" a world of profit and delight, /Of power, of honour, of omnipotence" (Act I, scene i, ll.52 53) may be sinful from a Christian point of view but his aspirations are also those of the Renaissance man of ambition.

Clearly, it will be simplistic to regard *Doctor Faustus* only as a Christian morality play. It is true that there is a whole range of Christian allusions in the play, and suggestions of a Christian religious universe are pervasive, but it is also possible to see the Christian moral order as a system which offers no natural outlet for human aspirations, especially if those aspirations are of an unconventional kind. It is true that Faustus's aspirations are shown by Marlowe as inevitably leading to his damnation, but we need not see this merely as a just punishment for sinful ideas. Marlowe has also incorporated in his play the theme of rebellion and its suppression. The power which Faustus seeks and which is denied to him by a Christian dispensation may make him a subversive figure, but the language of subversion and control through which Marlowe presents the tragedy of Faustus implies that the dramatist's sympathies are not all for the Christian order. Faustus' visions of power and glory are universal and timeless, but they can also be linked specifically to the Renaissance mind. Faustus, humbly born like Marlowe's first hero Tamburlaine, not only achieves greatness but becomes the epitome of Renaissance aspirations. As Roma Gill has pointed out in her edition of the play, Faustus has all the divine discontent, the tireless striving after knowledge and power which marked the Renaissance mind. The adventurers of the Renaissance age of explorations were not only the sailors who undertook daring sea voyages and discovered new lands which would then be colonised but also the scientists and scholars who were constantly courting the spirit of scepticism. Another characteristic of the Renaissance mind was a conflict between orthodox Christianity and the intoxicating possibilities of new knowledge that were experienced by 'forward minds'. As a man of the Renaissance, Faustus experiences this conflict of ideas: his mind is half free and

half bound, neither wholly medieval nor completely modern and secular. He has mastered the study of medicine and can cure all diseases; the conquest of death in an age marked by an excessively high rate of mortality mainly because of recurrent epidemics, is the only new challenge for him. As a Renaissance humanist his chief concern is to extend the range of human achievement.

We also have the theme of magic in the play. In the exercise of his magical powers Faustus can be seen as an artist whose magical performances evoke spirits from the past, like those of Alexander the Great and Helen of Troy, and who entertains the audiences within and outside the play with spectacles. *Doctor Faustus* has been seen in this respect as Marlowe's portrait of the artist who is given twenty-four years to see what art can do. The play's ambiguous exploration of the forbidden art of magic may even represent Marlowe's view of his own art.

1.4.10 Some Important Passages Analysed

➢ Faustus's Opening Soliloquy, Act I, Scene I (ll.1 62)

The opening soliloquy shows Faustus debating with himself about the course of study he should follow. For him the all important question is what every branch of study has to offer him. He takes up Logic at first and describes the end of Logic. Since he already knows how to dispute well, he declares that his extraordinary intellect demands a greater subject. Faustus then examines Medicine, remembering Aristotle's saying that where the philosopher leaves off, there the physician begins. At first the study of Medicine seems an attractive prospect, because it suits Faustus's self aggrandising spirit: "Heap up gold, /And be eternized for some wondrous cure" (ll.14 15). But a moments reflection tells Faustus that he has already acquired great proficiency in the subject, curing numerous different diseases and even preventing the outbreak of epidemics. Despite all his great achievements Faustus cannot escape the melancholy recognition that he is still a man and nowhere near achieving God like power. The line, "Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man" (l.23), expresses despair at the limitations of human power. If only he could make men immortal and bring the dead back to life, says Faustus, he would have continued to practise medicine. Faustus's wish is blasphemous, for only Christ brought a dead man (Lazarus) backto life.

Faustus then takes up an examination of law. After quoting Justinian, the Roman Emperor who codified Roman law, Faustus declares that the study of law, though suitable for one who is willing to do an uninteresting job for the sake of money is too illiberal (i.e. ungentlemanly) for a man like him who is inspired

by the ideal of the liberal arts. Finally, Faustus takes up Divinity (or theology) a subject in which he has specialised. He quotes from the Bible but his quotations are grossly unfair to Christianity. By omitting significant words from his Biblical quotations Faustus is able to prove to his own satisfaction that Christianity insists on the sinfulness and inevitable damnation of man. He therefore begins to consider what magic has to offer him. He is fascinated by magical rituals but he is more fascinated by the power and delight which magic seems to promise. The way Faustus speaks of the power and wealth which magic will bring for him shows that he is motivated not simply by a thirst for knowledge but also by a desire for more materialistic benefits. He wants omnipotence, limitless power. The chorus and the scholar in Act I, scene ii (ll.29 31) tell us that Faustus has for some time been engrossed in necromancy.

➢ Faustus's First Encounter with the Devil, Act I, Scene III

As a result of Faustus's first performance of magical rites a devil makes his appearance and Faustus immediately asks him to go back and change his shape, for he is too ugly. Faustus even jokes that the shape of a Franciscan friar will suit the devil best and when the devil obeys his command Faustus congratulates himself for wielding such extraordinary power. The joke at the expense of friars comes at one of the most serious moments of the play and reveals a flippancy which often comes to the surface in Faustus's utterances. But the devil, Mephastophilis, is indifferent to Faustus's joke and soon tells him that Faustus's conjuring words did not bring him running from hell. The power of magic is essentially negative: it provides evidence that the magician's soul is ripe for damnation. Mephastophilis tells Faustus that he came of his own accord in order to obtain Faustus's 'glorious soul'.

Mephastophilis does not turn out to be a tempter on his first appearance. When Faustus wants to know more about Lucifer Mephastophilis tells him that though Lucifer was once "most dearly loved of God," he fell from heaven by "aspiring pride and insolence"—and that the other angels who were thrown out of heaven along with Lucifer are all "unhappy spirits". Those who find in *Doctor Faustus*traces of the Christian myth of Satanic pride find in this account of the fall of Lucifer an outline of the fall that Faustus is about to re enact. In answer to Faustus' question about the exact location of hell, Mephastophilis tells him that hell is not a place but a mental condition and that it is so frightening because it symbolises negation and deprivation. But Faustus is so convinced of the positive delights of hell that he refuses to accept even this testimony to the real horror of hell from an impeccable source. Mephastophilis'powerful speech (ll.78 84) presents

the idea of a hell marked by a complete lack of joy and hope. This idea of hell at once enriches the intellectual content of the play and nothing like this is to be found in Marlowe's source.

But the idea did not originate with Marlowe. St. Augustine saw hell as both mental and physical torment and Marlowe follows that tradition. In this speech as well as a later speech of Mephastophilis (Act II, scene i, ll.120-130) ideas of the immanence and subjectivity of hell, of its utter joylessness and despair are so forcefully expressed that they remain long in the memory. At the same time, in keeping with the play's structural pattern of opposing one idea with another, there is Faustus's utter indifference to the idea expressed by Mephastophilis. Ignoring the suffering of Mephastophilis and the devil's description of the terror of hell, Faustus tells him that he is ready to sell his soul to Lucifer. He even rebukes Mephastophilis for his weakness. WhenMephastophilis leaves, Faustus retains his earlier enthusiasm for the idea of selling his soul, indeed his enthusiasm has increased manifold, for he says that even if he had "as many souls as there be stars", he would give them all to Lucifer. He ends his soliloquy by elaborating upon his earlier fantasies of power, this time speaking of his wish to build bridges in the air, to cross the ocean with a band of men, to join the hills of Africa and link that continent with Spain and to have complete hegemony over Germany.

➢ Faustus' Address to Helen, Act V, Scene I (ll.99 118)

The appearance of Helen, in response to Faustus's request to Mephastophilis to have her as his paramour in order to "… glut the longing of my heart's desire," calls forth the most famous lines of verse in *Doctor Faustus***.** Helen appeared before, in the same scene, to the amazement of the scholars. who wanted Faustus to conjure up "that peerless dame of Greece" (ll. 11 36). On that occasion Faustus himself did not say a word, though the scholars were effusive in praising this paragon of beauty. Her re appearance prompts Faustus to immortalise her beauty in lines which have become some of the most immortal lines of poetry. The speech is an example of dramatic poetry at its most expressive and the main themes of the play are discernible in Faustus' passionate address. Several scholars have pointed out that this Helen is an evil spirit and that in making her his mistress Faustus is committing the sin of demoniality, that is, physical contact with a devil's agent. The romantic lover's cry therefore gains a dreadful irony when Faustus says, "Her lips suck forth my soul, see where it flies". Faustus is literally losing his soul through this last and most damnable pleasure of his magical career. That this is his most damnable pleasure is indicated by the dramatic patterning of the episode, which is framed on each side by the Old Man. Before the appearance of Helen, the Old Man was holding out to Faustus a hope of salvation, but after Faustus's declaration

"And none but thou shalt be my paramour," the Old Man concludes that Faustus is 'accursed' and there is no hope left for him.

➢ Faustus's Last speech, Act V, scene II (ll.135 193)

Faustus's last speech is one of the greatest last speeches in all drama; it is also Marlowe's most mature passage of dramatic verse. As John Jump has shown, it provides a sharp contrast to Faustus' speech to Helen. The earlier speech is a passage of more or less formal eloquence, while this speech develops flexibly and unpredictably. It is dramatic in the fullest sense because it vividly conveys the quickly changing moods and emotions of a man who knows that this hour is his last. Such is the power of Marlowe's dramatic poetry that the passage of an hour is indicated by 58 lines of verse which may at the most take ten minutes of speech but we hardly notice the discrepancy between stage time and actual time.

Faustus's last speech is structurally similar to his first soliloquy. As in the opening soliloquy, Faustus is contemplating a number of alternatives, and after considering each, rejecting them all. But there is a crucial difference, for Faustus is no longer thinking of a career for life, but looking for ways to escape a frightening death. Moreover, in the first soliloquy Faustus was carrying on an internal debate in an apparently logical progression; but here he is in the throes of utter despair. The similarity between the two soliloquies reminds us of the first decisive step taken by Faustus towards damnation. In Faustus's last soliloquy also, we feel the same presence of contradictory levels of significance that has characterised the play throughout. At one level, we feel more intensely than ever before the horror of Faustus's situation; at another level, we perceive the operation of an irony which has the effect of distancing us from the speaker.

The maturity of Marlowe's handling of dramatic verse is evident throughout and we may now look at a few examples of this. First of all, there is the masterly use of broken lines which, occurring throughout the speech, mark dramatic pauses. Secondly, there are the repetitions of single words which indicate emotional pressure. Thirdly, the use of monosyllables often has the effect of intensifying a sense of doom. In fact, most of the telling sentences in the speech are monosyllabic. A total of eleven monosyllables in the second and third lines of the speech, echo the eleven strokes of the clock after which the emphasis falls heavily on the polysyllabic word, 'perpetually,' which reinforces the horror of Faustus's situation. As for Marlowe's ability to make his verse enact physical movement, there is the famous line: "One drop would save my soul, half a drop. Ah, my Christ!" (l.149). This line enacts the physical movement of the speaker as he gropes for the blood that might redeem him. Further examples of Marlowe's versatility in Faustus's quotation of a line from

Ovid's*Amores*,which Marlowe himself translated thus in his Ovid's *Elegies***,** "Then wouldst thou cry, stay night, and run not thus" has always been recognised for its telling irony. In Ovid the lover wishes to prolong the night he is spending with his beloved, but here it is the doomed Faustus desperately trying to postpone time's inexorable movement towards midnight. A more poignant irony occurs towards the end of the speech when Faustus, after recognising the futility of his earlier attempts to escape the inevitable, begs to be transformed into an animal and even into inanimate things like 'little water drops'. The proud humanist who wanted to become a demi God, to assert the supremacy of man, now wants to forfeit his humanity. Again, Faustus wants his last hour to be extended to "A year, a month, a week, a natural day" but even as he asks for time to be extended, the verse movement and the words convey the impression of time contracting from a year through a month and a week, to a natural day. That he asks for the impossible is subtly indicated by the very language of his appeal: "Stand still, you ever moving spheres of heaven, /That time may cease and midnight never come." (ll.138 139). The ever moving spheres cannot by definition, stand still, nor can time ever have a stop. There are times when Faustus himself seems to recognise the impossibility of his prayers and then he movingly reduces his demands as in these lines: "Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years, /A hundred thousand and at last be saved. /O, no end is limited to damned souls" (ll.172 4). Faustus himself realises the futility of his prayer to set limits to time, for in the last of three lines time is extended to infinity.

1.4.11 Summing Up

To sum up, we can say that the play *Doctor Faustus* is highly complex, intertwining various themes. The major themes can be said to be–i) The Christian belief of punishment for the sins of pride and overweening ambition; ii) The crisis of conscience for a man who hardens his heart against the warnings of conscience; iii) The boundless aspiration of the Renaissance, which sought to go beyond the limits of orthodoxy in all realms of thought; iv) Marlowe's exploration of the magical possibilities of his own creative art.

1.4.12 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. How does *Doctor Faustus*dramatise the conflict between religious orthodoxy and new knowledge?

2. In what sense is *Doctor Faustus*both a moralityplayand a tragedy?
3. How are magic and power related in *Doctor Faustus*?
4. In what ways does Faustus reveal his antipathy to Christianity? Can *Doctor Faustus*be called an anti Christian play?
5. Can *Doctor Faustus* be interpreted as the tragedy of a man who wants to master the secrets of the universe for the sake of mankind?
6. Comment on the theme of Humanist aspiration as presented by Marlowe in *Doctor Faustus*. Is Marlowe's attitude to his protagonist ambivalent?
7. Do you agree with the view that the real meaning of *Doctor Faustus*is to be found in contradictions and ambiguities rather than in a simple statement of its theme? Give reasons for your answer.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. What innovations did Marlowe introduce to Elizabethan drama?
2. What are the distinctive features of the Marlovian tragic hero?
3. Give your views on the comic scenes in *Doctor Faustus*.
4. Compare and contrast the first and the last speeches of Faustus.
5. Analyse and comment on the morality play elements in *Doctor Faustus*.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Comment briefly on the textual problems of *Doctor Faustus*.
2. What concept of hell do we find in *Doctor Faustus*? Is it a traditional concept?
3. What are the terms of the agreement between Faustus and the Devil?
4. Which dead characters does Faustus conjure up and for whom?
5. From which source did Marlowe get the idea of his plot?

1.4.13 Suggested Reading

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Module-2
Shakespearean Drama

Unit-5 □ Shakespeare's World View

Structure

2.5.1 Objectives

After completing this Unit, the students are expected to:

- form an idea of what the term "world-view" signifies;
- understand the diverse ways in which the world-view of a novelist and a dramatist is interwoven in the text;
- recognize the world-view of Shakespeare in his dramatic works.

2.5.2 Introduction

The term world-view is a translation of the German word *weltanschauung* (*weltan* meaning "world" and *schauung*, "view"). Both Chris Baldick and J. A. Cuddon explain that as a literary term *weltanschauung* or world-view signifies the philosophy of life or attitude to the world held by an individual writer or the more general outlook shared by people in a particular age. In literary criticism it is generally believed that as the author of any work of literature imaginatively engages with characters, emotions, passions and incidents, the literary work must be permeated with an explicit or implied philosophy of life of the writer. Thus, the writer's outlook on the world, or a particular interpretation of life by the writer, is an essential element of a literary work. Without the writer's ethical vision of life of, a work of literature cannot rise above a journalistic piece of writing that has merely an ephemeral value. The greatness of a literary work depends on the depth and integrity of the writer's world-view that emerges from the treatment of the complex issues and concerns like politics, social problems, domestic life, gender, environment, religion and so on.

2.5.3 World-View in Novels

Matthew Arnold in his essay "The Study of Poetry" says that poetry is "a criticism of life … by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty", and through this imaginative critique of life the poets present their interpretation and outlook on human life. Similarly, the other literary forms also subtly embody the philosophy of life of the writers. According to W. H. Hudson, along with the plot, characters, time and place of action, and style, the philosophy of life of the writer is an important and essential element of a novel (Hudson 130-31). He does not, of course, suggest that the writer like a propagandist or a preacher uses the novel as a vehicle of a theory of life or illustration of some doctrines or ethical principles. The novel, after all, is not a "sermon", nor an "essay in philosophy", nor "a political pamphlet" (Hudson 168-69). But the conception of the characters and the incidents is certainly inflected by some underlying moral values. The great novelists, as keen and sensitive observers of life, weld their insights into human motives and their thoughts on life into a kind of philosophy about the human world. Thus, their outlook on life, consciously or unconsciously, influences their representation of characters and incidents in the novels. Therefore, the selection and organization of the material and construction of the characters and incidents will indirectly reveal the attitude and ideological position of the writer. Both the novelist and the dramatist may

express their interpretation of life and their world-view in this implicit way.

Moreover, the novelists may add their personal views and opinions on the motives and actions of the characters conceived by them directly in their own words. The flexible, diverse and somewhat amorphous form of the novel allows its practitioners to "intrude" into the narrative at certain points of the plot and express their views of human life. Henry Fielding and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay not only report but also comment on and evaluate and sometimes authoritatively express personal opinions about human life in general. Fielding goes even further: the first chapter each of the eighteen books of *Tom Jones* is an essay directly addressed to the reader containing the author's views on life and art.

2.5.4 World-View in Drama

The dramatists, unlike the novelist, cannot express their world-view directly and explicitly in their plays. The drama is an objective form literary art. It shows, and does not merely tell. The dramatist creates diverse characters and puts speeches in their mouths that will be most appropriate and suitable for the characters. The dialogues are taken to be those of the characters and not of the dramatist. So, it is difficult to put the playwright's own philosophy of life in clear rationally-structured propositions. In theory, the dramatists have to withdraw their personal views and beliefs completely from the world of their characters. Unlike the novelists, they cannot appear or intrude in their own person in the action of the drama. However, if we keep our mind open and not guided by any preconceived belief of the sacrosanct law of the objectivity or impersonality of the drama, we will observe that in practice, the dramatists often find ways to insert their philosophy of life in the "microcosm" constructed by them. We may discuss here some of these ways contrived by the playwrights to put forward their world-views.

2.5.4.1 The Chorus:

In classical Greek tragedy the Chorus often functions as the representative or mouthpiece of the poet. The Chorus in Greek drama consists of "a body of persons forming, as it were, a multiple individuality, moving, singing, dancing and continually interrupting the dialogue and the progress of action with their odes and interludes" (Hudson 231). The elaborate odes of the Chorus gave a predominantly lyrical character to the Greek tragedy. The whole action of the Greek tragedy from beginning to end takes place in presence of the Chorus. The Chorus observes what passes on the stage and expresses the emotions and impressions aroused by the action of the drama. It also highlights the general moral reflections that the dramatist

wishes to suggest to sympathetic and sensitive or ideal spectator. The Chorus thus may be regarded as the representative of the dramatist commenting, criticizing and balancing the multiple feelings or "world-view" that the writer wishes to suggest through the dramatic work.

The role of Chorus was gradually subordinated even in the Greek and Latin tragedy: it played an organic role in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, but in Euripides or in Seneca its relation to the action of the drama was less close and integral. Marlowe in *Doctor Faustus*, or Milton in *Samson Agonistes* employed the Chorus. But the use of the Chorus gradually decreased, and the appearance of the Chorus was rather rare in later English or European drama. Shakespeare used a single character as the Chorus in the beginning of each Act in *Henry V* and the play ends with a speech of the Chorus. T. S. Eliot revived the Chorus in his *Murder in the Cathedral* and *The Family Reunion*.

2.5.4.2 The Choric/Choral Character:

However, in many plays including those of Shakespeare we may find one character standing out and standing a little apart from the rest of the characters. The speeches of this character seem to carry an extra authority. This character appears to fulfil the function of the Greek Chorus as a commentator on the action and underlining the world-view of the dramatist. For this reason, such a character is often described as "the Chorus" or a choric character of that particular play. Even in novels such character/characters are found; for instance, the rustic group in Hardy's novel *The Return of the Native* fulfils such a function. The Fool in Shakespeare's *King Lear* or Enobarbus in *Antony and Cleopatra* may be considered to be such a character. The Fool with his comic songs, doggerel rhymes, irony and sarcasm, and paradoxical inverse-statements, he points out King Lear's follies, blindness and madness in dividing his kingdom and choosing the false daughters (Goneril and Regan) and rejecting the true daughter (Cordelia).

Thus, he functions as a truth-teller and as a tutor to King Lear's moral education through suffering. Enobarbus with his detached view of Cleopatra offers a balanced picture of the queen; on the other hand, his comments on Antony also indicate the degeneration of Antony under the influence of Cleopatra. With their insight and unbiased judgment both the Fool and Enobarbus appear to be closer to Shakespeare.

In what is called the thesis play one character is often observed to be acting like a philosophic spectator and expositor and formulating the meaning of the play on the writer's behalf. In Bengali Jatra plays the character known as the Vibek (Conscience) plays such a role. The French critics call such a character the *raisonneur*–literally "arguer", or argumentative character–"A character in a play who appears to act as a mouthpiece for the opinions of the play's author, usually displaying a superior or more detached view of the action than the other characters" (Oxford Reference/https://www.oxfordreference.com). However, we have to be very careful in designating a character as the chorus or *raisonneur*–only if the utterances of a character harmonize with the whole spirit of the play, and throws light on its meaning, he or she may be called such an expositor or chorus.

2.5.4.3 The Total Impression of the Play:

Every play is conceived and constructed as a complete whole, as a microcosm, by the dramatist. All the characters, whether fictional or modelled on historical figures, are the developed by the playwright according to their nebulous or well-formed plan of the work. So, the play in its totality may arguably be regarded as the projection of their imaginative vision, the embodiment of their political, social, and aesthetic feelings, intuitions, beliefs and convictions, in short, their world-views. Therefore, as W. H. Hudson says, "by carefully analyzing the total impression, intellectual and moral, which that work makes upon us, we shall gain a broad sense at least of the dramatist's underlying philosophy of life" (Hudson 258-59).

2.5.4.4 Imagery as Embodiment of the World-View:

Caroline F. E. Spurgeon believes that the personality, the innermost likes and dislikes, attitudes of minds and beliefs–"whether he be dramatist or novelist"–are revealed in his works particularly "in and through the images, the verbal pictures he draws" (Spurgeon 4). This is applicable to even Shakespeare who is almost entirely objective in his dramatic characters and their views and opinions. We shall discuss Shakespeare's personal philosophy as Spurgeon claims to have emerged through his imagery in a later section (See 2.5.5.5).

2.5.4.5 A Character both Dramatic and Subjective:

Adramatist sometimes drops their mask of impersonality and through the utterances of the dramatic character may voice their own thoughts. Hudson mentions Hamlet's words like "the proud man's contumely, the pangs of love, the law's delay"

and his lectures to the players on the art of acting and so on may be those of Shakespeare. So how can we determine which speeches of a character are dramatic and which are both dramatic and subjective, simultaneously expressing the mind of the character and the mind of the author? The utterances of a character with whom we are meant to sympathise or the occasional confessions of the villains like Edmund in King Lear, if they harmonise with the total spirit of the action, may be regarded as the innermost thoughts or philosophy of life of the dramatist.

2.5.5 Shakespeare's World-View on Major Issues

Shakespeare has nowhere expressed his personal views and convictions directly and explicitly. Even if he had done so, it might not have matched with the world-view that could be deduced from his *oeuvre*. The Shakespeare scholars have painstakingly studied the available material on his life and the social, political, economic and cultural conditions of his times. Based on such contextual and historical information, and the total impression of his dramatic works that the audience and the readers experience over the years, some scholars have attempted to surmise his outlook on the major issues that are relevant even in our time. It may be hoped that by exploring the attitudes to andperspectives on these major issues and concerns of the dramas, we may develop a structure or paradigm of Shakespeare's world-view or philosophy of life.

2.5.5.1 Shakespeare's Political Beliefs:

E. M. W. Tillyard describes the Elizabethan World Order in his books (*The Elizabethan World Picture* and *Shakespeare's History Plays*) was guided by a principle of order and hierarchy. According to this doctrine of cosmological order, the universe was a unity, in which everything is interconnected but everything has its place in a great chain of being. One should not attempt to rise higher than one's assigned place or "degree" in the chain. The order which prevails in the heavens is duplicated on earth. There is sequence of leadership. As God is the leader of the angels or all the works of creation, similarly the king was appointed by God as the leader in the state. So, a rebellion against the divinely sanctified king was regarded as an attempt to break the hierarchical order or degree, causing political chaos and the horror of civil war. The long speech of Ulysses in Shakespeare's play *Troilus and Cressida* elucidates the idea of the degree and also the catastrophe resulting from the violation of degree: "The heavens themselves, the planets and this centre/Observe degree…./O when degree is shaked, / Which is the ladder to all high designs,/The enterprise is sick!" (1.3.85-86, 101-03). Shakespeare's History

Plays particularly dramatise such a sequence of order, civil war, usurpation and/or murder of the king causing horrific disorder, followed by the restoration of order by a resolute man of action. These History Plays are pervaded by a fear of rebellion, betrayal, social and political turbulence, and regicide or murder of the monarch. Some of the major tragedies like *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear* and *The Tempest*, too, dramatise this fearful political turbulence. This has led to some critics to suggest that Shakespeare's "political philosophy was all on the side of the established order" (Halliday 407). Shakespeare seems to have not much faith on the behaviour and opinion of the common people in the political management of the state: he portrays of the Roman mob (who may be representative of the English mob) as fickle-minded, easily manipulated, violent andhaving no mind of their own.

However, recent scholars like Jonathan Dollimore refute such views. Dollimore argues that Tillyard's world picture "was not shared by all" (Dollimore 8) during that period; on the contrary, this idea of the "social hierarchy as a manifestation of Divine Law" (Dollimore 10) represented only the interests of the dominant ruling class but proffered as those of "the community as a whole"; and so, it was wrong "to present the existing social order as natural and God-given" (Dollimore 10). This picture was merely an attempt to "legitimate the existing social order or *status quo*– the existing relations of domination and subordination" (Dollimore 6). Secondly, the legitimation of the "existing social order–that is, existing social relations", asserts Dollimore, were an attempt "to efface the fact of social contradiction, dissent and struggle" (Dollimore 7). The emphasis on order was "in part an anxious reaction to emergent and (in)-subordinate social forces which were perceived as threatening" (Dollimore 8). As a matter of fact, the collapse of the pre-modern social order, unified Catholic Church, economic uncertainty and the rise of the subversive forces caused this demand for order. Shakespeare's plays also have evidences of the subversive challenges to the dominantpowers put up by those who were marginalized, suppressed and subordinate. This can be observed in the activities of the women indulging in cross-dressing in several plays to interrogate male superiority, and the resistance against the fake benign magus but in reality, the authoritarian imperialist Prospero demonstrated by characters like Caliban and Ariel in *The Tempest*.

2.5.5.2 The Relation between the Ruler and the Ruled:

Although it is presumed that Shakespeare did not support rebellion against the legitimate king, it also emerges from many of his plays that the monarch should also protect the poor, the homeless, the starving and the wretched people of his

kingdom; the rich should stop wallowing in luxury and instead extend kindness, material help and justice to the helpless. In the following lines King Lear confesses that he did not take notice the suffering of the poor naked houseless people:

> O I have ta'en/Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp,/Expose thyself to feel what the wretches feel,/That thou mayst shake the superflux to them/ And show the heavens more just [3.4., 32-36]

He advises the rich and powerful people ('pomp') to cure themselves of this lack of fellow-feeling and actually and empathetically undergo the same kind of painful experiences (as he himself was experiencing in the storm and the rain) and give up the unnecessary possessions ('superflux'). Giving the unnecessary wealth to the poor will show the heavens more just than we realize. Lear thus assumes responsibility for his poor subjects in his way to self-understanding as a ruler. The same thought is expressed again by the Earl of Gloucester:

> Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man/That slaves your ordinance, that will not see/Because he does not feel, feel your power quickly./ So distribution should undo excess,/And each man have enough. (*King Lear*, 4.1.62-66).

The Earl of Gloucester also recommends that the unfeeling, morally blind ruling class give up their excess wealth, and the unjust inequality will be eliminated by a redistribution of wealth and the poor and the wretched will have sufficient means to survive. The repetition of these ideas by two of the major characters of *King Lear* suggests that Shakespeare probably endorsed them.

2.5.5.3 Shakespeare's Views on Gender:

According to the hierarchical structure of society in Shakespeare's time, as the king was the head of the state, the father or husband was the head of the family. In this patriarchal structure, women were regarded as inferior to men. Young women could not choose their own life partners in marriage, the bridegroom was chosen by their father. Juliet was not allowed to marry Romeo. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Egeus, the father of Hermia, threateningly says, "As she is mine, I may dispose of her" (1.1., 42), and so either she will marry Demetrius, the man he has chosen for her, or she will be put to death. The Duke Theseus, says to Hermia: "To you your father should be as a god" (1.1., 47). King Lear refused to give any dowry to the person who agrees to marry Cordelia, as she refused to flatter her father. Both Ophelia's father and brother ask her distance herself from Hamlet, and give up the idea of marrying him. In *The Tempest*, regarding Miranda's marriage

to Ferdinand, the final decision is taken by her father Prospero. Women were also stereotyped as fickle-minded, deceitful, untrustworthy, ("Frailty, thy name is woman", as Hamlet says in *Hamlet*, 1.2., 146), and Gertrude is reviled by Hamlet as lustful; Goneril and Regan in *King Lear* are portrayed in similar manner.

But Shakespeare also challenged such oppressive patriarchal notions of his contemporary culture and portrayed many strong positive women characters in his plays. Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* defies her father's threat and declares that if she has to choose the life of a nun, she will do so–"So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord" (1.1., 79) rather than marry the man whom she does not love. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and Cordelia in *King Lear* reveal their intellectual discernment and depth firmness of conviction. Rosalind in *As You Like It* and Olivia and Viola in *Twelfth Night* demonstrate their resourcefulness and assertiveness. Many of these independent-minded young women, as noted by Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz et al, "declare or imply their submission to their husbands" (Lenz et al5). However, it may be argued that though this was done in order to satisfy the contemporary convention, such endings cannot completely make the audience or the readers forget the impression of intellectual and emotional strength of these women. The dramatic device of cross-dressing or disguise of male characters adopted by women is used by Shakespeare to disrupt the puritan and conservative social and gender norms. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and Rosalind in *As You Like It*, disguised as male, reveal great intelligence and courage, and thus prove that there is practically no distinction between male and female in terms of intellect and resourcefulness. Thus, we may observe that great artists like Shakespeare "do not necessarily duplicate in their art the orthodoxies of their culture; they may exploit them to create character or intensify conflict; they may struggle with, criticize, or transcend them" (Lenz et. al 4).

2.5.5.4 Shakespeare's Views on Colonialism:

Many plays of Shakespeare speak of big merchants like Antonio and their overseas trade (*The Merchant of Venice*), sea voyages for discovery and exploration of new places and the people who lived in those places but represented like Caliban as "savage", "monster", "strange beast" (*The Tempest*), Othello (a Moor, a black African or Arab), the Prince of Morocco and Shylock, the Jew (*The Merchant of Venice*) and Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen in *Antony and Cleopatra*. These references show Shakespeare's awareness of Britain's colonial enterprise and the racial and religious Other, and the notions of the superiority of the White Christians. There are evidences of the racism in Shakespeare's plays. Othello is a construct

of a stereotype of the black as irrational and evil. Anna Kurian points to how the postcolonial critics show *The Tempest* "offers a very clear depiction of a colonial takeover of a free space and the reducing of native peoples to colonial subjects" (Kurian 224). Similarly, Octavius Caesar's conquest of Egypt and its consequences in *Antony and Cleopatra* can also be interpreted as representing "England as a second Rome" and England's trade and conquest-via-trade as an example of its expansion of empire similar to that of Rome (Kurian 224-25). However, as in his gender representations, Shakespeare's attitudes to England's colonial project and to racial and religious Other are marked by complexity and ambiguity. His representation of Shylock and Othello also evokes sympathy in the minds of the audience for their cruel and perverted mistreatment by characters like Antonio and Iago respectively. Caliban is portrayed as talking back to the coloniser Prospero, putting up resistance to colonial domination and appropriation and revealing deep longing for freedom. Thus, we may say that Shakespeare's views on the intersection of colonialism and racism also interrogate, challenge and even subvert the dominant beliefs and practices of his age, but at the same time such thoughts are also of great interest and relevance in particularly present-day postcolonial countries.

2.5.5.5 Shakespeare's World-View: What His Imagery Reveals:

Caroline F. E. Spurgeon agrees with John Keats that Shakespeare "has no Identity", and thinks that any attempt to guess Shakespeare's personal views and thoughts from his "dramatic utterances" can be completely misleading. For Shakespeare like all imaginative artists "is with all his characters and feels with them all" and is "many-sided and of many moods" (Spurgeon 200). However, she suggests that reading his books helps us to form some general ideas about Shakespeare as a person: she argues that the evidences of the images suggest that Shakespeare is "most diversely-minded", "the sanest and most balanced of men", has "a free spirit" and "a sympathetic understanding of all varieties of human nature" (Spurgeon 201-202). Moreover, analyzing the data "embedded in his images" (Spurgeon 202), Spurgeon claims that Shakespeare "does not seem to have drawn any support from the forms and promises of conventional religion, nor does he show any sign of hope or belief in a future life" (Spurgeon 207). But Shakespeare shows "a passionate interest in life, and a very strong belief in the importance of the way it is lived in relation to our fellows, so that we may gain the utmost from the ripening processes of experience and of love" (Spurgeon 207). She elaborates this idea by adding that "by, in and for ourselves, we are nothing; we exist only just in so far as we touch our fellows, and receive back from them

the warmth or light we outselves sent out" (Spurgeon 207). Spurgeon identifies this "Christ-like" sense of fellow feeling, or what she also calls "the 'fructifying' quality of goodness … that affect, influence or delight others" (Spurgeon 170) as "the centre of Shakespeare's belief" (Spurgeon 207). This thought has been repeatedly expressed through many different voices and images, and so Spurgeon concludes that this is "the philosophy by which he instinctively guided his life and actions" (Spurgeon 209).

2.5.6 Summing Up

This Unit has attemptedtodefine the term "world-view" and has briefly explained the importance of the world-view or the philosophy of life of the writer for his literary productions. It discusses how the novelists may infuse their outlook on life and the world both implicitly or may choose to express their personal opinions and views life and art directly as 'intrusive' authors. As drama is an impersonal and objective art form, the dramatist cannot usually explicitly articulate their *weltanschauung* in their plays. However, in practice, there are several dramatic devices with which the dramatists can manage to put across their philosophy of life in their works. The chorus, the choric character, the imagery, and a character that functions both as a dramatic and subjective character upholding the author's views, are some of these devices. Above all, the total impression made by the play on the minds of the audience or the readers may also indicate playwright's the philosophy of life. Then Unit then tries to examine Shakespeare's views on his contemporary political system, the relation of the ruler with the common citizens, ideas on gender, and the newly initiated colonization of non-European regions and the people inhabiting those lands, and in this way makes an attempt to present an informed sketch of Shakespeare's philosophy of life as expressed in his dramatic oeuvre.

2.5.7 Comprehension Exercises

Long-Answer Type Questions:

1. How would you define the term "world-view"? Why and how do novelists express their world-views in their fictional works?
2. Discuss the different ways in which dramatists may infuse their world-views in their theoretically objective form of art.

3. Briefly discuss Shakespeare's outlook on life as may be deduced from his plays.
4. Do you think Shakespeare's plays reinforce and consolidate the hierarchical ideas of 'degree' and order of his time? Answer with reasons.
5. Comment on Shakespeare's views on the colonialism and the colonized Other, as inscribed in his plays.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Explain the role of the Chorus in Greek drama.
2. Elucidate the role of the choric or choral character in drama.
3. Analyse Shakespeare's views on the relation between the monarch and the common people.
4. Write a short note on Shakespeare's thoughts on woman's status in society and family.
5. Can any evidence of challenge and resistance be discerned in the dramatic works of Shakespeare?

Short-Answer Type Questions:

1. Give the German term which is translated as "world-view".
2. What does the term "degree" signify in Elizabethan world picture?
3. Name a play of Shakespeare that employs the Chorus as a character.
4. Explain the role of the *raisonneur*.
5. Briefly comment on the term "the racial Other".

2.5.8 Suggested Reading

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Unit-6 □ William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*

Structure

2.6.1 Objectives

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners are expected to:

- Understand William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, its historical and canonical context, its themes, structure and style, characters, and importance of certain scenes of the play
- Understand Shakespeare's use of imageries, supernatural elements, and the intense psychological probe to which he subjects the characters.

2.6.2 Introduction

In the earlier Units of this Module, you have read about the ironies and politics associated with kingship in the plays of Christopher Marlowe. You are

also aware you're your reading of the contemporary History of Literature how the plays of Marlowe and other University Wits paved the way for the mature genius of Shakespeare the playwright to flourish. In this Unit, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* introduces you to an entirely different set of complications arising out of heedless ambition for royal power, the conflagration it causes in the land, and of course the nemesis (retributive justice) of it all.

2.6.3 A Brief Note on Shakespeare's Life

Baptized on 26th April 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, about a hundred miles northwest of London, William Shakespeare is perhaps the most admired and best-known playwright in the world. His birth date like many of the facts of his early life, not being confirmed is surmised to be the 23rd April which is also the date of his death. William was the third child among eight siblings and the eldest surviving son of John and Mary Shakespeare.

It is again a matter of surmise that the young Shakespeare attended the Stratford Grammar School acquiring, according to the curriculum of the day, knowledge of Latin grammar and the classics. At the age of eighteen he married Anne Hathaway who was twenty-six at the time. Their daughter Susanna was born on 26th May 1583. This birth was followed by the birth of twins–son Hamnet and daughter Judith–two years later. Hamnet died at the age of eleven of unknown causes.

There is no proven record of Shakespeare's life from the year 1585 to 1592. It is believed that during this time he found his way to London where he performed various menial chores including holding horses at the stage door. Shakespeare's name next appears as that of a rising actor in the tumultuous literary and theatrical scene of Elizabethan London. The 1592 reference to Shakespeare in Robert Greene's *A Groatswoth of Wit* as "an upstart crow…in his own conceit the only Shakescene in the country" points to the growing status of the dramatist who had become important enough to rile his colleagues, and inspire acrimonious criticism.

Shakespeare's name which is officially entered in 1595 in the payroll of the Lord Chamberlain's company of actors testifies to his active participation in it where he was the principal actor and manager. With the accession of King James to the English throne and his subsequent award of a royal patent to this company

its name was changed to the Kings' Men. In 1599 some of the members of the company built their own theatre on the south bank of the Thames which they called the Globe theatre. Shakespeare was closely associated with the Globe theatre of which he was part owner.

Shakespeare was the literary genius who, according to John Dryden, "of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul". Not unexpectedly he left behind him a prolific canon comprising comedies, tragedies, history plays of the English Tudor dynasties as well as of the Roman traditions, the so-called 'problem plays' and the last plays with their typical blend of light and shade making it difficult to classify them in a particular genre. Shakespeare wrote 38 plays in all, 154 sonnets, and three narrative poems, 'A Lover's Complaint', 'Venus and Adonis' and 'The Rape of Lucrece'.

The great tragedies *Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth* and *King Lear* represent the very peak of Shakespeare's achievement in the sphere of tragedy. Displaying a subtle insight in the workings of the human psyche, and expressing a range of emotions through characters powerfully wrought these plays articulate the most profound philosophy in sublime phraseology.

Shakespeare, for the most part, divided his time between Stratford and London. In London he changed addresses a number of times moving from Bishopsgate to Southwark and thence to an area north of St. Paul's Cathedral. Around 1597 he bought a large house–New Place-in Stratford. Shakespeare retired to Stratford in 1610 and it is likely that he wrote his last plays there. However, he continued to visit London from time to time. His connection with his company of actors suffered somewhat when the Globe theatre was burned down in a fire in 1613. Shakespeare died on 23rd April 1616 and was buried in the chancel of the Holy Trinity Church two days after his death.

2.6.4 The Date and Text of the Play

The manuscripts of all the plays by Shakespeare have perished and he himself did not print any of his plays. The quarto editions of sixteen of his plays were not authoritative texts. The thirty-six plays in the *First Folio* edition of 1623 have been generally accepted as Shakespeare's plays. Given the circumstances it is difficult to

pinpoint a specific date for the composition of the play *Macbeth*. The extant text is poorly preserved and bears evidence of several revisions. Most critics, however, agree that the play was written between 1603 and 1606. There is a general reluctance to place it earlier as it is widely perceived to be a royal compliment to the Stuart James who ascended the English throne in 1603.

The predominance of Banquo in the plot of the play (an ancestor of King James), the show of eight kings supposedly the descendants of Banquo afforded to Macbeth in a vision by the witches among other such details have been strong arguments for locating the play within the mentioned span. Though some editors have sought to assign a more specific date to the play, such as 1605-1606 mainly because of the references to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 and the subsequent trials their theory has not been able to win wide acceptance.

Based on Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* of 1577 (the revised edition of 1587-88 being the version that the dramatist probably consulted) William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth* was first published under the title *The Tragedie of Macbeth* in the First Folio of 1623. It was registered in the books of the Stationers' Company on the 8th of November 1623, by Blount and Jaggard, the publishers of the folio, as one of the plays "not formerly entered to other men". Certain references in the play suggest that either the play was written after 1603 or that those portions or lines were incorporated later. The allusions to the king's Evil (iv: iii) and to the two-fold balls and sceptres of Banquo's descendants (V: i) whether as flattering images of the new monarch or as simply topical references must surely have been written after James I's accession to the English throne. In the same way the allusions to equivocation in II: iii and to the hanging of the traitors in IV: ii must have been inspired by the controversies generated by the Gunpowder Plot of 1605. These lines were probably written after the trial and hanging of father Henry Garnet, Superior of the Order of the Jesuits for his role in the Gunpowder Plot. He was tried on 28th March 1606 and hanged in May the same year. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that these references were incorporated in the latter half of 1606. However, there appears to be a clear consensus that the play could not have been composed later than 1607 as there are unambiguous allusions to it from 1607 onwards.

The two performances of the play, one in 1606 and the other at the Globe Theatre in 1611 were both different from the published text of 1623 which

contains passages which could not have existed in the prompt books for the early performances. J.G. McManaway contends that the play was performed on 7 August 1611 at Hampton Court for King Christian of Denmark and James I of England. The performance of the play in 1611 in the Globe Theatre is the first one of which there is written record one Simon Forman having witnessed the same and written of it in his manuscript The Bocke of Plaies and Notes thereof per Formans for Common Pollicie.

2.6.5 Sources

It appears that Shakespeare drew on two main sources for his play *Macbeth*. The most extensive debt is to Raphael Holinshed whose *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland* of 1577 (revised in 1587) was an important source for Shakespeare. Also useful for the playwright's purpose was George Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historia* which traces the history of Scotland from the time of the mythical Fergus.

Shakespeare's free handling of the historical materials in Holinshed's *Chronicles* in composing *Macbeth* provides an idea not only of the forces at work around and upon him at the time but also the cultural and aesthetic concerns that must have governed the selection, compaction and modification of his source materials. Shakespeare's two main sources in Holinshed are the murder of King Duff by Donwald and his wife in 967 AD and Macbeth's usurpation of the Scottish throne by murdering King Duncan around 1040AD. Not only are the two events separated by seventy years each covers a number of years. The two chronologically distant episodes, with their respective complication of action have been merged into a single intense and swift event by the dramatist, and the protagonists of the two separate developments have been given the composite character of the person we know as Shakespeare's Macbeth.

In *Holinshed* King Duff is an ailing insomniac who sends his trusted servant Donwald on a search for the cause of his malady. A number of rebels, several among them being the kinsmen of Donwald had been conspiring against King Duff even to the extent of seeking supernatural help and indulging in practices such as having his effigy burnt. Upon destruction of this waxen image King Duff regains his health and celebrates his return to the same by making a spectacle of

the hanged rebels. However, Donwald whose pleas for clemency for his relatives in the treasonous plot had gone unheeded by Duff began to go against the king and, incited by his wife to take the life of the king had his servants murder him and remove his body when the latter came to stay at his castle.

Jonathan Goldberg in his essay 'Speculations: Macbeth and Source' observes, "Both Duff and Donwald are versions of Macbeth". Such dispersal of identity is accentuated if you consider that King Kenneth who succeeded King Duff by killing the latter's heir to the throne suffered from a troubled conscience and sleeplessness and was prone to hearing 'voices', calling up inevitable comparisons with Macbeth who had murdered sleep. Further, like Macbeth, Kenneth is prophetically informed that his nominated heir will not succeed to the throne. Thus, Shakespeare's Macbeth who is already a complication of two distinct persons/personae–namely, King Duff and the historical Macbeth–acquires further shades in his identity in the glancing similarities with Donwald and King Kenneth.

In the historical account you will find that Macbeth was personally afraid of Banquo's moral stature despite the latter's complicity in the murder of Duncan just as he sensed a challenge to his authority in Macduff whom he consequently began to hound. In Holinshed's ***Chronicles*** Macbeth has a genuine grievance against Duncan in that he had been overlooked by the king who named his eldest son as his heir and successor when in point of fact he, Macbeth had been nominated monarch by the thanes. Also, Macbeth could apparently lay claim to the throne through his wife and her son by an earlier marriage. Moreover, both Duncan and Macbeth were the grandsons of Malcolm II, the former being the son of his daughter Beatrice and the latter being the son of his other daughter Doada both of whom had married into the Scottish nobility. Thus, Duncan and Macbeth were, in effect, cousins. The familial relationship is invoked early in the play when Duncan refers to Macbeth as "Valiant cousin" (I ii) and "peerless kinsman" (I iv).

Holinshed's Macbeth invites Banquo and his son Fleance to a dinner having instructed hired assassins to kill them as they returned to their lodgings. Not only was the order of events inverted in Shakespeare's play, the scale of the social gathering was much larger, it being a well attended banquet. In the ***Chronicles*** Macbeth murdered Banquo after a considerable lapse of time since his murder of Duncan. With the contraction of time, in Shakespeare's play, and the subsequent omission of any references to Macbeth's long rule as an efficient king, the stability

and authority of the ruler are suspect and the vulnerabilities of the king and queen in the banquet scene are only too evident. The appearance of the ghost of Banquo in the banquet scene was Shakespeare's invention.

Shakespeare's play conforms to its main source in a number of ways. In Holinshed the king was a sacred guest at Donwald's castle whom he had lately showered with gifts. Thus, in both texts one sees the triple transgression of the code of honour when Donwald/Macbeth turns upon his fellow human being, his hallowed guest and revered king. Just as Donwald had killed King Duff at the instance of his ambitious wife ("being the more kindled in wrath by the words of his wife") so also Macbeth had been goaded to commit the evil deed by his wife, "chastised" as he had been by "the valour of her tongue". However, while in Holinshed's narrative the murder of the king is carried out by Donwald's servants in Shakespeare's play it is the host and subject himself who steels himself to commit the act.

What was recorded as an open conspiracy in Holinshed is transformed by Shakespeare into a secret regicide. Significantly while Banquo was an accomplice in the historical record in Shakespeare's play he has been absolved of any explicit role in the murder. Understandably in a play that has been largely seen as a royal compliment Shakespeare could not have risked an unfavourable depiction of Banquo who was an ancestor of James I. Shakespeare has significantly altered the character of Duncan from that of a young and weak ruler to that of an old and saintly one thereby compounding the onus of guilt on Macbeth, and making the regicide (at any time most heinous) seem all the more unjustified and sacrilegious.

The sleep-walking scene, so moving in its emotional effects, is Shakespeare's invention. The reference to Lady Macbeth's presumed suicide belongs to the same category as there is no mention of the fate of either Donwald or Macbeth's wife in the *Chronicles*. In Holinshed Lady Macbeth is mentioned only once as the dominating wife who abets her husband to murder the king that she may become queen. Thereafter there is no mention of her.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* betrays signs of indebtedness in the situation and development of its title character to Richard III as the protagonists of both plays commit heinous crimes to usurp and retain their thrones. It is not surprising that both these plays are regarded as the most Senecan of all the plays by Shakespeare. It is fairly clear that Shakespeare had read *Tenne Tragedies* that had been translated by Heywood and others and had been influenced by some of the actions, themes

and speeches in that work. The escalating violence and bloodshed in *Macbeth* bear testimony to the characteristic traits of the Senecan tradition. Lady Macbeth particularly has echoes of Clytemnestra and Medea. In the scene in which she invokes the evil spirits to attend upon her, and again when she cries out with apparent nonchalance that she could dash out the brains of her infant one sees in her the unmistakable imprint of Seneca's Medea.

The constant subversion of the moral and political order and its reflection in the cosmic and natural worlds shown in the play link it to the medieval tradition with its belief in the divine right of kings. While some critics have tended to establish *Macbeth's* affinities with the mystery play and 'the harrowing of hell' through the Porter's speeches others, notably Howard Felperin locate its kinship with the 'tyrant plays' within the medieval liturgical drama.

2.6.6 The Play

Macbeth is the last of Shakespeare's four great tragedies the others being *Hamlet, King Lear* and *Othello*. Often assessed as one of Shakespeare's darkest plays, *Macbeth* explores the pathology of evil tracing the consequences of unbridled political and worldly ambition on the part of its protagonist. The degeneration of the eponymous protagonist from "Bellona's bridegroom" to "dead butcher" is one of the most powerful trajectories of moral decline in all Shakespeare allowing no scope whatsoever for deceleration of the fall. Nor is there any hope of redemption for the protagonist who changes radically and violently in the course of the developing action. Whereas the other great heroes of Shakespeare's tragedies have had their humanity, to some extent reclaimed and reaffirmed by characters dwelling on some aspect of their nobility or the other, in Macbeth's case the stark epitaph delivered by Malcolm, "This dead butcher and his Fiend-like queen" sums up the intensity of moral negation that the former had come to represent and inspire in the turbulent terrain of medieval Scotland as also the absolute rejection that is meted out to him.

Yet, it is also true that countering the forces of evil in the play are the positive energies that are repeatedly emphasized in the interest of a moral balance without which it would have been difficult to preserve the integrity of Shakespeare's larger political, social and moral vision. The "saintly" Duncan whose absolute trust in his subject, kinsman and host was so brutally betrayed; the young heir to the

throne Malcolm possessed of the ideal virtues of a king who eventually returns to his realm to claim his birthright; the morally upright Banquo who refused to succumb to temptation; the brave and honest Macduff who served the nation with the utmost fidelity (to the point of sacrificing his family); and the stripling Siward who went down fighting for his country are without exception examples of goodness and valour that consistently try to resist the evil epitomized and unleashed by Macbeth instigated by his wife and the three Weird Sisters. Thus, though the play is titled after the protagonist, as learners, you will have to carefully study the other characters too in course of your perusal of the text of *Macbeth*.

As has been pointed out by Kenneth Muir in his Introduction to the Arden edition of *Macbeth*, nowhere is the good more evident than in the primary natures of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth who have both consciously and unconsciously suppressed it and have deliberately opted for its opposite only to fall prey to the fears and pangs of conscience that frequently attend the perpetration of evil. The following lines will give you a brief outline of the plot of the play–that is to say, the linear progression of the tragedy.

The story as it unfolds shows Macbeth and Banquo, generals in King Duncan's army returning from the battlefront after subduing a rebellion when they are confronted by three ambivalent figures roughly identifiable as witches. Their greeting of Macbeth as the Thane of Cawdor (which he is not at present) and Macbeth's subsequent discovery that the title had indeed been conferred on him set in motion a train of events that leads Macbeth to murder his king Duncan, usurp the throne, and lead the realm of Scotland on a series of misfortunes. All the while, notice how the mayhem in Scotland finds a parallel to the degenerating fortunes of Macbeth. While reading the text you should also be able to mark a contrast between Macbeth and Banquo, both of whom the witches addressed simultaneously. Logically, while both should have been driven by the same ambition for supreme power; Banquo (as long as Macbeth allows him to stay alive) follows a course that is distinctly different from Macbeth's.

Duncan's sons, Malcolm and Donalbain flee the country, the former to England and the latter to Ireland in order to escape an attempt on their lives. Though this first crime is committed by Macbeth after an anguished struggle with his conscience, the ones which follow are perpetrated by him without any apparent evidence of

scruples on his part. Spurred on by ambition and haunted by mounting insecurity he becomes a tyrant reducing Scotland to a realm echoing with injustice and horror.

Obsessed with retaining the crown for himself and his descendants, Macbeth hires assassins to murder Banquo and his son Fleance. Fleance manages to escape while Banquo is killed by the murderers. In conspiring thus Macbeth indeed stoops very low and betrays the rapid pace of his moral degeneration. He who had once been described by his wife as being "too full of the milk of human kindness/To catch the nearest way", succumbs to temptation and ambition, and is sucked into a spiraling movement of violence and murder of which he in a sense, is both author and victim.

Macbeth's conscience suppressed by him surfaces in the Banquet Scene which immediately follows the murder of Banquo and he imagines he sees the latter's ghost. He becomes progressively more disturbed every time he hallucinates this spectral figure and loses all control over himself thereby laying himself open to suspicion. The feast is thrown into disorder and the guests are asked to leave by Lady Macbeth. By the end of this scene the protagonist has degenerated to such an extent as to claim, "For mine own good/All causes shall give way: I am in blood/ Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more,/Returning were as tedious as go o'er".

Anxious to wield absolute control over his subjects and also to ensure that the throne is kept within his dynasty or his nominated heirs Macbeth meets the Weird Sisters in an attempt to know the future, and to learn, once and for all the direction of his fate. The equivocating agents of fate play with Macbeth's credulity exploiting his ambitious nature that is so susceptible to temptation. They set him up in hope with false promises while actually prophesying his disaster. When confronted with the vision of the eight kings, the last with a glass in his hand, Banquo following, Macbeth realizes bitterly that he had murdered Duncan in vain and that, if the visionary show is to be believed though Banquo himself could not be crowned king his descendants would be kings.

This show of a line of kings tracing their ancestry to Banquo so unsettles Macbeth that he vows to remove his enemies as soon as he begins to doubt their loyalty. Consequently, he announces in Act IV: Sc. ii, "From this moment/The very firstlings of my heart shall be/ The firstlings of my hand", and wastes no time

at all in despatching murderers to Macduff's castle in Fife who mercilessly kill Lady Macduff and her children. With this last inhuman violation, the tide turns against Macbeth and time begins to run out for the tyrant. Macduff who had gone to England to persuade Malcolm to return to Scotland, to save it from the tyrant receives the devastating news of the murder of his wife and children by Macbeth and, coping with his grief, resolves to return at once to Scotland and militarily confront the "Hell-kite" responsible for such an irreparable loss to him.

Shortly afterwards when in Act V: Sc. v Macbeth is given the news that Lady Macbeth is no more, he merely remarks, "She should have died hereafter:/There would have been a time for such a word" betraying his complete indifference to her who had once been so close to him. Once addressed as "dearest chuck", "dearest partner of my greatness", and "sweet remembrancer" by her husband, Lady Macbeth at the time of her death has ceased to have any meaning at all in Macbeth's life. As Kenneth Muir points out, "Macbeth's first crime is inspired by ambition and carried through by his wife's determination, the remainder, from the murder of the grooms to the slaughter of Macduff's family and the reign of terror of which this is an example are inspired by fear, fear born of guilt". Macbeth's alienation from those around him becomes clear as the forces opposed to his tyranny rally around Malcolm who, reinforced with the soldiers lent by the English king begins to march towards the tyrant's castle at Dunsinane.

In the conflict that ensues Macbeth learns of the witches' equivocation and realizes that he had been betrayed by them thereby losing the remnants of faith and hope. However, he shows his characteristic martial spirit and mettle when confronted by Macduff and goes down fighting. Macbeth's severed head is carried by Macduff as a trophy calling up comparisons with the head of the traitor Macdonwald that had been triumphantly brandished by Macbeth during the illustrious phase of his career early in the play.

2.6.7 Themes in the Play

Now you will be guided to an overview of critical opinions on *Macbeth* down the years. L, C. Knights speaking of the two main themes in *Macbeth* identifies them in his essay 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?' (1933), describing them as the themes of the reversal of values and that of unnatural disorder. The

inversion of moral values articulated by the Weird Sisters is adopted by Macbeth who becomes an antithesis of all the features that are associated with an ideal monarch. The scenes of disorder in the play reinforce the twisted moral values that drive its plot.

Alan Sinfield in his 1986 essay '*Macbeth*: History, Ideology and Intellectuals' distinguished between what he calls legitimate state violence and gratuitous evil in the play. The putting down of the traitors by Macbeth in the beginning of the play would qualify, according to Sinfield as legitimate violence sanctioned by political necessities while the later eruptions during the period of ruinous rule under Macbeth would belong to the illegal variety being utterly unjustified by any cause of state or society.

Among other critics on political disorder in *Macbeth*, Barbara Riebling emphasizes the sinister manipulations for power carried out by the protagonist. In her 1991 essay "Virtue's Sacrifice: A Machiavellian Reading of *Macbeth*" she maintains that Shakespeare studies in the mentioned play the consequences of misrule in a Machiavellian context.

Several critics including Janet Adelman and Jarold Ramsey have seen gender roles as one of the organizing themes of *Macbeth*. Ramsey in his essay 'The Perversion of Manliness in Macbeth' argues that the more Macbeth pursues his ideal of manliness the less humane he becomes till at length he completely surrenders his humanity to realize that his very notion of manhood had been a flawed one. According to Ramsey as the play develops Macbeth's "moral degeneration is dramatized as a perversion of a code of manly virtue so that by the end he seems to have forfeited nearly all of his claims on the race itself".

Janet Adelman, a psychoanalytical feminist critic in her essay "'Born of woman': Fantasies of Maternal Power in Macbeth" (1985) shows how maternal power in its most potent and destructive form is projected in the play through the figures of Lady Macbeth and the three witches as they manipulate the protagonist and plant the seeds of ambition in his mind.

Jane A. Bernstein in her 2002 essay "'Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered': Lady Macbeth, Sleep-walking and the Demonic in Verdi's Scottish Opera" adds to this line of thinking when she asserts that *Macbeth* "is loaded with sexual ambiguity: the bearded sisters, a murdered king as 'passive female victim' which among other

such instances lead to border-crossings that constantly challenge traditional notions on gender". William T. Liston in his 1989 essay "'Male and Female He Created Them': Sex and Gender in *Macbeth*" emphasizes the presence of a gendered space in *Macbeth* arguing for the preservation of traditional ordering believing that any deviation from it by men and women leads to the loss of their humanity.

H.R. Coursen who in his 1985 essay adopts a Jungian approach to assess the relationship between Macbeth and his wife is close to the theory of one partner complementing and completing the other. He finds in their mutual interchange of qualities normally attributed to the opposite sex a phenomenon that actually fulfils the gaps in their essential selves. It is Lady Macbeth who in II;ii had confidently proclaimed after the murder of Duncan, "A little water clears us of this deed". Ironically in the sleep-walking scene she is shown to be rubbing her hands in a compulsive and symbolic gesture to rid her soul of the stain of murder that has mentally unhinged her. "Out damned spot! out I say!" she cries out in her anguish. She who had allied herself with the powers of darkness needs to have light continually by her as she cannot bear to remain in darkness for any length of time.

It is Macbeth who has the hallucination of the dagger and, as Freud had pointed out it is Lady Macbeth who falls prey to mental illness. In II: ii after the murder of Duncan Macbeth had rued, "Will all great Neptune's Ocean wash this blood/ Clean from my hand?" and in V: I it is Lady Macbeth who laments, "Here's the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand". The pangs of conscience having been inordinately active in Macbeth following his murder of Duncan he had cried out in II: ii, "Glamis hath murther'd Sleep, and therefore Cawdor/Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more". And yet it is not he but Lady Macbeth who has forfeited sleep. In V: I she rises from her sleep, and talking in her sleep betrays her guilt.

2.6.8 Structure and Style

A tragedy in five Acts, *Macbeth* is the shortest among the tragedies by Shakespeare. Most editors agree that the text of the play has suffered numerous cuts, additions and alterations. It appears to have emerged from the prompt book or a version of it prepared for the printers. You will notice that the pace of the

action has been varied as long scenes are interspersed with short ones, intense scenes by lighter ones, and scenes of action with those of reflection. Also, the time-frame of the historical action has been condensed where considered necessary by Shakespeare.

In a telescoping of time the three invasions of Scotland mentioned in Holinshed, namely that by Macdowald and his "kerns and gallowglasses", by Sueno and his Norwegians, and by Canute's Danes in revenge for Sueno's defeat are combined by Shakespeare into one important battle in Act 1: Sc. i of the play.

In much the same way the decade of beneficent rule by Macbeth between the murder of Duncan and that of Banquo is scarcely alluded to by Shakespeare while his seven years of tyrannical excess are highlighted and communicated through a few brief and volatile scenes. This lack of shading in the delineation of Macbeth's character detracts from the psychological credibility of the same in Shakespeare's play.

The unfinished, sometimes abrupt sequence of scenes and the general structure of the play owe their unusual brevity and sharp transitions to numerous cuts, excisions, and truncations to the rough and ready exigencies of a prompt book for a particular performance. Thematic and plot compulsions, too, have contributed to the conspicuous brevity of the text. The fast pace of the action along with the lack of development of any but the main character has succeeded in highlighting the rise and fall of the protagonist that is as accelerated as it is stripped of all but the essentials.

Clusters of images, as shown by Caroline Spurgeon, enforce a sense of pattern in the rhetorical ordering of the play. While images of unnatural disorder form one group, clothing imagery constitutes another. Images pertaining to darkness, hell and blood form other recognizable categories. In II: iv after the murder of Duncan you hear of a falcon that had been attacked and killed by a mousing owl and how Duncan's horses had run wild in a fit of frenzy. Macbeth's clothes by the end of the play "hang loose about him like a giant's robe/Upon a dwarfish thief". He is the tyrant who is obeyed out of fear not love as is explained by Angus, "Those he commands move only in command. /Nothing in love". He is the "Hell-kite" and 'Hell-hound" mentioned bitterly by Macduff.

Bradley notes the blackness that broods over the tragedy with almost all the most memorable scenes being played out against such a background. The murders of Duncan and Banquo and the sleep-walking scene of Lady Macbeth are night scenes. Macbeth's encounters with the witches take place in storm-tossed or cavernous surroundings. It presents an atmosphere where "night's black agents to their prey do rouse". Macbeth calls out to the stars to hide their fire that his "black desires" may not be revealed. He embraces "seeling Night" that scarfs up "the tender eye of pitiful day", and Lady Macbeth invokes thick night to come palled in the "dunnest smoke of hell". The witches are addressed by Macbeth as "secret, black and midnight hags" evoking their associations with evil.

This blackness is periodically coloured by a vivid spillage of blood caused by the numerous acts of violence in the play. The murdered Duncan whose silver skin was laced with golden blood, the "blood-boltered Banquo" with "twenty trenched gashes on his head", Scotland which bled under the heels of a tyrant and Macbeth whose guilty hands would as he believed turn "the multitudinous seas incarnadine" are but examples of violence that ironically relieve the darkness with shades that serve only to aggravate it.

2.6.9 Characters

This section will briefly discuss the salient points on which the major characters of the play might be discussed.

➢ The Character of Macbeth:

In point of character, you will find that Macbeth shares similarities with Shakespeare's Antony and Richard III. Antony in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and Macbeth in the eponymous play seek to redefine the range of their powers pursuing a throne that will yield them prerogatives hitherto not enjoyed by them. Macbeth is linked to Richard III in their shared trait of evil. However, while Richard is from the beginning totally committed to the execution of his sinful purposes Macbeth when he is introduced to us appears a model figure, one who is brave and competent in battle and of whom everyone speaks well. It is his transformation from good to evil, or should one say, the intensification in his nature of what was merely a hint of evil which excites interest in his decline.

Complexities notwithstanding earlier critics such as A.C. Bradley, Lascelles Abercrombie and G. Wilson Knight took unambiguous views regarding the character of the protagonist. While Bradley tended to see Macbeth as the epitome of evil Abercrombie and Knight praised the zest and fearlessness of the general turned king who retrieved his warrior's spirit at the end of his life. L.C. Knights, however, objected to such conclusions claiming that "the critics have not only sentimentalized Macbeth–ignoring the completeness with which Shakespeare shows his final identification with evil–but they have slurred the passages in which the positive good is presented by means of religious symbols".

Macbeth does not achieve a moral recovery at the end of the play though there are traces of his earlier valour as he confronts his enemies head on. Robert B. Heilman in his 1966 essay 'The Criminal as Tragic Hero: Dramatic Methods' exonerates Macbeth from unredeemed villainy recognizing in him a capacity for feeling and imagination that according to him should appeal to our pity and understanding. At the same time Heilman is aware that Macbeth falls short of the requirements of the tragic hero maintaining. "we expect the tragic protagonist to be an expanding character, one who grows in awareness and spiritual largeness; yet Macbeth is to all intents a contracting character who seems to discard large areas of consciousness as he goes, to shrink from a multi-lateral to a unilateral being…" It is Irving Ribner's view in his book *Patterns in Shakespearean Tragedy* that the tragedy *Macbeth* is not resolved through the fallen hero's redemption but through the restoration of the forces of good that had been kept at bay for so long.

➢ The Character of Lady Macbeth:

Lady Macbeth is a character who continues to inspire controversial readings amongst critics. As a rule, she is criticized for her role in instigating her husband to murder their king and kinsman Duncan who at the time of the murder was also her guest at the castle in Inverness. At first in the marital partnership, she is the strong and vocal one chastising Macbeth with "the valour of her tongue" and goading him to overcome his scruples. Educating her husband in the arts of deception she urges him in I: v: "To beguile the time, /Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye, /Your hand, your tongue: look like th' innocent flower, /But be the serpent under't'. Later when Macbeth declares in I: vii, "We will proceed no further in this business" she upbraids him roundly asking him, "Art thou afeard/ To be the same in thy act and valour,/As thou art in desire?"

Lady Macbeth stresses the word 'man' linking it to humanity and ironically underscoring, in the process, the deficiencies of mere 'manliness'. In her conversation with Macbeth in I: vii she equates manliness with killing. When Macbeth protests, "I dare do all that may become a man;/Who dares do more is none", Lady Macbeth retorts, "When you durst do it, then you were a man;/And to be more than what you were, you would/Be so much more the man". So determined is she in this scene before the murder of their royal guest that Macbeth is forced to concede that her "undaunted mettle" should "bring forth men children only".

When Macbeth hallucinates the dead Banquo in III:iv believing that he is confronted by the latter's ghost Lady Macbeth admonishes him by asking him, "Are you a man?" and later when he persists in his illusion she deplores his lack of composure by exclaiming, "What! quite unmanned in folly?" Marilyn French in her essay "'Macbeth' and Masculine Values" believes that in Shakespeare's eyes, if "Macbeth has violated moral law; Lady Macbeth has violated natural law". She goes on to note that Lady Macbeth "fails to uphold the feminine principle. For her, as for Goneril, this failure plunges her more deeply into a pit of evil than any man can ever fall".

Even more unsettling perhaps is Lady Macbeth's invocation to the spirits "that tend on mortal thoughts" to "unsex" her and fill her "from the crown to the toe top-full/ Of direst cruelty!" She cries to the same spirits, "Make thick my blood/Stop up th' access and passage to remorse;/That no compunctious visitings of Nature/ Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between/Th' effect and it!" She is indeed frightening when she calls out to the "murth'ring ministers" to come to her woman's breasts, and "take her milk for gall". Janet Adelman in her essay 'Escaping the Matrix: The Construction of Masculinity in *Macbeth*' finds Lady Macbeth to be a witch-like figure whose "unsexing' primarily functions as an "unnatural abrogation of her maternal function". Adelman makes it clear that "latent within this image of unsexing is the horror of the maternal function itself". Through the image of 'perverse nursing' Shakespeare unites Lady Macbeth and the witches in an unholy combination expressing male castration fears.

In II: ii when Macbeth is thoroughly distraught after murdering Duncan Lady Macbeth again saves the situation with her presence of mind exhorting her husband, "Go get some water, /And wash this filthy witness from your hand". She further instructs Macbeth to smear the daggers of the sleeping grooms with blood that suspicion related to the crime may fall on them. When Macbeth falls short of the deed, she once again takes control of the situation by declaring that she would herself go into the slain Duncan's chamber and do the needful. "If he do bleed", she resolves, "I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal, /For it must seem their guilt."

In much the same vein she upbraids her husband a little later when she tells him, "My hands are of your colour; but I shame/To wear a heart so white".

It is till the murder of Banquo that Macbeth is still close to his wife. After this murder, as Macbeth becomes more and more desperate for his security, and ruthless in his methods to achieve the same, the couple drifts apart. Macbeth ceases to confide anymore in his wife. The closeness that had once existed between them manifests itself in a bizarre reversal of belief and destiny. Sigmund Freud in his essay 'Some Character-Types met with in Psychoanalytic Work' mentions Ludwig Jekels' theory that Shakespeare often split a character into two personages which taken separately are not always understandable and become so only when they are conceived as a unity. Applying this theory to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth he observes, "In that case it would of course be pointless to regard her as an independent character and seek to discover the motives for her change, without considering Macbeth who completes her".

➢ The Character of Banquo:

As the story runs, Banquo and Macbeth, both victorious generals under King Duncan, are returning from the battlefield. They encounter the witches together for the first time; Macbeth's royal ambitions are fuelled by their prophecies while Banquo is told that his progeny will be kings. Thereafter, Banquo's responses are staid–he even advises Macbeth not to attach much importance to such equivocatory figures, and thereby sets in motion one of the main themes of the play. The character does not have much stage time in the play, since his existence for a longer time means keeping alive a person who could directly place suspicions of the king's murder on Macbeth. But even within this short span, his character offers an interesting foil to Macbeth.

➢ The Character of Macduff:

Another of Duncan's trusted generals, Macduff's great unrest at the usurpation of royal power at the hands of Macbeth impels him to leave Scotland and garner forces with Malcolm, Duncan's son, in England with the purpose of waging war against Scotland which is reeling with penury under the tyrant. He has however left behind his wife and children who are butchered by the king's men and this perhaps becomes the final spur that triggers Macduff to action against Macbeth. If we consider *Macbeth* as a play with deep political insinuations, then the lengthy interaction between Malcolm and Macduff on English soil is very interesting. We find each trying to gauge the other's readiness to action, because there is an inherent paradox involved in it–avenging Macbeth will also mean attacking their own

homeland. In the short and quick battle scenes that follow towards the end of the play, the one between Macbeth and Macduff is the most interesting. An encounter between two brave warriors, one with the agenda of restoring order and the other, a fallen hero, becomes the high point of the play. Macduff virtually becomes a mirror against which to judge the travesty of the erstwhile hero, Macbeth. The Thane of Glamis who fought loyal battles is not the Macbeth we see now. There are only some traces of his earlier glory, which however peter out the moment he gets to know that Macduff was not 'born' but 'ripp'd untimely' from his mother's womb. The fortuitous prophecy made by the apparition regarding the killer of Macbeth (that gave him a false sense of invincibility) is thus shattered. The inevitable happens and as Macduff returns on stage with the slit head of Macbeth and proclaims: 'Scotland is free', the play comes full circle. Through the character of Macduff thus, not only does the equivocatory nature of the play get revealed taking Macbeth to his final fall, the complex range of issues that Shakespeare takes up are also brought out through him.

2.6.10 Selected Approaches

i) The Porter Scene in *Macbeth*

The Porter's grim fantasy of Hell Gate symbolically reflects the actual situation in the play. Just after the murder of Duncan the castle of Inverness is indeed hell because Lady Macbeth as the evil priestess has invoked the "murth'ring ministers" to take her milk for gall while Macbeth has cried out to the stars to "hide their fires" before inviting damnation living, as he does in a Dantesque inferno. Moreover, if we regard hell as a state of mind as is seen in Marlowe's play *Dr. Faustus*, then the distinction between inner and outer landscape disappears, and "where we are in hell/And where hell is there we must ever be".

The figures introduced in the Porter Scene are in some way or the other linked to the developments of the plot at this juncture. The sin of the avaricious farmer who is the first to gain admittance into "hell" consists of hoarding grains to sell the same at a higher price later. An abundance of crops however foiled his plans and caused his ruin. The image of the "avaricious farmer" contrasts with the images of natural growth that are to be found in the play. Duncan greets Macbeth and Banquo in I iv with the words, "I have begun to plant thee, and will labour/ To make thee full of growing", to which Banquo replies, "There if I grow/The harvest is your own", thus linking human relationships to the organic and peaceful processes of growth in nature. The farmer and Macbeth share one characteristic and

that is of greed. Both are hungry for profit, and they manipulate natural processes in order to serve their own ends only to be ruined at the end.

The entry of the equivocator is linked to one of the main themes of the play, i.e. equivocation. Father Garnett, a Jesuit priest who was a prime accused in the Gunpowder Plot was held guilty of equivocation. It is interesting to note that he went under the alias of Farmer. Immediately after the exit of the farmer Macbeth equivocates with ease. Macbeth's equivocation at this point in the play, through a brilliant twist of irony, becomes but an aspect of truth that involuntarily surfaces in his speech. Upon the discovery of the royal murder when all present, in a bemused state of mind, bemoan the death Macbeth says, "Had I but died an hour before this chance/I had lived a blessed time…" Unbeknown to him these words are a precise description of his own predicament.

The Porter equivocates when he observes, "I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way, to th' everlasting bonfire" deftly concealing his personal stand on hell and presenting the traditional view of it. In a complex web of pretense, the Weird Sisters, Macbeth, and the very language of the play each in their own measure engages in the politics of equivocation. In a sense, Rosse sums it up, when in IV ii he says, "But cruel are the times, when we are traitors, /And do not know ourselves".

The third circumstance mentioned by the Porter is that of "an English tailor stealing out of a French hose". The humour of this observation lies in the fact that since the style of the French hose at the time required it to be very short and straight the tailor indeed had to be a master of his craft in order to be able to steal any cloth from the material intended for such an outfit. The entry of the tailor is significant in terms of the recurrent clothing imagery in the play. The tailor's sin is that he had stolen cloth with the result of having fashioned an ill-fitting garment. Macbeth had stolen the royal title and the prerogatives that went with it and the new honours did not quite cleave to his form. In II iv Macduff says, "Lest our old robes sit easier than our new!" Angus in V ii compares Macbeth's regal title to a robe that is too large for him meaning thereby the moral dimensions that are required to fit kingly vestments were so noticeably lacking in the wearer, namely Macbeth. He says, "Now does he feel his title/Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe/Upon a dwarfish thief".

ii) The Presentation of the 'Witches' in *Macbeth*

The witches in *Macbeth* as New Historicist critic Stephen Greenblatt has pointed out in his seminal work *Shakespeare Bewitched*, have the conventional attributes found in both Continental and English witch lore, associated with tempests,

thunder and lightning. They call to their familiars and conjuring spirits, raise winds and sail in a sieve. They stir their hideous broth in their huge cauldron, and above all, they traffic in "prognostication and prophecy". "What are these", asks Banquo in I iii, "So withered and so wild in their attire/That look not like the inhabitants of the earth/And yet are on it?" The basic identity of the witches is unclear, there is uncertainty over their very origins and their gender is also called into question. Banquo wonders, "…you should be women, /And yet your beards forbid me to interpret/That you are so".

The presentation of the witches in *Macbeth* is ambivalent. On the one hand they appear to have been endowed with powers enabling them to foresee the future which has led some critics to see them as a symbolic extension of fate, or the personification of a psychological dilemma. On the other hand, they may be viewed, as Peter Stallybrass has pointed out, from a practical standpoint. In I iii they are shown to kill swine and to be involved in petty vendetta, typical offences in English witch prosecution. They have their familiars, (Graymalkin and Paddock) the common companions of English witches but rarely mentioned, according to Stallybrass in Scottish or Continental prosecutions. They further share the features of an English country-witch being old women with a withered look, "choppy fingers" and "skinny lips". It is also clear that the witches' power is limited as they can cause discomfort to the sailor and hint to Macbeth his impending doom but are powerless to alter the actual course of action. At best they can ensure that "Though his bark cannot be lost/Yet it can be tempest tost" thereby supplying proof of their perverse and evil intentions.

Feminist criticism of the play encourages you to see the witches as androgynous, equivocal and mysterious, who strike at the stable social, sexual and linguistic forms which the society of the play needs in order to survive. They believe that the witches and Lady Macbeth conspired to persuade Macbeth to overthrow patriarchal authority which led to the 'womanish' killing of the saintly Duncan representing family and state.

iii) The Banquet Scene in *Macbeth*

The Banquet Scene in III iv presents a masterly mingling of elements through which are shown the development of the plot, a crucial phase in the moral degeneration of Macbeth, and the dissipation of order into chaos which becomes increasingly prominent in the play. Macbeth, who has ordered the killing of Banquo and his son Fleance can scarcely maintain his composure during this scene. Inaugurating the feast after being prompted by Lady Macbeth he meets the murderers and learns from them that while Banquo has been killed Fleance has

escaped. The news upsets him greatly but what unsettles him completely is his hallucination of Banquo's ghost.

A figment of his tormented imagination and guilty conscience, the ghost of Banquo appears to Macbeth to be sitting in his place. He turns to the assembled nobles and asks them, "Which of you have done this?" Lady Macbeth saves him by attributing an invented illness to him, an untruth that Macbeth too resorts to a little later in order to save the situation. He barely regains his composure and begins the feast than the ghost reappears bringing on the fit once more in Macbeth.

The elements of irony, hypocrisy, prophecy and usurpation surface in this brief but powerful scene. The conversation between husband and wife, strewn with references to the word 'man' directs attention to the notions of 'manhood', 'manliness' and 'humanity'. This scene is important for its contribution to the development of the action. It exposes Macbeth to the nobles two of whom in the very next scene voice their suspicions about Macbeth maintaining that "this tyrant" has usurped the throne of Scotland. It also shows the moral degeneration wrought in Macbeth, and the depths to which he can descend in his pursuit of power.

2.6.11 Summing Up

Having considered the varied aspects of the play you must have by now gained an understanding of its historical context, Shakespeare's modifications of the same for artistic purposes, some of the major characters and the sequence of action which constitutes the plot. Some of the important scenes, too, have been discussed for your benefit as has been the stylistic elements which are expected to guide you in your understanding of the play.

2.6.12 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Would you consider Macbeth to be a villain or a hero? Give reasons in support of your view.
2. Write a critical essay on the Sleep-Walking Scene in *Macbeth*.
3. Examine the role of the witches in *Macbeth*. Do you think that they are the driving force behind Macbeth's crimes?
4. Write a brief essay on the Porter Scene in *Macbeth* justifying its presence in the play.

5. Examine the main themes in the play *Macbeth*.
6. Compare Macbeth's moral and psychological states before and after the murder of Duncan.
7. Critically comment on the Banquet Scene.
8. Discuss the character of Lady Macbeth.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Why do most critics place the composition of *Macbeth* between 1603 and 1606?
2. Briefly discuss the Senecan elements in *Macbeth*.
3. Analyze the significance of the English tailor in the Porter Scene.
4. Write a brief note on a gendered reading of the play *Macbeth*.
5. Discuss the aspects in which Shakespeare's *Macbeth* conforms to its main source.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Name the two main sources on which Shakespeare drew for his play *Macbeth*.
2. Provide two instances of how Shakespeare has modified history in *Macbeth*.
3. What is Macbeth's reaction on hearing of Lady Macbeth's death? How does it reflect on the changes in their relationship?
4. What are the acts of violence committed by Macbeth?
5. Why do Malcolm and Donalbain flee the country?

2.6.13 Suggested Reading

Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. The Project Gutenberg E-Book of Shakespearean Tragedy. 2005.

Knight, G. Wilson. *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearean Tragedy*. Routledge, 2nd Edition. 2001.

Muir, Kenneth. *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence*. Routledge, 1st Edition. 2004.

Muir, Kenneth (Ed.). *Macbeth*. The Arden Shakespeare, Second Series. Bloomsbury Publishing. 1997.

Spurgeon, Caroline F. E. *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us*. Cambridge UP, 1935, 1996.

Unit-7 □ William Shakespeare: *As You Like It*

Structure

2.7.1 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are as follows:

- To acquaint the learners with Shakespearean Comedy.
- To give the learner an idea about the sources of the play *As You Like It,* highlight the evolution of the plot, the themes, structure and style of the play.
- To equip the learner with the right tools to approach and discuss the various aspects of the text.

2.7.2 Introduction

As with Tragedy, so with Comedy, the Elizabethan approach in general and the Shakespearean style in particular was quite different from the proposed models of classical drama. In the preceding units you have come across some of the best specimens of post–Renaissance tragedy and seen for yourselves the wide range of issues encompassed. This unit will introduce you to the other kind of drama–

Comedy of the period. In course of your study, you will realise how intricate aspects of life, across social hierarchies, can also become the staple of comedy. It is only desirable that you read this unit after correlating it with the text of the play, so that you may have many more aspects in your mind.

2.7.3 Shakespearean Comedy

You have already read about the impact of the Renaissance in England and that Shakespeare belongs to the period of the English Renaissance. You have also come across the different literary forms which evolved in that period, including drama. Since we will be studying Shakespeare's comedy *As You Like It,* I will acquaint you with the dramatic form of Comedy and go on to define and describe Shakespearean Comedy.

Generally speaking Comedy is a dramatic form essentially light and humorous in nature, with a happy or cheerful ending. It may be a play in which the central motif is the triumph over adverse circumstances leading to a happy conclusion. Comedy can be divided into two broad divisions: Satirical Comedy and Romantic Comedy. Classical Comedy, both Greek and Roman, belong to the former category. Its aim is to satirize an individual and his flaws and foibles, or a class of people with a certain ideology. Hence, Jonsonian Comedy or Comedy of Humours of the Jacobean period in England and the Comedy of Manners of the Restoration period can also be called satirical. Latin Comedy, especially the plays of Plautus and Terence–in which certain type characters (the foolish parent, the prodigal son, the parasite, the braggart soldier) are satirized–influenced Renaissance English drama which is obvious when we read a play like Ralph Roister Doister (1553).

The genre of Romantic Comedy evolved in Elizabethan times. The comic plays of Shakespeare's predecessors like Robert Greene belong to this category and are characterized by richness, variety and a sense of abundant gaiety. Such dramas focus on lovers who seek fulfilment in love and find it only after overcoming obstacles to their union. The pursuit of love and happiness usually takes place in a world of fantasy or an idyllic pastoral setting which serves as a symbol of freedom and harmony. Pastoral Comedies/ Romances also belong to this broad category.

Shakespearean Comedy is *sui generis* (a class by itself). It does not belong to any particular class (Satirical or Romantic) and yet imbibes some of the features of

both traditions, especially the tradition of Elizabethan Romantic/ Pastoral Comedy. The famous Shakespearean critic S. C. Sengupta, in *Shakespearean Comedy* notes "Although he employs all the devices his forerunners and contemporaries make use of, the impression one derives from his dramas is fundamentally different from that which is produced by theirs".

Shakespeare's Comedies can be divided into four groups: the Early Comedies, the Middle Comedies (often known as Mature Comedies), the Dark Comedies and the final plays (they are linked thematically and can be called Comedies). We should concentrate on the Middle or Mature Comedies because *As You Like It* belongs to this group. The main theme of these plays is love and its fulfilment in a real world which presents obstacles both external and internal. It is often contrasted with a parallel quasi-fantasy world where love grows and matures so that it can later adapt itself in a realistic space. This can be seen in *As You Like It* in which the main love relationship germinates in the corrupt world of the court of Duke Frederick, but grows and matures in the forest of Arden. Usually there are several love relationships running parallel to the main relationship. The dramatist posits different kinds of love to show its variety and different perceptions of the lovers involved. Most of Shakespeare's Comedies are concerned with love and desire, overcoming barriers to the fulfilment of these and end in physical and emotional union, usually marriage. Renewal of life through marriage is an underlying theme of these plays.

Shakespearean Comedy is a mixture of many disparate elements which, however, cohere to convey a single impression of harmony and joy. C. L. Barber (in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, 1972) associates this spirit of unpolluted joy with the gaiety of 'festivals' celebrated by people in Shakespeare's time. Hence, he feels that *As You Like It* is also a 'festive' Comedy. Shakespeare's Mature Comedies are characterized by a variety of moods and tones which ultimately blend into one another. Characters from different areas of society meet and their attitudes to life are constantly juxtaposed. We find this in *As You Like It* in the dialogues between Touchstone and Jaques, or Rosalind and Celia, or Corin and Touchstone, or Rosalind and Orlando. There is also a unique mingling of humour and poetry in the Comedies and a stylistic balance of the use of verse and prose.

The main characters of Shakespeare's mature comedies are delineated with a fine understanding of human psychology. Characters like Rosalind in *As You Like*

It and Viola in *Twelfth Night* take charge of the development of the plot. They are daring individuals who do not hesitate to admit their own frailty on many occasions. They are aware of the vagaries of fate in a real world and yet fall in love 'at first sight'. The use of disguise in the plays also complicates the plot and allows the central female characters to manifest a diverse range of attitudes and emotions. Such disguises are also related to issues of gender which are constantly highlighted to convey traditional and non-traditional views. We also find isolated characters like Jaques and Malvolio who remain outside the mainstream of humanity. In most of the plays the professional Fool has a significant role as choric commentator and source of sophisticated humour.

2.7.4 Date and Text of *As You Like It*

There are basically two ways of knowing the date of the text: internal evidence (records of productions/ performances or publications), and internal evidence (references in the play to contemporary events whose dates are known, the play's style vis-a-vis the evolution of Shakespeare's style).

The date of the play is fixed by the fact that it does not appear in the list Francis Mere gives in *Paladis Tamia* in 1598, and it does appear in the 'Stationer's Register' in August 1600. It has been suggested that *As You Like It* could have been produced after 1598 to rival two Robin Hood plays: *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* and *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntingdon* which were very popular in 1598.

The figure of the satirical Jaques and the discussion of the ethics of satire are suitable to the year 1599. But there are two allusions to events of a later date than 1600: Rosalind's words "...though I say I am a magician" which may refer to a severe statute against witchcraft passed after James I had come to the throne in 1603, and her reference to "pretty oaths that are not dangerous" which may be an allusion to another Act of the early years of James I's reign, restraining the "abuses of players" and forbidding the use of the Holy name of God in stage plays.

2.7.5 Sources

Shakespeare's main source for *As You Like It*, identified by Capell and Farmer in 1767, is a prose romance by Thomas Lodge-*Rosalynde, Euphues Golden Legacie*, first published in 1590. An introductory remark in Lodge's text is "If you like

it, so", and this may account for Shakespeare's choice of the title. *Rosalynde*, a pastoral romance, is itself based on an earlier poem, 'The Tale of Gamelyn', wrongly attributed to Chaucer. The tale as appropriated by Lodge, provided the intertwined plots, and suggested all the characters except Touchstone and Jaques in Shakespeare's play.

Two other minor debts have been suggested by some critics. The first is Michael Drayton's *Poly-Olbion,* a poetic description of England, but there is no evidence that the poem was written before *As You Like It*. The second suggested source is *The Historie of Orlando Furioso* by Robert Greene, produced around 1592.

2.7.6 Summary of the Play

➢ Act I

As You Like It has a twin plot: two narratives about two brothers (the Duke Senior and his younger brother Frederick; Oliver and his younger brother Orlando) are intertwined. Although the **first Act** starts with the story/ sub-plot of Oliver and Orlando, we have to know the background of the entire play which contains the seeds of the main plot. A Duke has been usurped by his younger brother Frederick. The banished Duke lives like Robin Hood and his merry men in the Forest of Arden which provides the pastoral setting in the play. His daughter, Rosalind, is allowed to live in the Duke's court with the younger Duke's daughter Celia. Similarly, another pair of brothers, the sons of the Elder Duke's friend Sir Roland de Boys, are shown to be in conflict because Oliver, the elder brother treats Orlando, the younger brother, as a second-class citizen and deprives him of the education suitable to his rank.

Act I begins with Orlando and the old servant Adam. He complains about his brother Oliver's attitude towards him and his disregard for the instructions of their father about the upbringing of the younger son. When Oliver approaches them there is a verbal skirmish between the brothers. Orlando is seen as a positive and spirited character. Hence, very rightly he rebels against his brother's treatment, exclaiming**,** "**Shall I keep your hogs and eat husks with them? What prodigal portion have I spent that I should come to such penury?**". This is a reference to the parable of the prodigal son in the Bible. Adam and Orlando have barely

left the stage when Oliver begins plotting to punish his brother for his impudence. Hearing that Orlando is planning to try his strength against Charles, the Duke's prime wrestler, Oliver incites Charles to foil his brother and teach him a lesson.

The following scene (**Scene 2**) takes place in the Duke's court where Rosalind and Celia are seen conversing on topics like the former's depressed state of mind and the latter's love for her. The affection between the two cousins presents a contrast to the hatred between the two brothers that we have just witnessed in Scene1. Rosalind, whose father has been banished is in low spirits and feels she is compelled to show more 'mirth' than she is capable of. There is a witty exchange between the cousins which clearly shows the importance of the concept of 'Fortune' in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Celia wishes that the "**hussif Fortune**" may distribute her gifts among mortals "**more equally**". Rosalind aptly calls Fortune "**blind**." Then the court jester/ clown Touchstone appears and they engage in a playful war of wits. He contributes to the Folly versus Wisdom motif in the play: "**The more pity that fools may not speak wisely what wise men do foolishly**." He suggests that it is fools only who attempt to criticize the foolish actions of men (people in high places like Celia's father). There seems to be a precarious balance between foolishness and wisdom. These characters then witness a wrestling match between Orlando and Charles. Orlando wins the match, but after being snubbed by the Duke he receives a chain from Rosalind ("**Wear this for me; one out of suits with fortune**") who shows an interest in him from the moment they meet. Orlando is also struck by Rosalind (her beauty and her manners) and his state of wonder and confusion is suggested in the words, "**What passion hangs these weights upon my tongue**".

In **Scene 3** of this Act the Duke, reluctant to keep Rosalind in the court any more, banishes her, despite Celia's outspoken defiance: "**Pronounce that sentence then on me, my liege. / I cannot live out of her company**". When left alone with Rosalind Celia insists upon following her cousin. They decide to disguise themselves, Rosalind as a boy and Celia as an ordinary girl. Touchstone, the jester also accompanies them.

In the **Opening Act** we are introduced to some of the important characters in the play. Their characters as they are revealed to us merely outline their behaviour and attitudes in the **Duke's Court** and its vicinity. In the **second Act** the action

moves to the **Forest of Arden** which presents a stark contrast to the setting in **Act I**. This contrast is one of the main themes of the play which is often seen as a conflict between the civilized state and the natural condition of man.

➢ Act II

The **Second Act** begins in the Forest of Arden which, according to Helen Gardner, "is set over against the envious court ruled by a tyrant and a home which is no home because it harbours hatred, not love" (*More Talking of Shakespeare*, 1959). In **Scene 1** the banished Duke is shown living in the heart of nature with his followers. He goes on to describe the world of nature, not as an ideal state of existence, but a harsh world with extreme climatic changes: "**the icy fang / And churlish chiding of the winter's wind.**" This is where Arden differs from the typical Arcadian pastoral scene often evoked in pastoral romances of the Elizabethan age. This is a real world never free from "**winter and rough weather**". It is characteristic of the Duke that he should transform disadvantages into advantages. In his very first speech in this scene he utters the famous lines, "**Sweet are the uses of adversity, / Which like a toad ugly and venomous, / Wears yet a precious jewel in his head**." These philosophical musings lead to a discussion on the 'melancholy Jaques' who is a significant character in the play both as choric commentator and a type-character–almost "the humorous character ... the man with a dominant passion carried to the point of absurdity" (Agnes Latham, Introduction, Arden edition of As You Like It, 1975). The humour emerging from the First Lord's description of Jaques' reflection on the weeping deer is very much in tune with the spirit of *As You Like it*–a Romantic-pastoral comedy and a 'festive' play (refer to C.L. Barber).

In the next scene (**Scene 2**) Duke Frederick comes to know about the flight of Rosalind, Celia and Touchstone. He is further incensed by reports that they may have joined the young wrestler, Orlando. Here we also see that Oliver is summoned by the Duke.

This is followed by **Scene 3** in which the sub-plot advances as Orlando, warned by Adam not to return home, also proceeds towards the Forest of Arden with the old servant and his meagre savings.

Back in the Forest of Arden in **Scene 4** the three travellers (Rosalind, Celia and Touchstone) totally exhausted, come upon an old shepherd who informs them about a farm for sale. Rosalind and Celia, who are well provided with funds, suddenly decide to purchase it, retaining the old man as their servant at higher wages. We are also introduced to Silvius, the love-sick shepherd who expresses his passion for Phebe, the cold-hearted shepherdess. This is a typical example of the

kind of love which is often satirized by Shakespeare. It also presents a contrast to Rosalind's mature love for Orlando.

The focus then shifts back to the Duke and his band of outlaws in **Scene 5**. This scene opens with the famous song by Amiens: "**Under the greenwood tree**". Here we are properly introduced to Jaques. In his typical manner he asserts that he "can suck **melancholy** out of a song, as a weasel sucks eggs". After the song is over Jaques responds with his own kind of song: "**If it do come to pass / That any man turn to ass**". Amiens departs to announce to the Duke that a banquet awaits him.

A brief scene (**Scene 6**) follows. We see the weary Adam and Orlando who have walked into the forest. The former, faint from hunger sinks on the wayside, while the latter goes deeper into the forest in search of some food to revive the former.

In **Scene 7** the sub-plot converges with the main plot. At first the Duke and his companions are seen gathered around the venison from the deer they have slain, when Jacques joins them, relating how he has been detained in the forest by a most edifying conversation with a Fool. He has obviously met Touchstone. Suddenly Orlando bursts into the scene with sword drawn and demands food. Surprised, but unperturbed, the Duke generously offers him food. After hearing the young man's story about the plight of Adam, the Duke asks him to fetch his companion, promising that not a morsel shall be eaten until the weary travellers can share the meal. It is when Orlando goes to bring his companion that Jaques delivers the famous "**seven ages of man**" speech. He says that "**all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players**,' and describes the seven ages of man in sentences so graphic that they have become world-renowned quotations. The comparison between the world and a stage in a theatre is a typical Shakespearean metaphor which can be found in many of his plays, both tragedy (*Macbeth*, *King Lear*) and comedy (*The Merchant of Venice*). Orlando returns with Adam and while they eat, Amien sings "**Blow, blow, thou winter wind**". This song once again reminds us that Arden is not an ideal place for the outlaws, and yet it is superior to the court and its corruption. This over, the Duke, who has been studying Orlando's countenance, recognises his strong resemblance to his old friend, Sir Roland de Boys. On learning about his identity, he bids him welcome to Arden. Adam is revived and he also joins the rest.

➢ Act III

The **First Scene** of **Act III** takes us back to the court of the ruling Duke who angrily orders Oliver to produce his brother alive or dead very quickly or else

forfeit his property, which is confiscated in the meantime. When Oliver protests against this decree and declares that he never loved his brother, the duke instead of supporting him, banishes him.

Back in the Forest of Arden in **Scene 2** the theme of love advances further– love has transformed Orlando into a poet, and he hangs verses in praise of Rosalind and carves her name on trees ("**Hang here my verse, in witness of my love**"). After a conversation between Touchstone and the old shepherd Corin regarding the advantages of the court and the countryside Rosalind, in the guise of a youth, enters the scene and reads the poems. While Rosalind as Ganymede and Touchstone argue about the verses, Celia as Aliena joins them. Rosalind herself is critical of the verses hanging from the trees; she comments: "**O most gentle Jupiter, what tedious homily of love have you wearied your parishioners withal**". When left alone with her cousin Celia tells her that she has met Orlando in the forest. At this stage Jaques and Orlando arrive and the two girls hide themselves to hear them talk. After Jaques leaves Rosalind peers at Orlando from behind the tree, asking the time. When he reproves her for using the expression "**the lazy foot of time**," she saucily describes how time passes for different persons under varying circumstances. She also offers to give good advice to the man who hangs verses from trees because "**he seems to have the quotidian of love upon him**." "Quotidian" means an ague or malarial attack accompanied by continuous shivering. It is obvious that Rosalind considers typical love-sickness as a kind of disease. She represents Shakespeare's view of mature love which is adapted to reality with all its inconsistencies. After conversing on the subject of Orlando's love for the lady who is the inspiration for his verses, Rosalind as Ganymede offers to cure the love-sick youth if he will woo her as if she were Rosalind. Orlando consents to try the plan, before he and Rosalind disappear into the forest depths.

The Clown, Touchstone, strolls into the next scene (**Scene 3)** with a shepherdess, Audrey, whom he is helping to gather her goats. Here we witness another variant of 'love' which seems to be ubiquitous in the Forest of Arden. Touchstone proposes an immediate marriage; but an unaccredited priest, Sir Oliver Martext, refuses to marry them unless someone gives away the bride. At this point Jaques, who has been eavesdropping upon Touchstone's conversation, intervenes and postpones the wedding. Touchstone then leaves with Audrey deciding to be properly married some other day.

The following scene (**Scene 4**) in the forest brings back Rosalind and Celia, the former lamenting that Orlando has not kept his promise to visit them. She also refers to her meeting with her father who fails to recognize her. Their conversation is cut short by the arrival of Corin who takes them to another part of the forest

where the young shepherd Silvius is pleading with the disdainful Phebe **(Scene 5)**. This presents another kind of love experience–the lovelorn man suffering from the pangs of unrequited love. This is a typical motif in Elizabethan plays and sonnets. After the three have overheard Phebe rejecting Silvius, they enter the action and Rosalind rebukes Phebe in strong terms. Phebe adds to the complexity of the plot by falling in love with Rosalind in the guise of Ganymede. They depart as Phebe decides to write a letter to the young man she desires and asks Silvius to deliver it.

➢ Act IV

The setting of the **Fourth Act** is the Forest of Arden. In the **First Scene** Jaques meets Rosalind and Celia. Rosalind refers to his 'melancholy' which Jaques tries to explain as being of a peculiar sort. He further adds that in his life he has gone through many experiences, and Rosalind wittily retorts that if experience only serves to make him sad, it would be better to have none: "**I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad** ...". While they are arguing Orlando appears and Jaques leaves them in haste. Then we witness the fake courtship which was arranged in **Act III, Scene 2**. Rosalind who pretends to be Ganymede is ironically pretending to be Rosalind. Hence, she chides Orlando for his absence and eggs him on to make a proposal. When Orlando declares that he would kill himself Rosalind mockingly comments that "**men have died from time to time and worms have eaten them, but not for love**!" Being good-natured and charmed by the witty Rosalind (as Ganymede) he consents to a mock-marriage. After that Orlando asserts that he would like to possess Rosalind "**For ever and a day**" and she retorts, "**Say a day without the ever. ... men are April when they woo, December when they wed**". She is obviously critical of the typical attributes and expressions of conventional love. And yet she herself is deeply in love: "**O coz, coz, coz, my pretty little coz, that thou didst know how many fathom deep I am in love ... My affection hath an unknown bottom like the Bay of Portugal**".

Scene 2 deals with Jaques and the merry followers of the banished Duke. A deer has been killed and this event is being celebrated with a song. Jaques suggests that the hunter who has killed the deer should be presented to the Duke with the deer's horns set upon his head.

In **Scene 3** Rosalind and Celia return to the spot where they are supposed to meet Orlando again, apparently after two hours. Rosalind complains to Celia about Orlando's unpunctuality. Sylvius arrives with Phebe's letter to Ganymede. Rosalind reads it aloud and asks Sylvius to tell Phebe that if she truly loves him/

her she should then love Sylvius. Once he leaves Oliver appears and reports that his brother has asked him to carry a blood-stained handkerchief to the youth whom he calls 'Rosalind' in sport. He goes on to relate to them the incident where Orlando saved him from a serpent and a lioness and was wounded in the fight with the latter. Reconciled with his brother Oliver had followed him to the Duke's cave where Orlando fainted. After that he had asked Oliver to explain his absence to Ganymede and deliver the handkerchief as proof of his condition. Hearing this and losing her consciousness briefly, Rosalind/ Ganymede regains consciousness and pretends that she has pretended to faint. This episode introduces Oliver to Celia bringing together the different strands of the plot. Oliver and Celia stand out as another love-pair adding to the complex pattern of love experiences in the Forest of Arden.

➢ Act V

The **Fifth** and final **Act** ties all the loose ends together preparing us for the grand finale in the concluding scene. It begins with Touchstone and Audrey (in **Scene 1**) wandering in the forest discussing the marriage that did not take place. Another suitor walks in–he is another clown who stupidly answers Touchstone's questions. After Touchstone lectures this simpleton, Corin enters and asks them to meet Rosalind and Celia.

In **Scene 2** the brothers, Oliver and Orlando, are seen together; the former expresses his love for Celia. The truth of this newborn passion is proved, when he proposes to give up everything and settle down as a shepherd for the sake of his peasant lady-love. When Orlando sees Rosalind/ Ganymede approaching, he asks his brother to go and 'prepare' Celia/ Aliena. Rosalind regrets that Orlando's arm is in a sling and reports what we already know: Oliver and Celia's love for each other. Their approaching marriage makes Orlando complain that the sight of such great happiness intensifies his loneliness: "**But O, how bitter a thing it is to look into happiness through another man's eyes**!" When he also tells Rosalind/ Ganymede that he is not satisfied with the fake relationship between them, the latter assures that she, with the help of magical powers, will bring Rosalind tomorrow so that they are also united in matrimony. At this point another pair of lovers enters the scene: Sylvius and Phebe. After being reproached by Phebe Rosalind as Ganymede manages to prove that Sylvius is deeply enamoured by the shepherdess by making him describe his passion. Phebe exclaims that she feels the same way about Ganymede. Towards the end of the scene Rosalind tells the shepherd that she will help him, adding that should he ever marry a woman it will be Phebe, but exacting in exchange for this conditional promise Phebe's solemn pledge to marry either Ganymede or the shepherd on the morrow.

In the following scene (**Scene 3**) Touchstone and Audrey enter and refer to their imminent marriage. Two pages of the banished Duke also enter and sing to the lovers one of the most popular lyrics in Shakespearean Comedy: "**It was a lover and his lass**".

Act V, **Scene 4** marks the climax of the play. It is also the concluding scene of this pastoral comedy. Here Duke Senior and his companions are present to witness a quadruple wedding. While the Duke and Orlando, who is also present, discuss the possibility of Rosalind/ Ganymede living up to her/ his promise, Rosalind herself (still in the guise of Ganymede) appears with Silvius and Phebe. Rosalind initially obtains the Duke's promise that he will give his daughter Rosalind to Orlando if she (as Ganymede) brings her in and Phebe's promise to marry Silvius if she refuses to marry Ganymede. She then leaves with Celia so that she can bring the Duke's daughter with the help of magic. While Orlando and the Duke are speaking about Ganymede's resemblance to Rosalind, another pair of lovers–Touchstone and Audrey–enters the scene. There is a lively conversation between Jaques, the Duke and the Clown. But this is interrupted by the appearance of Hymen, the god of marriage with Rosalind and Celia. While father and lover are surprised to see the change in Ganymede, Phebe is compelled to dismiss her illusions and give consent to marry the shepherd, Silvius. Immediately after the four pairs of lovers are united in holy matrimony by Hymen, the god of marriage, Orlando's second brother, Jaques de Boys, appears, saying that he is sent to atone for the wrong the usurping duke has done. He then relates how Duke Frederick had entered the forest to pursue and kill his elder brother; but he met a hermit who changed him totally. The younger Duke has now decided to restore his kingdom to his elder brother and retire into a monastery. Thus, the ending of the play establishes the harmony which Shakespearean comedy celebrates and upholds. It also re-affirms the magical quality and reformative powers of the Forest of Arden.

The epilogue of this play is recited by Rosalind. She declares that just as **'good wine needs no bush,**' a '**good play needs no epilogue**,' before 'conjuring' the audience by stating that for the love they bear men the women cannot help liking this play, while for the love they bear the women, the men will do likewise.

2.7.7 Characters

Rosalind (Ganymede): As the central character of the play Rosalind (Ganymede) embodies the very spirit of this Romantic/festive comedy. Her lively character "arises from, and continually illuminates the thematic structure of the play" (John Russell Brown, Shakespeare and his Comedies, 1957), especially in

her role as someone who mocks at love and also falls deeply in love. She is the daughter of the banished Duke Senior and cousin to Celia. In the Duke's court she is very reserved and hence, restrained in her response to her cousin's words, feelings and attitudes. She is also the saucy and practical person who, after being banished by the present Duke, dresses as a young man, Ganymede, and reaches the Forest of Arden accompanied by Celia and Touchstone. From the moment she puts on doublet and hose her vivacity is irrepressible. The free ambience of the forest allows her to express her freedom from all conventional modes of behaviour and manners. She is a free spirit, merry, witty and also down-to-earth. Her constant bantering with Orlando show-cases her wit and good-natured humour (Refer to her comments in **Act IV, Scene 1**). In the Forest of Arden she takes control of the action and characters like Orlando, her father Duke Senior, Silvius and Phebe. Shakespeare puts the "denouement into her capable hands" according to Agnes Latham. Although she is in love with Orlando, she does not hesitate to mock conventional love and its romantic excesses. She allows herself to be disguised as a boy who pretends to be a girl, so that Orlando can practice his so-called art of loving and yet is willing to wed the very person she ridicules for writing love lyrics on trees. Rosalind's notion of love is endorsed in this play. It is a love which can withstand the obstacles and problems of reality and still remain intact as a powerful emotion and inextricable bond. "What she will not countenance is an affected and humourless intensity, the besetting fault of Elizabethan love-cults".

Orlando: Even though he is Rosalind's partner and the so-called 'hero' of the play he seems a mere shadow beside the vivacious Rosalind. He is the youngest son of the banished Duke's friend Sir Rowland de Boys and the brother of the tyrannical Oliver. He is not one of Shakespeare's usual comedy heroes. He lacks wit and presence of mind, prefers wrestling to witty give-and-take. After he falls in love with Rosalind and escapes to the forest, he hangs indifferent verses on trees to express his feelings. Initially Orlando's idea of love is highly artificial. Rosalind in the garb of Ganymede helps him to grow into a mature lover.

Celia (Aliena): Even though she is the daughter of the selfish younger Duke, she remains, throughout the play, an unselfish, loyal cousin who accompanies Rosalind in her exile in the guise of a simple country girl, Aliena. The two girls balance one another even as they participate in similar activities. She also contributes to the romantic plot of the play by falling in love with Oliver.

Jaques: He is one of Duke Senior's attendants and he has got a well-deserved reputation for being "melancholy." We might even say that Jaques *enjoys* being sad because he purposefully seeks out experiences that are depressing. He also plays a choric role in the play as an observer and commentator. He is the very essence

of sophistication–he experiments with everything and finds nothing worthwhile in human life. His sensitive resentment against man's cruelty and injustice even in a semi-magical world like Arden cannot be taken too seriously because that would go against the very spirit of *As You Like It*.

He is best known for his "**Seven Ages of Man**" speech in **Act II, Scene 7**. It has been praised too frequently. Like Touchstone he is also an incongruous figure in the Forest of Arden. Jaques and Touchstone complement each other. In the eyes of his fellow companions, he is bit of a 'fool', more so than Touchstone can ever be. S.C. Sengupta holds, "His cynicism, which is temperamental, has been aggravated by his experiences". He also presents the typical figure of a man suffering from melancholia which is an Elizabethan type figure and would be ridiculed in Shakespeare's time.

Touchstone: As the court jester Touchstone is a typical witty clown of the Elizabethan period, and yet he has a more important role in the play because he goes with Rosalind and Celia to the Forest of Arden. There he contributes to the plot and the theme of love by being involved with Audrey. He is also a choric figure inasmuch as he comments on different topics in the play. He has the training of the court 'jester' whose role is to flout the world. But many critics give him importance as a critic in the play, for instance, E. Welsford in *The Fool* (1935), and J. D. Wilson in *Shakespeare's Happy Comedies* (1962) says, "He tests all that the world takes for gold, especially the gold of the golden world of pastoralism". His response to Corin's "How like you this shepherd's life" is an elaborate piece of nonsense, comparable with the sham logic he uses to baffle characters like William. The values of romantic love, which are what the play endorses, are strengthened rather than undermined by the presence of Touchstone.

Oliver: As the eldest son of Sir Roland de Boys and Orlando's elder brother he is initially a negative character. His jealousy compels his bother to escape from his home. But in the Forest of Arden, he reforms completely and becomes Celia's worthy partner.

Duke Senior: Rosalind's father, the Duke, lives in exile in the Forest of Arden. He is a wise and amiable person who enjoys the fruits of nature despite nature's adversities. At the end he consents to Orlando and Rosalind's marriage and returns to the court after his brother restores the kingdom to him.

Duke Frederick: The younger Duke is a usurper, an unpleasant character who dominates over the court and all the people of his dukedom. He even banishes his niece to whom his daughter Celia is attached. At the end he also reforms as he steps into the magical arena of the forest of Arden and comes across a religious man who changes him completely. He gives back his kingdom to his brother.

The others are minor characters like Adam, the faithful servant who accompanies Orlando to the forest, Silvius the love-sick shepherd, Corin the genial but typical shepherd, Phebe the disdainful shepherdess in love with Ganymede, Audrey Touchstone's love interest, etc.

2.7.8 Themes

Love: Being a Romantic Comedy, pastoral romance and a festive comedy *As You Like It* centres round the theme of love in all its variety. In the figures of the principal characters, it becomes clear that each in his/her own way is in search of love, and each person's notion of love is different from the other. Here typical Romantic love is purged of its excesses and seems to contribute to the development of the persons pursuing it. This is very clear from the character of Oliver who finds love when he meets Celia and changes his ways.

The central love relationship is that between Rosalind and Orlando. Although they meet and fall in love in the court of Duke Frederick, their love grows and flourishes in the forest of Arden which has a congenial atmosphere for such an experience. Rosalind's disguise as Ganymede serves as a means through which she educates her lover in the proper attitudes to love. All the other love-relationships stand out as variations of different kinds of love. While Silvius and Phebe are the typical lovers of a pastoral romance with all its excesses and stereotyped nuances, the love of Touchstone and Audrey present an opposite extreme by underscoring the physicality of such a relationship. Rosalind and Orlando's love is poised between these two extremes. The Celia and Oliver love relationship has not been developed at all in the play.

Rosalind's understanding of love stands out in this play and it is she who balances the practical and idealistic aspects of love. C. L. Barber says, "Romantic participation in love and humorous detachment from its follies, the two polar attitudes which are balanced against each other in the action as a whole, meet and are reconciled in Rosalind's personality".

Court Life Versus Country Life: Much of this play is based on the difference between the two different value systems: that of the country and the city. In the country (Forest of Arden) the value system is characterized by simplicity, honour and truthfulness. By contrast the value system in the city (the Court) is governed by deceit and hypocrisy. The play sets out to expose the destruction of human relationships, which such values can cause, while at the same time highlighting the power of simplicity and loyalty which the country upholds. The Forest of Arden epitomizes freedom. Here love grows and flourishes to full fruition. Here

the exiled Duke finds 'winter and rough weather' preferable to the deceit and envy of the court. It may not be wholly idyllic as a place of rest, but it underscores the possibility of happiness in human life which is largely dependent on values which the forest breeds. Its reformative power is evident in the way Duke Frederick is said to be transformed into a holy man when he steps into the forest.

Foolishness and Folly: There is an intricate interplay between foolishness and wisdom in the play. Both Orlando's effusive declarations of love and Jaques' melancholic philosophical ramblings are exposed as forms of foolishness. The so-called Fool Touchstone is one of the wittiest characters in the play. His quick wit and insight into human nature allows him to expose the folly of those around him, even as he participates in clowning and tomfoolery. Despite its critique of human folly, *As You Like It* also acknowledges that foolishness and folly are the very things that make us human.

Gender: Like some of Shakespeare's Romantic Comedies *As You Like It* features a cross-dressing heroine whose disguise enables the playwright to explore the fluidity of gender construction. When Rosalind flees into the woods for safety, she disguises herself as an attractive young boy, "Ganymede". Rosalind's gender-bending game of make-believe is further complicated by the fact that she pretends to be a woman while disguised as a man in order to teach Orlando the meaning of true love, and also by the fact that the actor playing the role of "Rosalind" in Shakespeare's time would have been a boy since women were not allowed to perform on the public stage. In *As You Like It*, Shakespeare makes it clear that gender roles can be imitated and performed–in theatre and in real life.

2.7.9 Structure and Style

As we have discussed earlier *As You Like It* is a Romantic Comedy, a genre which was very popular in the English theatre of the Renaissance. Its structure includes a plot dealing with a pair of lovers who encounter many problems in the beginning and in the end are united. Usually there is an ideal space in which love is seen to progress through various stages. The structure also includes sub-plots dealing with similar love interests. All these sub-plots are tied up together in the conclusion.

Shakespeare's version of the Romantic Comedy presents a criticism of life within a taut structure, and the main pair of lovers move towards a more mature understanding of love, both ideal and real. *As You Like It* has also been called a pastoral comedy within which lovers meet and unite in an ideal pastoral locale. But in *As You Like It* this particular structure is somewhat subverted because the play

is also a satire on the typical pastoral romance. As mentioned earlier C. L. Barber calls *As You Like It* a 'festive comedy' associating it with midsummer celebrations and festive spirit. But in Shakespeare's play the festive spirit is often undercut by shades of melancholy, harsh experiences and man's innate evil inclinations.

Shakespearean drama is mostly written in blank verse (unrhymed iambic pentameter), which the dramatist has often modified and used fluently to suit the genres and the moods of each play. In comedies he uses both blank verse and prose. This is evident in *As You Like It*. It is often seen that people belonging to the aristocratic class speak in blank verse (e.g. Duke Senior) and common people like Audrey speak in prose. But there is no such rule in *As You Like It* where Rosalind speaks to Orlando in prose in the courtship scenes and Silvius and Phebe speak in blank verse. Sometimes the logic behind such use of verse and prose is not obvious. Perhaps Rosalind speaks to Orlando in prose to do away with the artifices associated with the courtly tradition of 'courtship'. It could also be that Silvius and Phebe speak in verse because they are the typical shepherd and shepherdess of pastoral romance which Shakespeare satirizes in his play. But the blank verse used by Jaques is unique in its distinctive character. The sheer brilliance of the "Seven Ages of man" speech has been acknowledged by all critics–here the blank verse gives depth to the philosophy conveyed through the use of its rhythm, apt words and rhetorical figures.

2.7.10 Summing Up

As You Like It is a typical Shakespearean comedy which appropriates two different genres: the Romantic Comedy and Pastoral Comedy/Romance. It strips the artificiality of both the forms and makes the play a lively comedy based on a mature vision of love. It is also called a 'Festive Comedy' because of its spirit of celebration. It is a celebration of both love and life. There is also an intermingling of levity and seriousness in the play which allows the play to be both entertaining and philosophical in many ways.

2.7.11 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Discuss *As You Like It* as a Romantic Comedy.
2. Discuss *As You Like* It as both a pastoral comedy and a satire on pastoralism.

3. Compare and contrast the life in the Forest of Arden and in the Court in *As You Like It*.
4. Discuss the different notions of 'love' as expressed in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.
5. "Rosalind embodies the very spirit of the play, *As You Like It*". Discuss.
6. Analyse the role of Touchstone in *As You Like It*.
7. Discuss the role of Jaques in the play *As You Like It*.
8. Analyse the plot-construction in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Write a brief essay on the element of wit in As You Like It.
2. Comment on the use of disguise in As You Like It.
3. Critically evaluate the function of music in the play As You Like It.
4. Discuss the effectiveness of the climax of the play.
5. Comment briefly on the minor characters in the play.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. "The more pity that fools may not speak wisely what wise men do foolishly." Explain.
2. Write a short note on the debate between Court and Country life in the play.
3. Explain with reference to the context the following line: "I had rather have a fool to make me merry than experience to make me sad ..."
4. Mention (quote) any two references to love in the play and explain their significance.
5. Give the summary of the "Seven Ages of Man" speech in Act II, Scene 7.

2.7.12 Suggested Reading

Barber, C. L. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, Princeton UP, 1972.

Bloom, Harold (Ed.). *William Shakespeare's As You Like It: Modern Critical Interpretations*. Chelsea House Publications, 2003.

Charlton, H. B. *Shakespearean Comedy*, Gaskell-House Publishers, 1972 (1938).

Evans, Bertrand. *Shakespeare's Comedies*, OUP, 1967.

Sengupta, S. C. *Shakespearean Comedy*, OUP, 1950.

Unit-8 □ Shakespearean Criticism, Scholarship and Contemporary Reading

Structure

2.8.1 Objectives

Upon reading this unit learners are expected to have:

- An understanding of Shakespearean criticism from the 17th century to the present time.
- An acquaintance with what is known as Shakespeare scholarship. This includes areas like socio-cultural contexts of the plays, the Elizabethan stage and its craft, and audience reception mainly.
- To try and read Shakespeare's work in the present time in the light of contemporary critical frameworks.

2.8.2 Introduction

The name of William Shakespeare is very common, even to a non-native English-speaking country like ours. This is partly because the British have had a huge influence on our culture and society which continues even after more than seventy-five years of independence. Yet one cannot help but notice the timeless genius that Shakespeare was, and howthe Indian society was capable of absorbing Shakespeare into its cultural orbit. Many centuries have passed since Shakespeare was first introduced to our cultural milieu, and yet the Bard remains one of the most prominent influences in shaping and reshaping literature, theatre, and films of the subcontinent.Therefore, as students of literature it is important that you understand why Shakespeare is still relevant in our times and in order to do so you need to understand how Shakespeare has been viewed throughout the centuries.

2.8.3 Shakespearean Criticism: An Overview

In the previous units you have read about Shakespeare's life and works, and know that from a very early time of his career, he has been inspiring criticism from his contemporaries. For instance, Robert Greene in *A Groatsworth of Wit* had referred to him as "an upstart crow". Nevertheless, Shakespeare enjoyed popularity and recognition in this time among the Elizabethan and Jacobean audience–a section that we will discuss later in this unit. By his death in 1616, his total number of plays ranged to 39 among which 36 were collected and published 7 years after his death in 1623 as the *First Folio*edition. In this edition, we find one of the first notable commentaries on Shakespeare's works by one of his famous contemporaries Ben Jonson. In the latter half of the 17thcentury, we have John Dryden, another notable critic, poet and a dramatist, who also contributed to Shakespeare. As the century passes by, Shakespeare's works were approached in the Neo-Classical light by Alexander Pope and Dr Samuel Johnson. Moving on to the Romantic era we have Charles Lamb's work "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation", Thomas de Quincey's "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*", and Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare from 1811-1819. Following the Romantics we get the Victorian critics characterized by the likes of Thomas Carlyle and A. C. Bradley. As the years progressed, Shakespeare's works

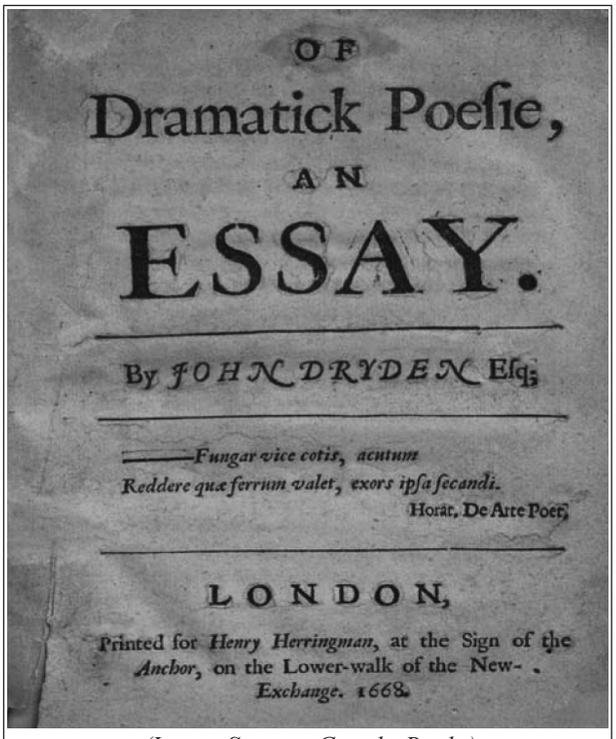
invited more critical opinions from modern scholars such as Caroline Spurgeon, E. M. W. Tillyard, G. Wilson Knight, S. C. Sengupta and many others. Below is a list of some of the major Shakespearean critics throughout the centuries:

Age	**Critic**	**Notable contribution(s) to Shakespeare criticism**
17th century	Ben Jonson	"To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare, and What He Hath Left Us"
17th century	John Dryden	*An Essay of Dramatick Poesy*(1668)
18th century (Neo-Classical)	Alexander Pope	*Preface* to Shakespeare edition (1725)
18th century (Neo-Classical)	Samuel Johnson	*Preface* to Shakespeare edition (1765)
19th century (Romantic)	Charles Lamb	"On the Tragedies of Shakespeare Considered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation"
19th century (Romantic)	Thomas de Quincey	"On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*"
19th century (Romantic)	Samuel Taylor Coleridge	Lectures on Shakespeare from 1811-1819
19th century (Victorian)	Thomas Carlyle	On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History: Lecture III (1840)
19th century (Victorian)	A.C. Bradley	Lectures on *Shakespearean Tragedy*
20th century (Modern)	G. Wilson Knight	*The Wheel of Fire*
20th century (Modern)	Caroline Spurgeon	*Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells Us*
20th century (Modern)	E. M. W. Tillyard	*Shakespeare's History Plays*
20th century (Modern)	S. C. Sengupta	*The Whirlgig of Time: The problem of Duration in Shakespeare's Plays*

In the following section we will talk briefly about some of theaforementioned critics and their contributions to Shakespeare criticism.

2.8.3.1 17th Century Criticism:

As mentioned before, Shakespeare was quite famous in his own lifetime, even among his fellow playwrights. One such contemporary happens to be another towering figure of the English stage–**Ben Jonson**. In his eulogy to Shakespeare in the *Preface* to the *First Folio* of 1623, written in heroic couplets,he considers Shakespeare's writings to be something that "neither Man nor Muse can praise too much" (Jonson 13). Jonson talks about the immense popularity that Shakespeare enjoyed in his time, and suggests that his works will continue to influence generations to come by describing him as someone "not of an age, but for all time" (Jonson 14).


OF
Dramatick Poesie,
AN
ESSAY.
By JOHN DRYDEN Esq;
——Fungar vice cotis, acutum
Reddere quæ ferrum valet, exors ipsa secandi.
Horat. De Arte Poet.
LONDON,
Printed for Henry Herringman, at the Sign of the Anchor, on the Lower-walk of the New-Exchange. 1668.

(Image Source: Google Books)

John Dryden's *An Essay of Dramatick Poesy* is constructed as a dialogue among four characters–Crites, Eugenius, Lysideius, and Neander. Through the character of Neander (meaning "new man"), who represents Dryden himself, he mentions about Shakespeare that he had the "most comprehensive soul" when compared to all the ancient and modern writers. Through this phrase Dryden praises Shakespeare's unparalleled capacity of capturing a wide spectrum of human experiences, emotions, and intellect to which audiences of all kind can connect and relate to.He further adds that Shakespeare did not need formal learning, as he is often criticized for, as he was "naturally learned" (Dryden 36). But he also criticizes Shakespeare for sometimes being flat and insipid, and for his puns, and also for the "bombast" (Dryden 36) of his speeches. He also mentions that the language that Shakespeare uses is a bit "obsolete" (Dryden 37).

Stop and Think

Dryden praises Shakespeare for incorporating a wide range of human emotions in his plays. Which emotions do you think drive through the play *Macbeth*?

Compared to Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, according to Neander, is the more "correct poet" (Dryden 38), but Shakespeare had "the greater wit" (Dryden 38). Neoclassicism, which dominated literary oeuvre in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, emphasized order, reason, and adherence to classical models. Correctness referred to a writer's ability to adhere to established rules, including the unities of time, place, and action; decorum; and the separation of genres. Wit, in the neoclassical sense, was the faculty of intellectual brilliance and inventiveness, combining imagination with judgment. While wit was admired, it was often expected to function within the boundaries of correctness. Correctness and wit were central to neoclassical aesthetics because they balanced reason with inventiveness, ensuring art adhered to classical ideals while still engaging the imagination. Dryden's praise of Shakespeare, however, shows his willingness to move beyond these parameters, celebrating a genius whose natural wit and creative power made him exceptional, even if he violated the rules. Dryden compares Shakespeare to Homer and Jonson to Virgil.Dryden's admiration of Shakespeare can indeed be summed up in one line that Neander speaks about him–"I admire him (Ben Jonson), but I love Shakespeare" (Dryden 38).

2.8.3.2 Neo-Classical Period:

Heading to the Neoclassical era, we have **Alexander Pope**'s 1725 edition of Shakespeare. In the *Preface* of the edition, he praises Shakespeare by saying "If ever any Author deserved the name of an Original, it was Shakespeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of Nature…" (Pope 1). Pope mentions that it will be unfair to judge Shakespeare by means of the Aristotelian rules, as Shakespeare's time and audience were much different than that of the Greeks. While comparing Shakespeare to Jonson, Pope keeps the former on a higher pedestal, claiming that his superiority comes from his originality-"Because Shakespeare borrowed nothing it was said that Ben Jonson borrowed everything" (Pope 3). Pope also speaks in detail the problems of errors in Shakespeare's works that are caused due to the lack of expertise from the publisher's end.

Did you know?

Although Shakespeare's creative originality has been praised throughout generations of critics, many of his plays were actually adaptations of previously existing stories. For instance, the source of the story of *Macbeth* can be traced to *The Holinshed's Chronicle*. The originality lies in his craftsmanship of turning existing stories into immortal plays.

Dr Samuel Johnson's 1765 edition of Shakespeare was probably his largest work and it took some 9 years for him to complete the work. The edition comes

with a *Preface* in which he praises Shakespeare for his realistic and relatable characters-"Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion" (Johnson 3).He views Shakespeare's plays as neither tragedies nor comedies but as just representations which have the elements of both. Dr Johnson considers this mingling justified as Shakespeare's plays both "instruct and delight". Johnson also considered Shakespeare's skills of writing comedy superior than his composition of tragedy-"His tragedy seems to be skill. His comedy to be instinct" (Johnson 6). But as a Neoclassical critic, the didactic Dr Johnson considers that Shakespeare was keener to please than to instruct, and according to him the creative artist may not sacrifice "virtue to convenience". He further adds "...he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to show in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked…" (Johnson 7).

Since you have read two of Shakespeare's plays, you might be able to relate to this statement. Consider *Macbeth* for instance, where Macbeth falls as he was a wicked man, but so does Banquo, and Macduff's family. However, Dr Johnson defends Shakespeare from the criticism regarding his violation of the unities of time and place which here established and recognized by both dramatists and critics of the age, although Aristotle has mentioned only about the unity of action while discussing about the plot of a play.Dr Johnson states that the unities of time and place are in fact irrelevant, and as long as a dramatist maintains the unity of action, which, according to him, Shakespeare does, it does not matter if the dramatist breaks the other two unities as "...the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players" (Johnson 10). Dr Johnson concludes "Shakespeare is always original; nothing is derived from the works of other writers. He is comparable only to Homer in his invention" (Johnson 25).

Stop and Think

In the play *Macbeth* do we not find Shakespeare breaking the unities of time and place? The actions take place sometimes in Scotland and at times at England as well. The time-span is also huge, starting from Macbeth's victory against Macdonwald and the Thane of Cawdor to his defeat in the hands of Macduff. But have you ever seen at any point where Shakespeare breaks the unity of action in the play?

2.8.3.3 Romantic Period:

Charles Lamb, the prince of English essayists, in his essay "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare" raised the concern that Shakespeare's plays, no matter played by

how good an actor, are more suited for reading than watching-"It may seem a paradox, but I cannot help being of opinion that the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage than those of almost any other dramatist whatever" (Lamb 3). It is to be remembered, dear learners, that this is the Romantic era we are talking about, and novels have become one of the popular forms of literature by the time of Lamb. Therefore, Lamb considers that stage representation may reduce the greatness of Shakespeare.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge is another foundational critic of Shakespeare. In his lectures on Shakespeare, he focuses on a handful of Shakespearean plays, namely *Hamlet*, *Tempest*, *Richard II*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Macbeth*. He had immense admiration for *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra* but had equal dislike for *Measure for Measure*-"This Play, which is Shakespeare's throughout, is to me the most painful, say rather the only painful part of his genuine works."Coleridge compares *Macbeth* to *Hamlet* and says that the former appeals to the imagination of the audience while the later appeals to the intellect. However, he is quite disapproving of the "Porter Scene" in *Macbeth* calling the passage "disgusting" and "interpolation of the actors".Other than that, he considers *Macbeth* as a "wholly and purely tragic" play due to the absence of pun and comic elements. Speaking of Lady Macbeth, he considers her character to be "deluded by ambition". To sum up, we can say that Coleridge's view of Shakespeare is constructed through the role of imagination.

Stop and Think

Do you think that there is a chance that the "Porter Scene" was not written by Shakespeare? I mean, it seriously breaks the tragic atmosphere into something ridiculous, right? Why do you think it is there? Like Coleridge, do you also consider it to be "disgusting"?

The discussion of "Porter Scene" (Act II, Sc. iii) comes again when we talk of **Thomas de Quincey**'s essay "On the Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*".Unlike Coleridge, de Quincey sort of defends the scene, focusing on the importance of the "knocking". He interprets the knocking as something that transforms Macbeth from his "human" nature to his "fiendish". Instead of Coleridge's view of interpreting the play as something appealing to the imagination, de Quincey focuses on how the act of knocking acts as the "strife of mind".

2.8.3.4 Victorian Period:

Among the Victorian critics, the most notable name that we find is that of **A. C. Bradley.** In his lecture on *Macbeth,* he calls the play "sublime" that forces the audience to gaze at the characters in awe. He also notices the effect

of the dark and desolate atmosphere that pervades throughout the play. And the darkness is not only metaphorical but also literal as most of the captivating scenes take place in the darkness or at night. Bradley praises the spectacular effects of *Macbeth*and Shakespeare's use of irony in the play. He also considers the possibility that *Macbeth*might not be a full work, rather an abridged version, as the play is surprisingly short, but discards the thought saying that perhaps Shakespeare wanted the play to be that way, and also that we as audience "feel *Macbeth* to be short: certainly, we are astonished when we hear that it is about half as long as *Hamlet*" (Bradley 469).

2.8.3.5 Modern Period:

In the 20th century we have critics such as Caroline Spurgeon who detailed the use of imagery in Shakespeare's plays. She talks about iterative imagery that occurs in many of his plays. Iterative imagery is a kind of imagery that is repeatedly used in a play. For instance, the image of "blood" is repeatedly used in the play *Macbeth*.Other critics includeE M W Tillyard whointerprets Shakespeare's history plays as political writings, highlighting Shakespeare's ideas about the politics of the Tudor regime.

2.8.4 Shakespeare Scholarship: An Overview

Shakespearean scholarship, simply speaking, refers to an engagement with the time and work of Shakespeare. Shakespeare study has been a part of the culture in our country since the colonial era, when the British were setting the educational standards of our country. The study of English literature was naturally prioritised in the higher studies and the inclusion of Shakespeare became inevitable. Since then, India, as a non-native English-speaking country, has contributed substantial outputs to Shakespearean scholarship. In fact, India still remains one of those countries which has some of the highest engagements and adaptations with Shakespeare. Maintaining the rich tradition of Shakespeare study in our country, in this unit we will try to learn about the time and stage of Shakespeare, the actors of the time and the audience.

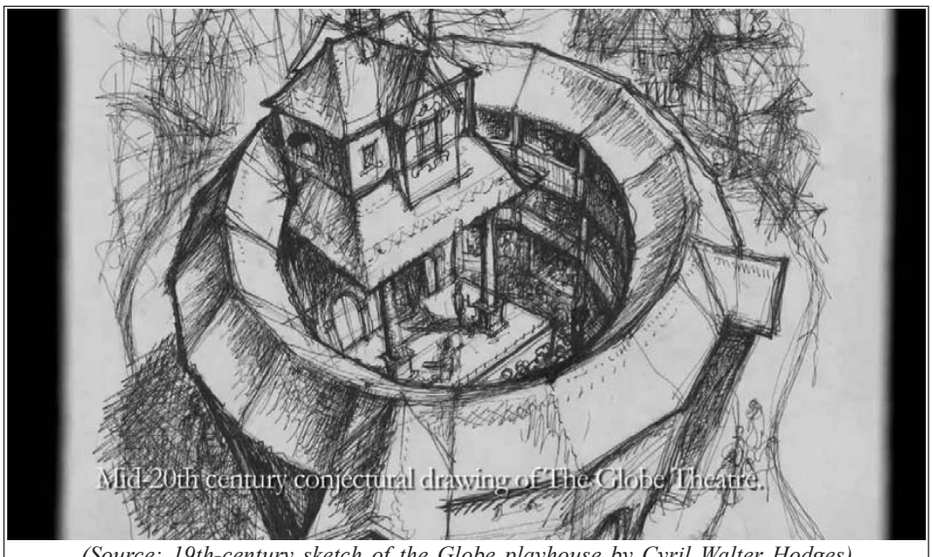
2.8.4.1 Shakespeare's Time and Stage:

You are already acquainted with the development of the English theatre in Module 1 Unit 2 of this paper. This section will focus specifically on the time and stage of Shakespeare.

In Shakespeare's time, stage was never fixed, it was versatile–a play might have been played in an indoor theatre, outdoor theatre, royal palace, courtyard, or maybe for a company tour. The stage itself was relatively bare, but the audience in Shakespeare's time were very enthusiastic. In 1576, James Burbage, an actor, built "The Theatre"–a multi-sided structure with a central, uncovered "yard" surrounded by three tiers of covered seating and a bare, raised stage at one end of the yard. Spectators could pay for seating at multiple price levels; those with the cheapest tickets simply stood for the length of the plays.

Shakespeare's company was one of the many who performed at The Theatre in 1594. Later the Burbages (James and Richard Burbage) began the construction of a bigger playhouse called "The Globe" and the lease of the playhouse was shared among five partners, including Shakespeare and his company. The Globe opened in 1599 and was the place where Shakespeare's finest plays were acted. Unfortunately, it burned down in the year 1613, during a performance of *Henry VIII*. However, a second Globe was built on the very site.

Open playhouses such as The Globe could hold wonderful performances when the weather was good. The necessity of indoor theatre was sensed in hostile weather conditions, as indoor theatres could operate without the concern for rain or wind. Shakespeare's company achieved this goal when the Burbages bought the "Blackfriars Theatre" of London.



(Source: 19th-century sketch of the Globe playhouse by Cyril Walter Hodges)

The stages had very little if no scenery at all at that time. Props were brief as needed for the scene, for instance a bed, or a throne. Entrances and Exits were in the plain view of the audiences but sometimes the stage had the option of "trapdoors". You might recall the Porter Scene from *Macbeth*, where the Porter says–"If a/man were porter of hell-gate, he should have/old turning the key." Actors could descend from the "heavens" above the stage or enter and exit from the "hell" below through a trapdoor and vice versa. A typical stage was almost 40 feet square, raised up to 4 to 6 feet, and usually had a roof. There was also a space of "discovery" where certain characters would remain hidden and appear according to the necessity of the plot. Props were usually carried on and off the stage, but the bigger props would usually stay on the stage throughout the play. The audience would not mind the inconsistency. People would sit around the stage in the galleries, but there was also provision where people could stand and watch the plays.

It is interesting to note that Shakespeare had little interest in the publication of his plays, as he was, in all essence, a man of the theatre. Nevertheless, some eighteen of his plays found their way into the print, mostly in quarto format. Quartos and Folios were names used to describe the format of the printed book. In a quarto, a large sheet of paper folded in half twice to create four leaves or eight pages, while in a folio, it was folded in half to create two leaves or four pages. Naturally the quartos were cheaper to produce than the folios. Seven years after Shakespeare's death, a folio version was published that contained, as mentioned before, a eulogy by Shakespeare's one of the most famous rivals Ben Jonson. Commonly known as the *First Folio* of 1623, the original name was *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*. The folio was dedicated to William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and his brother Philip Herbert. The contents were compiled by the members of the "Stationer's Company" John Heminges and Henry Condell, and published by Edward Blount, William Jaggard and Issac Jaggard.

2.8.4.2 Actors in Shakespeare's Time:

During Shakespeare's time, women were barred from acting, therefore all the roles were performed by men and the boys. The lack of men meant that the role of female actors was played by young boys, who were trained as apprentices from a very early age. You might remember from your reading of *As You Like It*, that Rosalynd, a female character, was dressed up as a young boy in the play. This was

challenging for the young boy actors as they had to play as women pretending to be men. This theme of cross-dressing gave the opportunity to explore gender and sexuality in Shakespeare's plays.

One of the earliest acting groups in Shakespeare's time was Earl of Leicester's men and it had one of the most famous actors of the age as their leader–James Burbage. James Burbage, as mentioned before, was the founder of The Theare in 1576. When the Earl of Leicester died in 1588, the group merged with Lord Strange's Men. This new group performed at The Theatre and The Rose Theatre and they also played some of Shakespeare's early plays. Apart from this group of actors, we also come to know about The Admiral's Men which was one of the finest groups of the contemporary time. Their popularity receded with the growing popularity of Lord Chamberlain's Men, also known as Shakespeare's Company. Shakespeare spent the most of his professional career as a dramatist with this group and this group had the exclusive rights to most of Shakespeare's plays. Shakespeare's Company mostly performed at The Globe, and Richard Burbage, the most famous actor of Shakespeare's time, was cast in most of Shakespeare's plays. In 1603 when King James Stuart became the chief patron of Lord Chamberlain's Men, the name was changed to King's Men. Apart from Shakespeare, this group also collaborated with other famous playwrights of the era such as Ben Jonson.

Among individual actors of the time the first name that comes to our mind is that of Richard Burbage. Being the son of James Burbage, another famous actor for the Earl of Leicester's Men, his acting career most likely started in that very group. He acted with various other theatre groups including The Admiral's Men and The Earl of Pembroke's Men before joining Lord Chamberlain's Men. He played in most of Shakespeare's major plays including *Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Macbeth and King Lear*. Richard Burbage continued acting for the stage until his death in 1619.

James Burbage, the father of Richard Burbage, was the leader of Earl of Leicester's Men from 1572. He had significant contributions to the building of The Theatre and The Globe Theatre. We also get certain other names such as Will Kemp, a comic actor for Shakespeare's Company, who acted in plays like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (role of Bottom) and *Romeo and Juliet* (role of Peter). After he left, he was replaced by Robert Armin, who most likely played the role of Feste in *Twelfth Night*.

The King's Men continued to perform even after the death of Shakespeare, until the closing of theatres in 1642.

2.8.4.3 Shakespearean Audience:

One of the reasons that Shakespeare was so popular in his time was that he catered to the taste of all sorts of audience. The theatre at Shakespeare's time welcomed all sections of the society, starting from wealthier patrons to poor commoners. The Globe could accommodate thousands of spectators on each show. These spectators wanted entertainment more than anything. Wealthy people would watch the shows from covered balconies, and poorer people would pay a penny (the price of a loaf of bread) to watch the plays from an open-air section called the "pit". The royal people would usually not go to public theatre houses, rather acting companies were summoned to perform at the court of Queen Elizabeth or King James Stuart. In public theatres, talking, jeering, and cheering were common during the performances. The "groundlings" or the audience of the pit were very rowdy at the time and actions such as booing the villain, clapping for the hero were common. If the audience did not like the theatre, they could even throw furniture when plays were flop. Shakespeare, therefore knew that he had to grab the attention of the audience right from the beginning. He used several tricks, including not introducing the main character of the play in most of the cases. A minor character would walk on the stage and try to set the mood as the audience would settle in. take *Macbeth* for example–the opening scene begins with a very exciting display of witches–something that the contemporary audience would absolutely love.

Did you know?

The word "box office" comes from Shakespeare's time. Audiences who came to the theatre had to pay the money inside a box. From that time, the place where audience pays for the show came to be known as the "box office".

2.8.5 Contemporary Readings of Shakespeare: A Brief Note

Contemporary readings of Shakespeare refer to viewing his works in the light of recent context which include books, stage productions, and other adaptations. Contemporary readers include everyone from a student to a scholar, from a general reader to a theatre practitioner, who have read, interpreted, reimagined Shakespeare's works in different ways. These activities are important as they sustain Shakespeare's relevance in our times, ensuring his enduring influence throughout generations,starting from Dryden in the 17th century to modern theatre artists and film directors.

2.8.5.1 Shakespeare in 20th and 21st Century Films:

Throughout the world, Shakespeare's plays have been adapted several times to suit the modern audience. Some of the big names in adaptation include Tom Stoppard(*Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* from *Hamlet*), Edward Bond (*Lear* from *King Lear*) and Akira Kurosawa (*Throne of Blood* from *Macbeth*). In India we have one of the highest number of adaptations of Shakespeare. In the last half of the 20thcentury, we get Bollywoodadaptations such as *Angoor*(from *A Comedy of Errors*, dir. Gulzar) and Qayamat *Se Qayamat Tak* (from *Romeo and Juliet*, dir. Mansoor Khan). When we talk about Shakespearean film adaptations in India, the first name that requires mention is that of Sohrab Modi, who is often credited to be the man responsible for bringing Shakespeare to the Indian screen. His *Khoon ka Khoon* was a 1935 filmed version of a stage performance of *Hamlet*. In recent times, we have the famous Shakespeare film trilogy by Vishal Bhardwaj– *Maqbool* (2003) from *Macbeth*, *Omkara* (2006) from *Othello*, and *Haider* (2014) from *Hamlet*. Not only in Bollywood, but also in Bengali as well we have several adaptations of Shakespeare, one the most recent ones being a web series named *Mandaar* (adapted from *Macbeth*), directed by Anirban Bhattacharya in 2021. Other notable adaptations in Bengali include *Bhranti Bilas* (from *A Comedy of Errors*), *Saptapadi* (from *Othello*), *Zulfiqar* (from *Julius Ceasar* and *Antony and Cleopatra)* and many more.

Shakespeare has always been a favourite when it comes to adapting the plays into the big screen. In fact, Shakespeare is the most filmed author in any language. One of the prominent names in this regard remains Laurence Olivier with his direction of *Henry V* (1944) and *Hamlet* (1948). Orson Welles, hailed as one of the greatest filmmakers of all time, directed a film version of *Macbeth* in 1948. However, the golden age of Shakespeare in screens began in the 1960s with the names of Franco Zeffirelli's *Taming of the Shrew* (1966) and the hugely popular *Romeo and Juliet* (1968). During this time, we also get famous names of other directors such as Grigory Kozintsev and Roman Polanski, who have successfully made film versions of *Hamlet, Macbeth,* and *Lear*.

Shakespeare has also been included into animated movies as well, including the children's favourite *The Lion King*, a wonderful adaptation of *Hamlet*.

2.8.6 Summing Up

In this unit, we have discussed about how Shakespeare has been critiqued throughout the generations. We have also discussed about the stage, actors and the audience of his time, and how his works came into print. Additionally, we have also known about how he has been seen, read, and interpreted in recent times. Hopefully, this discussion has been benefitted you in your understanding of the all-time favourite playwright.

2.8.7 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Write a brief essay on your understanding of 17th century Shakespeare criticism.
2. Elucidate your understanding of Shakespeare criticism in the Neo-Classical era.
3. Write a brief essay on how the Romantic critics viewed Shakespeare.
4. Briefly write about Romantic and Victorian criticism of Shakespeare.
5. Write briefly about Shakespeare in films.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Critically comment of Dryden's views on Shakespeare.
2. Explain your understanding of Dr Johnson's critique of Shakespeare.
3. How does the Romantic critics differ from the Neoclassicists in the field of Shakespeare criticism?
4. Briefly discuss about the earliest publications of Shakespeare's plays.
5. Discuss the nature of the audience in Shakespeare's time.
6. Identify and discuss about the actors in Shakespeare's time.
7. How has Shakespeare been Indianised in films?

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Critically comment on why Dryden considers Shakespeare to have a "greater wit" than Jonson.
2. Explain briefly how Dr Johnson defends Shakespeare against the charges of the violation of the unities of place and time.

3. How does Pope, a Neoclassicist, appreciate Shakespeare?
4. Explain briefly your understanding of Coleridge's views on Shakespeare citing textual references from your syllabus.
5. Briefly recall the contribution of the Burbages.
6. Who were the King's Men and what was their contribution to the theatre at Shakespeare's time?
7. Briefly talk about the theme of cross-dressing in Shakespeare's plays, citing textual examples from your syllabus.
8. Briefly discuss about the film adaptation of Shakespeare in Bengali.

2.8.8 Suggested Reading

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Module-3
Themes and Forms of Post-Shakespearean Drama

Unit-9 □ Jacobean Drama

Structure

3.9.1 Objectives

Upon the completion of this unit the learners are expected:

- To have a comprehensive understanding of the Jacobean period, stage and theatre conventions of the era
- To understand the conventions and differences of Jacobean tragedy, tragicomedy, comedy and masques
- To be able to answer long, medium and short length type questions related to this unit.

3.9.2 Introduction

The Jacobean period was one of the most flourishing eras for English drama. In the previous units you have had sufficient knowledge regarding Elizabethan drama. In this unit, you will be given a comprehensive idea of Jacobean drama.

As involved learners, it will be your task to comprehend how closely the dramatic output of a period can be linked to its social dynamics.This unit is intended to provide an in-depth understanding of the period, convention and innovations in dramatic form and staging. Throughan introduction to the historical, political and literary background of the Jacobean period, the growth and development of drama shall be traced. Different forms of drama that were prevalent during the period, the style and language, and the contribution of different playwrights shall be described.

3.9.3 The Jacobean Period (1603-1625): A Brief Survey

The Jacobean period in the history of England and Scotland **extends from the accessionof James I in 1603 to the end of his reign in 1625**.These twenty-two years of the reign of James I produced the finest works in the annals of English literature. The period marks a continuation of the spirit of the Elizabethan Age that was called a nest of sweet singing birds as well as an age of drama. The period was influenced by the Renaissance with renewed interest in the Italian forms of performance, plays of Plautus and Terence and Senecan closet plays, adapted for public performance. The period also marks innovations in generic conventions and mixed theatricality. The Jacobean stage utilised the fulleffect of the revival of learning both for the private court performance and public theatres.

What is of abiding interest here is to see how the Jacobean plays combined the intellectual and aesthetic faculties of the Renaissance. The Reformation had awakened interest in moral, ethical and spiritual issues. The popularity of the public theatre, the circulation of the Bible in easily readable vernacular among English people, the geographical exploration and discovery of new worldsbeyond the seas, and the expansion of trade and commerce, further enlarged the imagination of creative thinkers of the age.Since the days of King Henry VIII,England had evolved as an independent nation throwing off the yoke offoreign power and disassociating itself from Roman Catholicism. The fierce feuds of Catholic and Protestant by this time had ended and all the discordant elements had bonded in harmonious co-existence under James I, irrespective of the Gun Powder plot and underground activities of the dissenters.

The extravagant loyalty to Queen Elizabeth I was, however, missing during the rule of James I, who was brought from Scotland where he ruled as James VI.

William Shakespeare and Ben Jonson carried the spirit of the Elizabethan age into the theatrical culture of the Jacobean age and instead of shaping the theatre attuned their own dramaturgy to changing ethos of the age. The classical dramaturgy of the University wits was thenreplaced by innovations, in both form and content. While Shakespeare stepped into the new world order that was ripe unto rottenness with his Hamlet, Ben Jonson, with a Roman satirical temperament, brought cynicism to the stage with his play *Volpone*. John Webster introduces a maddening world of chaos and decadence with a grotesque macabre of death and his contemporaries like Chapman, Beaumont, Fletcher, Marston, Ford, and many others, brought to the Jacobean stage a great range and variety. While the world of Jacobean tragedy is a dark and sinister, a world of chaos, corruption, perversion, blood and lust; the world of comedy is more city-oriented, with characters obsessed with money and sex.The distinctions between tragedy and comedy gradually blurred in Jacobean tragicomedies and the new theatrical experience brought the audience closer to the contemporary crises in morality, politics, society and economic structures. Another form of performance called masque became popular in the courts of James I and the nobility.

3.9.4 Convention and Innovations

During the Jacobean period performance in the public theatre was very popular. The Elizabethan groundlings became more robust during the Jacobean period and much of the theatre arena was occupied by beggars, loafers, petty criminals, pick-pockets, drunkards, orange sellers, theatre lovers, atheists and conspirators. Theatres became hotspots of sin and crime. During the Elizabethan and Jacobean period several theatre groups were formed, several public theatres sprang up, writers and players honed their skills, and the managers put the plays on different types of performance space–Public, Street, Inn-yards, Church, Court, open ground, etc. The competition was most unhealthy, often crime/ghost-infested, but nevertheless most productive, with every competitor trying to outsmart the other and gain access to the best performance space and audience, and make the act commercially successful. If the piece became popular, rival managers often stole it by sending to the performance a clerk who took down the lines in shorthand. Neither authors nor managers had any protection from pirate publishers, who frequently issued copies of successful plays without the consent of either. After the play had had a London success, it was cut down, both in length and in the number of parts, for the use of strolling players.

Jacobean theatre offered more scope for a more flexible use of improvisational and transformational acting, overt spectacle and inset plays, blending of different forms of performance that the playwrights drew from the streets of London and medieval performances. The theatre became equally infested with ghosts, black magic, exorcism, murder, violence and cruelty. Edward Gordon Craig in his article (1913) "Shakespeare's Collaborators" suggests that "the dramas were created by Shakespeare in close collaboration with the manager of the theatre and with the actors; in fact, with practically the whole of the company who invented, produced and acted them" (155). The production process involved the knowledge and experience and exposure to different performative arts of the improvisators involved in the making of the play.

The reasons behind the commercial success of most of the Jacobean plays may be attributed to the producers and actors who kept improvising on the production techniques by adding new props, visual and aural effects, and acting techniques. The acting or performance style was heavily indebted to the popular Italian form *commedia dell arte*and stories were mostly drawn from Italy and Greece. Shakespeare's use of Plutarch's history of the Greeks and Romans went alongside Holinshed's *Chronicles*, while Jonson and Webster were fonder of Italian stories for the stage.

3.9.5 Jacobean Stage and Theatre

With the coronation of King JamesI in 1603, the court became the centre of theatrical activities. The plays were commissioned for court performance almost on a regular basis. For example, this "Court calendar" of court performances of Shakespeare's playsin last two months of 1604, listed by E. K. Chambers, in Volume IV of *The Elizabethan Stage*,would show the demand for plays during that period:

Nov. I. King's (*Othello*).

Nov. 4. King's (*Merry Wives of Windsor*).

Nov. 23. Prince's.

Nov. 24. Prince's.

Dec. 14. Prince's.

Dec. 19. Prince's.

Dec. 26. King's (*Measure for Measure*).

Dec. 27. Mask for wedding of Sir Philip Herbert and Lady Susan Vere.

Dec. 28. King's (*Comedy of Errors*).

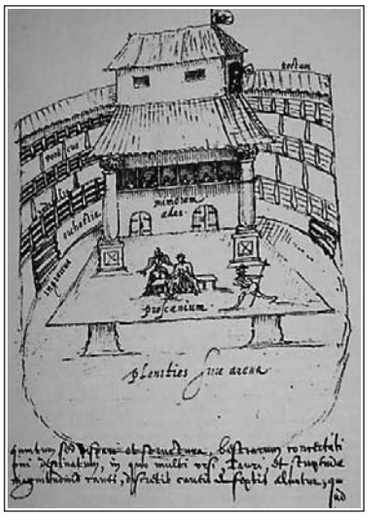
Dec. 30. Queen's (*How to Learn of a Woman to Woo*). (119)

Few academic plays, mostly in Latin, were performed at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge. Travelling players carried the truncated plays to provincial England and the church retained the medieval tradition of religious drama. The plays that succeeded on the public stage were usually invited for court performances along with customised plays or masques suited for court performances. The public theatre was meant for the masses and made theatre an integral part of popular mass culture of that period.

In 1587 Philip Henslowe built the Rose Theatre and when he joined **Admiral's Men,** he shifted the performance of the group to the Rose theatre, and under his financial management several theatre companies acted there from 1592 to 1603. Most of the playwrights of the Jacobean age wrote their plays keeping in mind the apron/thrust stage of the Rose or the Globe theatres.The Globe was erected with the timber smuggled from the site of the Theatre in 1599 and used an identical stage like other public theatres on the south bank of the river Thames such as the Swan and Fortune.

The stage of the Rose Theatre had a diameter of about 70 feet (21 m) and the theatre had a capacity of about 2,200. Our knowledge about the architecture of the stage is mainly based on the following drawing of the Swan theatre by Johannes de Wit:

The raised wooden platform of about 4-5 feet had three performance spaces: the apron jutting across the ground visible to the spectators from three sides; the middle stage with two pillars and a roof; and the inner stage chamber. The elevation (about 25 feet) of the stage had three levels for performance: the lower level representing the hell (4/5 feet) below the raised platform; the wooden platform with trap door/s (earth); the upper balcony (6-7 feet above the platform) and an upper level representing the heaven.



The staging of the act of devilry in the Jacobean plays required the use of this stage with a trap in the middle to allow the supernatural characters to appear/ vanish through it. The 1598 inventories of the Rose Theatre, recorded by Henslowe,

reveals that a good deal of investment was made to buy properties for staging of *Doctor Faustus* like "dragon in fostes," "the sittie of Rome," and "Faustus Jerkin his clok," "invisible cloak," etc. (*Henslowe Papers* 118). More such stage props were added during the Jacobean period, especially for the plays of Shakespeare and Webster.Apart from this stage architecture large halls were modified for theatrical performance such as the Blackfriars. The staging of masques in the Jacobean courts shifted from open theatricality towards proscenium theatre. There was an astonishing diversity of experiment in Jacobean drama that was gradually liberating itself from Renaissance conventions. Different types of plays were performed during the Jacobean period, ranging from histories to tragedies, comedies, tragicomedies, farces to melodramas and masques, among others.

3.9.6 Jacobean Tragedy

The greatest among the Jacobean playwrights, writing successful tear-jerking tragedies, was William Shakespeare (1564-1616). The Jacobean period was remarkable for Shakespeareanplays dealing with the darker side of human experience. Between 1601 and 1607, Shakespeare composed his great tragedies that were produced during the Jacobean period: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *KingLear* and *Macbeth.*During the same period, he wrote tragic plays based on Grecian and Roman history, plays like *Julius Caesar*, *Antony and Cleopatra, and Timon ofAthens.*These seven plays exemplify the highest achievement of English Renaissance tragedy. The reshaping of the historical materials in the form of tragedy was a popular method to disguise contemporary issues under the garb of history. If *Hamlet* prepares the audience for the new type of tragic experience on the Jacobean stage while epitomising the values of Renaissance Humanism, Shakespeare's tragic universe gradually became more and more dark and sinister, manifesting the "metaphysic of evil." The pricks of conscience that keeps Hamlet procrastinating the final act of revenge go missing in Macbeth who is hell bent to write his own destiny without any moral scruples. Othello's suspicious nature, sexual jealousy, and a sense of deprivation lead him to commit rash acts of violent uxoricide and suicide. King Lear's irascible nature, possessive instinct, power-mongering, senile dementia, culminating in tragic loss of Cordelia, ending with his own death, stretched pain beyond human endurance. Macbeth is drenched in blood, committed to his obsessive

pursuit of power through violent acts of sin, and displays no mark of repentance, even at the moment of death.

If Shakespeare provided a solid foundation for the development of Jacobean drama, it was John Webster (1580-1625) who gave a distinctive identity to Jacobean drama. The first notice of John Webster as a playwright was marked as a collaborator paid for his contribution for writing few lines in a play. His career as dramatist can be traced in the closing years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth and seems to have lasted through the reign of James I. He belonged to a group of writers who often collaborated to write play. This group included Munday, Drayton, Middleton, Dekker, Chettle, Heywood, and Wentworth Smith, among others. The following are the tragic plays, written wholly or in part by Webster, of which trace has come down to us, according to C. Vaugham:*The Guise* (1601), *Caesar's Fall*. (1602), *The White Devil or Vittoria Corombona* (1612), *The Duchess of Malfi*. (Printed in 1623), *The Devil's Law-Case* (1623).

During the Jacobean period, Senecan revenge tragedy became more popular especially after the success of Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* In such tragedies, the revenge plot revolves around a crime, usually usurpation or murder, the pursuit of detective-avenger, the identification of the criminal and, finally, the execution of revenge. In Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, the main object of revenge is the Duchess and the avengers are her brothers, Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal. A tool-villain is appointed by the avengers, Bosola, who accomplishes the task of avenging the violation of degree by the Duchess. She has married her steward against the prohibitions imposed on her by her brothers. She is a young propertied widow and although rich widows could remarry during that time, she becomes a victim of honour-killing. Once the revenge is accomplished, her brother, Duke Ferdinand asks Bosola, "By what didst thou execute / This bloody sentence?" and Bosola reminds him "By yours," Ferdinand rebukes him, "Mine? Was I her judge?" [Act IV, sc ii]. J.W. Lever has pointed out that "Webster based the action on a vendetta resulting from an unconventional match, leading to the deaths of both the revengers and their victim" (86-7). But the revengers are not "motivated solely by their resentment at the innocent marriage of a pair" as Lever has argued (89). The marriage may be "wanton and irreligious" and "their difference of rank… a shocking violation of degree" but the victim is more "sinned against than sinning" (Lever 89; *King Lear*). Ferdinand by his own confessional words at the moment of his death reveals the objective of revenge:

Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,

Like diamond we are cut with our own dust. [*Dies*] (Act V, scene v, 72-3)

The Duchess is thus a victim of inexplicable incestuous lust of Ferdinand along with a "sin" of blood and Ferdinand's greed.Once dead, the Duchess inspires Bosola to take up arms against the offenders and transform himself from a tool villain to an avenger. The second revenge plot too falters: Bosola kills Antonio, whose life he promised to save. Finally, he kills both the offenders and gets killed in the process.

In the tragedies of Jacobean playwrights like John Ford (1586-1640), a sense of foreboding doom and immoral act is visible, as in*TheBroken Heart*. Francis Beaumont (1584-1616) and John Fletcher (1579-1625) did much work in collaboration. According to W.H. Hudson, "Their moral tone is often relaxing, their sentimentstrained, and their characterisation poor; but they havemany redeeming features, and such plays as *Philaster* [a tragicomedy]and *The Maid's Tragedy* successfully challenge comparisonwith anything in the romantic drama outside Shakespeare" (79).George Chapman (1560-1634) wrote tragedies like *BussyD'Ambois*(1604), *The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles, Duke of Byron, Marshal of France* (1608) and *The Revenge of BussyD'Ambois*(1610). Philip Massinger (1583-1640) wrote a tragedy about the Emperor Dominitian, *The Roman Actor* (1626) for the King's Men and collaborated with Nathan Field (1587-1620) in *The Fatal Dowry* (1618) and with Thomas Dekker (1570-1632) in *The Virgin Martyr* (1620), based on the martyrdom of St. Dorothy.

A new form of naturalistic domestic tragedy developed during the Jacobean period that were not set in the exotic locales (usually Italy), as used by Webster and John Ford. Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* and two anonymous plays–*Arden of Faversham* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*–are English family plays. There is a dominant sense of tragic doom and the characters try to escape from problems arising out of love or money.

3.9.7 Jacobean Tragicomedy

Tragicomedy developed through generic hybridity of tragedy and comedy, either by providing a happy ending to a tragic story or by a blending of serious

and light moods. The term may be applied to plays of mixed means combing the conventions of tragedy and comedy. Italian playwright Battista Guarini (1537-1612)mixed 'high' and 'low' characters in*Il Pastor Fido* (1583). Beaumont and Fletcher followed his example in their *Philaster, or Love Lies A-Bleeding* (1609) and George Chapman (1560-1634) wrote *The Widow's Tears* (1612). Problem plays of Shakespeare like *Troilus and Cressida*(1602), *All's Well that Ends Well* (1604) and *Measure for Measure*(1604) mixed serious and comic scenes. Between 1608 and 1612, Shakespeare wrote tragicomedies and dramatic romances such as*Cymbeline*, *TheTempest*, and *The Winter's Tale* and historical plays like *Pericles*(in collaboration with George Wilkins) and *Henry VIII*(with John Fletcher). These plays blur the distinction between tragedy and comedy.

Beaumont and Fletcher's*Philaster, or Love Lies A-Bleeding* (1609) was perhaps the most popular tragicomedy of the Jacobean period. The play deals with dethronement of Philaster by King of Calabria. Philaster is in love with the usurper's daughter, Artheusa, who is engaged to the Spanish prince, Pharamond, whose amorous affair with Megra is exposed by Artheusa. She becomes the object of Pharamond's revenge and accused of an affair with Bellario. Philaster believes in this story and plans to kill the pair and commit suicide. He is arrested and kept in the custody of Artheusa who promptly marries him. It is revealed that Bellario is a girl who is infatuated with Philaster and has disguised as a boy. Thus, all is well at the end: the usurper is overthrown and Philaster is restored to the throne.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* has been classified as a pastoral tragicomedy dealing with a similar theme of usurpation, revenge, matrimonial alliance and restoration of the throne. Prospero, the erstwhile and exiled Duke of Milan, has taken up a twelve-year residence with his daughter Miranda in an island after usurping Sycorax, mother of Caliban. With his magical power, he uses Ariel to bring all the offenders to the island. Ferdinand, the son of King Alsonso of Naples, falls in love with Miranda, Antonio restores the dukedom of Milan to Prospero, Ariel is freed, the island is returned to Caliban, and the Italians prepare to sail back to their home. Serious issues of usurpation, colonisation, revenge, and liberty are interwoven with romance, comedy and farce in *The Tempest* that is set in a pastoral world.

3.9.8 Jacobean Comedy

Ben Jonson (1572-1637), among Jacobean playwrights, was the most prolific and successful. He experimented with various theatrical styles and genres and was immensely influenced by the works of Roman playwrights like Plautus and Terence. His earlier Elizabethan Comedy of Humours was appropriated with the Jacobean moral ethos. Most of his characters are obsessed with love, marriage or money. Using the dramaturgy of Plautus, he allows a farcical build-up towards a climactic exposure of human deceit and cunning. Ben Jonson's reputation rests mainly on comedies written between 1605 and 1614: *Volpone*(1605) "assails gross vice";*Epicoene, or, The Silent Woman* (1609) "ridicules various sorts of absurd persons";*The Alchemist* (1610) "castigates quackery and its foolish encouragers";and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614)"is acoarse but overwhelming broadside at Puritan hypocrisy," according to R.H. Fletcher (114).

Volpone, or The Fox, according to Andrew Sanders "is Jonson's most savage comedy" (171). Jonson uses Italianate menagerie of characters like Fox, Flesh-fly, Vulture, Crow, Raven, etc., in the play. *The Alchemist* is much closer to the Roman comedies of Plautus. In the play,Lovewit leaves London at the time of plague leaving the care of his house to his servant, Face. With the help of his henchman, Subtle, Face uses his master's house as a centre of fraud. Subtle poses as an alchemist with possession of the philosopher's stone and dupes the gullible. Characters from different walks of life are thus looted by them. Sir Epicure Mammon is the main target of the tricksters. Finally, the master returns and discovers the frauds and keeps the booty. Face cleverly plants Dame Pliant as a suitable bride and Lovewit marries her. The servant is reconciled with the master at the end of the play.

The light-hearted romantic comedies of the Elizabethan period go missing from the Jacobean stage and Jacobean city comedies are tinged with unhappy marriages, debts, adultery, corruption and deceit.Comedy became more critical and exposed human shortcomings. Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker' s Holiday* (1599) is one of the earliest ofcity comedies remarkable for the gallery of characters it presents. Thomas Middleton (1580-1627) wrote city comedies for boy actors from 1602 to 1607 such as *A Mad World, My Masters* (1604), *A Trick to Catch the Old One* (1605) and *Michaelmas Term* (1606). His comic masterpiece *A Chaste Maid*

in Cheapside (1611) was written for adult companies. The play parodies mercantile double-dealing exposing obsession with sex, money, procreation and inheritance. According to Andrew Sanders:

> For Middleton, however,social anomalies, new mercantile value-systems, and the equation of money and sex suggest the corruption of urbansociety. In each play foxes have to be outfoxed and the old who lack both spritely wit and integrity are successfullyoutwitted by the young. (167)

Francis Beaumont's*The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) is a burlesque comedy that parodies the conventions of old-fashioned romantic knight errantry.In the play a city apprentice, Ralph, becomes a "grocer errant" with a burning pestle as his device in the titular"play-within-the-play." Philip Massinger's *A New Way to Pay OldDebts* (1622), one of the most popular social comedies of the period, presents Sir Giles Overreach, a cruel extortioner, who snatches the property of his nephew, Frank Wellborn.

3.9.9 Masques

During the reigns of James I masque emerged as an important theatrical form specially for court entertainment, performed at the court on special occasions. The performance of masque differed from the public theatre performances at the Globe, theBlackfriars, and the other London theatres. The masques were performed in private royalhalls, such as the Banqueting Hall in Whitehall. The production of the masques was expensive, with lavish costumes, elaborate stage designs and spectacularеffects. Inigo Jones, who designed the sets and introduced the proscenium arch, borrowed from Italy, anda new architectural style to Englishtheatre.The masques depended on the spectacularscenic effects, music, dance, and a celebratory atmosphere. BenJonson's*The Masque of Beautie*, was intended "to glorifythe Court," and give the courtiers an opportunity to perform.According to IforIvans,in1605 Jonson"prepared *The Masque of Blackness* for which Inigo Jones did the designs, and in which the Queen and her ladies appeared"(165). This is perhaps the first record of female performers on the Jacobean theatre. In Shakespeare's *The Tempest* an inset betrothal masque in performed to entertain and bless Miranda and Ferdinand. This masque also requires female roles, elaborate costume, music and dance.Later

in the seventeenth century, Jacobean open thrust stage, was replaced by this new theatre architecture.

3.9.10 Summing Up

In this Unit therefore, you have received a fair idea about the turns that English Drama was taking since the flowering of the mature genius of Shakespeare, and how social changes were beginning to tell upon the nature of audiences. You have also learnt about the different theatrical forms that had flourished, drawing upon the manifold humanist perspectives that the Renaissance had opened up. All of these will serve as good background as you approach the text of John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi* in the next Unit.

3.9.11 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Write a short note on range and variety ofJacobean drama.
2. Evaluate the development of Jacobean tragedy.
3. Write an essay on Jacobean Citizen Comedy.
4. Write a note on the development of tragicomedy as a dramatic form during the Jacobean period.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Write a short note on the contribution of William Shakespeare to the development of Jacobean drama.
2. Define masque. Identify the characteristics of the genre with reference to any masque of the Jacobean period.
3. Write a short note on the historical and literary background of the Jacobean period.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Name two writers of Jacobean comedy and their works.
2. Name two tragicomedies of the early seventeenth century.
3. Write a short note on Middleton.
4. Write a short note on the contribution of Beaumont and Fletcher.

3.9.12 Suggested Reading

Albert, E. *History of English Literature.* OUP, 1976.

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Hudson, W.H. *An Outline History of English Literature.* G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1913.

Ousby, Ian (Ed.). *The Cambridge Guide to Literature in English.*Cambridge UP, 1988.

Sanders, Andrew. *The Short Oxford History of English Literature.*Clarendon Press, 1994.

Styan, J. L. *Drama, Stage and Audience.* Cambridge UP, 1975.

Unit-10 □ John Webster: *The Duchess of Malfi*

Structure

3.10.1 Objectives

After completing this unit, the learners would be able:

- To have a comprehensive idea of John Webster along with the history of the composition, production and publication of the play *The Duchess of Malfi*
- To understand the drift in playwriting from Shakespeare to the contemporary dramatists of the age
- To answer long, medium and short length answers from this unit.

3.10.2 Introduction

In the previous unit, you have read about Jacobean drama and its exponents. You have also read the mention of John Webster and his famous play *The Duchess of*

Malfi. This particular play falls under the category of "Jacobean Revenge Tragedy". In this unit you will read about the play, its sources, publication details, thematic details, critical receptions, act wise summary and imageries and symbols related to it. We shall also talk about the chaos, decadence and subversions of the Jacobean moral order, as represented through the play. It is recommended that you read this unit after correlating it with the text of the play for a better understanding.

3.10.3 John Webster: A Bio-Brief

About John Webster not much is known. Information about the life of this Jacobean playwright is based on conjecture. According to Sidney Lee, Webster was probably born in 1580 and died in 1625. He probably joined as a parish clerk of St. Andrew's, Holborn. The only certain dates that the biographers of Webster confirm are related to the production or publication of his works.The first notice of John Webster as a playwright was marked as a collaborator paid for his contribution for writing few lines in a play. His career as dramatist can be traced in the closing years of the reign of Queen Elizabeth and seems to have lastedthrough the reign of James I. The earliest record we have of Webster is of his collaborating for Henslowe in 1602 with a number of others in writing four plays, *Caesar's Fall*, *Two Harpes*(perhaps Two Harpies), *Lady Jane* and *Christmas Comes but Once a Year*.

3.10.4 *The Duchess of Malfi*: Composition, Production and Publication

In 1612 Webster's *The White Devil* was published. The text was based on a performance "as acted" by the Queen's Majesty's Men. Webster started working on the next play *The Duchess of Malfi* which was perhaps performed before 1615. The play was first printed as a small Quarto in 1623, and was reprinted, with some minor variations in 1640 and 1678. The First Edition is considered as the most correct of the Quartos. According to John Russell Brown, "the title-page announced that it [*The Duchess of Malfi*] had been 'presented privately,at the Blackfriars, and publicly at the Globe, by the King's Majesty's Servants'" (xviii). The play was performed by the leading actors of the period like Richard Burbage (as Ferdinand), John Lowin (as Bosola), and Richard Sharp (as the Duchess).

The staging of the play suited the requirements of an enclosed auditorium space like the Blackfriars with provisions for intimate scenes with artificial lighting of torches and lanterns. Several scenes of the play require an enclosed darkened

space for generating suspense and shock effect. The play also required scenic designs appropriate to both private and public space. The internal evidence on staging is provided by the stage directions that are more suitable for the Blackfriars. The printed text follows the quarto edition that was probably used for private performance in the Blackfriars. The same text was probably adapted for performance at open theatres like the Globe where darkness and night scenes were implied through words and stage props like torches and lanterns.

3.10.5 Webster's Handling of the Sources

Webster's transformation of source materials into a well-made tragedy filled with suspense and thrill displays a mastery over both the form and the content. The primary source of the play has been identified in Matteo Bandello's twenty-sixth *Novella* (1554). Bandello's stories are based on events that happened in his lifetime eye-witnessed by him or compiled as contemporary news and scandals. Bandello, for greater narrative fidelity, may have imagined himself as the Delio of the story, giving a circumstantial account of events that happened during the period 1508-1513. Bandello recounted the story of Antonio Beccadelli di Bologna, his secret marriage to Giovanna [the Duchess in Webster's play] after death of her first husband, and the wrath of her two brothers–a Duke and a Cardinal. Bandello recorded that the avenging brothers arranged the kidnapping of the Duchess, her maid, and two of her three children by Antonio, and arranged for the murder of all the hostages. Antonio, escaped to Milan with his oldest son, where he was later assassinated by a gang led by one Daniele Bozzolo.

Webster's legal eyes and theatrical acumen could easily trace in such high-class feudal gossip a Senecan revenge plot suitable for the Jacobean audience. Bandello's work was translated into French byBelleforest in his second volume of *Histories Tragiques*(1565) with fictional elaboration and linguistic embellishment. Such quasi-historical romance was then adapted as a conduct book on morality by William Painter in the second volume of *Palace of Pleasure* (1567) in a chapter titled "The infortunate marriage of a gentleman called Antonio Bolonga with the duchesse of Malfi, and the pitifull death of them both." Webster perhaps used the latest version of the story but nevertheless retained the foundation of earlier versions, including the original Italian source text.

In Painter's version the Duchess is presented as a lascivious and voluptuous widow; in Webster's version, she stands against the conservative and hypocritical imperatives of patriarchal society, asserting with dignity her integrity and free will. Webster's method was much advanced for his times as he, according to John Russell

Brown, "accepted the main outline of Painter's story, but modified, reshaped, and elaborated it to sustain a wider interest and lead to a wider conclusion" (xxviii). Webster fabricated the factual plot with fictional departures and invented characters. The agents and spies employed to detect the secret story of a rich widow engaged in an amorous relationship with a man below her degree, the tool villain to avenge the wrongs done by the Duchess and the avenger of his own sinful act, are all combined in the persona of Bosola.

While working on the additions to Marston's *The Malcontent* in 1604, Webster must have drawn his model for the character of Bosola from the deposed Duke Altofrontwho is disguised as a discontented parasite Malevole. The final change in Bosola from a tool-villain to an avenger of Duchess's death and the onstage slaughter of the Aragonian brothers–Ferdinand and Cardinal–cater to the Jacobean obsession with onstage revenge and bloodshed, drawn from several sources including *The Jew of Malta,Julius Caesar,Hamlet*and *King Lear*. Machiavelli's *The Prince* must have provided materials for the creation of characters like Julia, Cardinal and Bosola.

3.10.6 Critical Reception of the Play

The Duchess of Malfi well-suited for performance in the indoor Blackfriars and produced successfully with leading actors of the day in the Jacobean public theatres did face hostile reception on moral and religious grounds. OrazioBusino, Venetian envoy in England in 1618, objected the play for religious reasons.After rising briefly togreat heights, Webster's power in the field of tragedy seems to have declined perhaps because of the rise of the Puritans who opposed such on-stage liberties. After the restoration of the theatres in 1660 there was a new found interest in the plays of Webster.

As per archival records, the play was successfully performed on 30 September 1662, with talented actors Betterton playing Bosola, Mary Saundersonas the Duchess, and Henry Harris as Ferdinand. A female actor performing the role of the Duchess perhaps for the first time on the English stage received good reception. John Downes notes that it was "so exceedingly excellently acted in all parts."The play was staged twice at Covent Garden on 4 and 6 April 1733, with a new name "The Fatal Secret" with Mrs Hallam as theDuchess. Lewis Theobald writes of Webster's violation of the unities and his "wild and undigested Genius" and revised the play in 1733 intoan unintentional tragic farce: no children are born, morals are overlaid, horrors are softened, and Webster's lines thought to be crude, are made to disappear. True to its new moralistic title, "The Fatal Secret" met with the fate it deserved.

Charles Lamb's generous selection of the play in anthology led to renewed awareness of Webster as a literary artist and poet in 1809 among his contemporaries. Webster's plays vanished from the English stages for over a century only to reappearon 20 November 1850 at the Sadler's Wells Theatre. The review, however found Webster guilty of charges:

> Instead of 'holding the mirror up to nature,' this drama holds the mirror up to Madame Tussaud's and emulates her 'chamber of horrors' but the 'worst remains behind,' and that is the motiveless and false exhibition of human nature. (Moore 91)

The Victorian Age appreciatedWebster's poetry and tragic vision on the one hand and attacked play for its episodic structure, absurd improbabilities, melodramatic excesses and immorality. The female-centric play offered the female actors the scope to excel in the theatres of England and America.

A.C. Swinburne was Webster's most enthusiastic champion in the late nineteenth century with his excessive admiration of Webster's imagery and impressionism. William Archer in 1893 refuted such critical over-praise and found the play "loose-strung," with an ill-made plot and "go-as-you-please romances in dialogue" (Moore 141). Bernard Shaw branded Webster as "Tussaud laureate" in 1898 for his display of wax-work effigies and melodramatic excesses. T.S. Eliot in 1918 poem "Whispers of Immortality" wrote:

> Webster was much possessed by death
> And saw the skull beneath the skin;
> And breastless creatures under ground
> Leaned backward with a lipless grin.
> Daffodil bulbs instead of balls
> Stared from the sockets of the eyes!
> He knew that thought clings round dead limbs
> Tightening its lusts and luxuries. [1-8]

However, Eliot would later criticize Lamb's appreciation of Webster and for beginning a near-fatal dichotomy between drama and poetry. John Webster, somewhat like his Duchess, is seen "going into a wilderness" without any "friendlyclue as [his] guide." Critical reputation of Webster became much stronger with the critical essays of J.W. Lever, Clifford Leech, Travis Bogard, James L. Calderwood and Catherine Belsey in the second half of twentieth century.

3.10.7 Dramatis Personae

The following list of Dramatis Personae appeared in the printed version of the play. The list reveals the hierarchical order and gender division in the feudal patriarchal society of Amalfi. The degree of order is violated by the Duchess who marries her steward against the wishes of her brothers. Webster's satire exposes the hypocrisy of the society that gives more importance to hierarchy and patriarchal order rather than to merit and integrity. As a renaissance tragedy, the play upholds the argument in favour of merit, virtue, integrity and free will.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

FERDINAND, Duke of Calabria
CARDINAL, his brother
ANTONIO BOLOGNA, Steward of the Household to the Duchess
DELIO, his friend
DANIEL DE BOSOLA, Gentleman of the Horse to the Duchess
CASTRUCCIO
MARQUIS OF PESCARA
COUNT MALATESTI
RODERIGO
SILVIO
GRISOLAN
DOCTOR
The Several Madmen

DUCHESS OF MALFI
CARIOLA, her woman
JULIA, Castruccio's wife, and the Cardinal's mistress
Old Lady

Ladies, Children, Pilgrims, Executioners, Officers, and Attendants.

3.10.8 Plot Summary

Despite some structural flaws *The Duchess of Malfi* has a well-made plot. Although the unity of plot is violated and episodic digressions into comedic action dilute the intensity of the tragic plot, the play has a power to generate suspense and hold the attention of the audience. The audience is given a foreknowledge of the events and are involved in the formation of the plot.

➢ Act I

The opening serves as an expository prologue: set in the court of Malfi, the play introduces the theme, characters, action and motives. Antonio, who has just returned from France, states that "the court of princes is like a common fountain." Delio introduces Bosola as "the only court gall" afflicted by corruption and evil; "slighted thus" Bosola aspires the life of scavengers: "black birds that fatten best in foul weather." Bosola describes the Aragonianbrothers as "plum trees growing crooked over standing pools, laden with ripe fruits accessible to crows, pies and caterpillar." The action moves in a rapid pace and the exposition prepares firm ground for the rising action and complication. Bosola's cynic observations in choppy prose, the suppressed violence of his words, his sense of injury and desire for revenge prepare the audience for Webster's tragedy.The Duchess' twin brother Ferdinand, the Duke of Calabria, appears next, followed by his brother Cardinal. Once the characters are exposed, that we meet the Duchess with her waiting womanCariola, according to the instruction of Duke Ferdinand,the Duchess agrees to keep Bosola as the Master of the Horse in her court, an implant to spy on the Duchess and report Ferdinand about her suitors and private life. Antonio and Bosola are commoners who depend upon the nobility and both areambitious.Ferdinand and the Cardinal warn the Duchess against remarriage. When they leave, the Duchess summons Antonio for a secret meeting and presents herself as a woman of flesh and blood. She offers her love to Antonio and participates in a secret betrothal ceremony, hoping that "time will easily / Scatter the tempest". Cariola senses the crisis. This secret marriage leads to the necessary and probable action of spying and revenge.

➢ Act II

There is a lapse of few months:the Duchess and Antonio have been able to keep their marriage private.Cariola and Delio are their confidante. Bosola is seen accosting a mid-wife and offering insightful comment that we hide our human diseases under rich tissue of deception. He offers a pregnancy detection test to the Duchesswith apricotsripened with horse dung. She is tempted to taste the fruit and fails in the test. She feels unwell, hurries away to her bedroom and goes into labour. Antonio concocts the story of the theft of jewellery to mask the scream of labour pain as the Duchess gives birth to a baby boy.Later in the night, Bosola snoops around for some evidence and suspects Antonioof lying. When Antonio hurriedly leaves, a horoscope with blood mark is found by Bosola. It is his son's horoscope, prophesying a violent death of the new born child. Bosola must now find out who the father is. He sends a message to Ferdinand and the Cardinal throughCastruchio. The scene shifts to Rome, where the Cardinal is with his mistress, Julia, the wife

ofCastruchio. Cardinal calls Julia false and inconstant. Delio,an old suitor of Julia enters. Their meeting is interrupted by a servant, who informs Julia that her husband is in town, delivering a letter that puts Ferdinand "out of his wits" (II. iv. 69). Ferdinand and the Cardinal readthe letter: Ferdinand rants, declaring himself as mad as he appears, cursing his sister; the Cardinal is colder, more composed, trying to quiet his brother. Ferdinand vows violence upon his sister.

➢ Act III

Act III opens after a lapse of some years. Antonio tells Deliothat he and the Duchess have had two more children. Ferdinand has just arrived at her court, and is quiet. Duchess's morals are being doubted and Antonio's suspected to be corrupt.Ferdinand tells the Duchess that he wants her to marry a count named Malateste whom the Duchess rejects. Ferdinand wants to know more. Bosola says that the Duchess has three children though their father is not known. Bosola gives Ferdinand a duplicate copy of the key to the Duchess' bedroom. The next scene shifts to the privy chamber: Antonio, Cariola and the Duchess are jokingin a jovial spirit. Antonio and Cariola, playfully, withdraw to another room, hoping to annoy her. Alone she combs her hair and muses aloud about the danger from her brothers. Ferdinand appears, holding a poniard. He accuses her of betrayal and when she tells him she is married, Ferdinand denounces her. Antonio and Cariolaare informed about Ferdinand's visit. She asks Antonio to leave. She tells Bosola that Antonio has been embezzling her money. Antonio is asked by her to go to Ancona with her jewellery and as an eyewash, they enact a scene denouncing and sacking Antonio. Later, Bosola defends Antonio's honesty and praises him to win the confidence of the Duchess.Bosola's trick succeeds-she tells him that she is married to Antonio. The Duchess takes Bosola into her confidence, asking him to deliverher jewels to Antonio. She announces her plan to visit the shrine of Loretto, near Ancona, and meet Antonio there. The next scene moves to Rome. The Cardinal, asked by the Emperor to join a military campaign, is seen planning withMalateste. Bosola reveals the secret plan to the Cardinal and Ferdinand. Ferdinand is enraged and the Cardinal plans to go to Ancona.The play shifts to the shrine in Ancona:the Cardinal banishes the Duchess and her family from the shrine. Bosola meets the Duchessand her family. The Duchess urges Antonio to leave for Milan with their eldest son. Bosola enters with an armed guard and takes away the Duchess.

➢ Act IV

Ferdinand meets Bosola and the Duchess is told that Ferdinand wants to visit her in darkness, since he has sworn not to see her. The lights are taken

away. Ferdinand enters and gives her a dead man's hand with a ring upon it. The Duchess "affectionately kiss[es] it" (IV. I. 44). Ferdinand leaves and as the lights are brought, wax figures of Antonio and her children appear dead. The Duchess thinks that they have all been killed. In profound grief, she begins to contemplate death. Bosolaurges her not to despair.Bosola asks Ferdinand to stop tormenting the Duchess. Ferdinand torments her further with a group of madmen drawn from a different profession–a priest, a doctor, a lawyer, an astrologer, a tailor, an usher and a farmer-who talk and sing song. Bosola comes in dressed as an old man, heralding her death. Her integrity andcourage impress him. Executioners arrive and the Duchess faces Bosola boldly, asking him to pay due respect to her dead body. Cariola is strangled and the children too are killed.Ferdinand on seeing the corpses blames Bosola for obeying his orders and banishes Bosola. Betrayed thus,Bosola takes upon himself to save Antonio and avenge his suffering.

➢ Act V

The last act of the play ties up all loose ends.A doctor informs Pescara about Ferdinand's lycanthropy–a wolf-like behaviour, digging up graves, carrying off the corpses. Ferdinand enterscomplaining that he is haunted by his own shadow and in fit of rage throws himself upon his shadow. The Cardinal sends Bosola to find Antonio.Julia confesses that she has fallen in love with Bosola.He asks her to spy on the Cardinal for him but instead she reveals the murder of the Duchess to the Cardinal. He makes her swear not to tell anyone, by kissing his poisoned bible andJulia dies. Cardinal bribes Bosola to kill Antonio. Antonio and Delioare spotted outside the Cardinal's citadel: as they converse, an echo arises from the Duchess' grave, repeating words and phrases like "deadly," "sorrow," "Never see her more."The Cardinal prepares to dispose Julia's body and reveals his plan to kill Bosola. The plan is heard by Bosola. Ferdinand enters, still raving, and exits. At that moment Bosola enters in darkness and stabsAntonio by mistake. Bosola is shocked: he has killed Antonio whom he intended to save. Bosola turns into an avenger. Bosola stabs the Cardinal who cries aloud and Ferdinand bursts in with a sword, and stabs both Bosola and the Cardinal. Bosola manages to kill Ferdinand. With the stage strewn with dead bodies,Delio enters with Antonio's eldest son and laments the tragic spectacle.

3.10.9 Chaos, Decadence and Jacobean Moral Order

In *The Tragedy of State*,J. W. Lever argues that "Jacobean tragedy it is not primarily [concerned with] the conduct of the individual, but of the society which

assails him, that stands condemned" (8). Bosola is seen as presenting the "plight of the intellectual in theworld of state, at once its agent and victim" (94).The fundamental flaw is not in the characters or their conduct, but in the political and social order in which they inhabit. The play grows out of the morality tradition and warns the transgressors in the chaotic and decadent moral order of Jacobean age. Webster not only saw the rotten carcass hid under an artificial social façade, he put that as the central theme of the play. He wanted to reveal the sinister under-current of society that has lost morality. The polarity of virtue and vice is so messed up that there is the prevalence of immorality and evil all around. The evil is not destroyed by virtue in this Jacobean play of crumbling values; evil is destroyed by greater evil, which in turn destroys itself. Webster's path is satanic, like Euripides and Marlowe, as Una Ellis Fermor has pointed out. The inscrutable powers that lead to the suffering of human beings are not held by supernatural agencies, they are man-made, self-inflecting disasters, in a decadent society, ripe unto rottenness.

In his essay "Four Elizabethan Dramatists," Eliot regarded Webster as a "geniusdirected toward chaos." Later critics such as Travis Bogard saw in Webster, a vision based on the fusion of tragedy and satire. The order emerges out of a chaotic world order as pointed out by Irving Ribner in *Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order* (1962). Through this play, as Swinburne pointed out, Webster emerged as a moral poet with his poetic imagination and critical insight. J.A.Symonds also recognises Webster's "firm grasp upon the essential qualities of diseased and guilty human nature." If the play is immoral, so was the Jacobean ethos, and Webster, the moralist, presents the importance of integrity in this decadent world of chaos and disorder. On the other extreme, Kenneth Tynan, in *A View of the English Stage* (1975), has stated:

> Webster is not concerned with humanity. He is the poet of bile and brainstorm, the sweet singer of apoplexy: ideally, one feels, he would have had all his characters drowned in a sea of sweat. (299)

3.10.10 Revenge

During the Jacobean period, Senecan revenge tragedy became more popular especially after the success of Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* A revenge plot is based on a crime, usually usurpation or murder, the pursuit of detective-avenger, the identification of the criminal and, finally, the execution of revenge. All these come late in *The Duchess of Malfi.* The main object of revenge is the Duchess and the avengers are her brothers, Duke Ferdinand and the Cardinal. The tool-villain

appointed by the avengers is Bosola. The Duchess becomes the object of revenge for her violation of degree through her inter-class marriage with her steward, that too against the prohibitions imposed on her by her brothers. She is a young propertied widow and has one son from her previous marriage. Rich widows could marry again during that time and the prohibitions imposed on her by her brothers seem inappropriate.

There is much procrastination in the act of revenge as the marriage has been preserved as a closely guarded secret despite several evidences collected by Bosola. Babies are born, they grow up, and finally the order of honour-killing is given to Bosola. Once the revenge is accomplished, the main avenger comes and asks, "By what didst thou execute / This bloody sentence?" When Bosola reminds him "By yours," Ferdinand rebukes him, "Mine? Was I her judge?" [Act IV, sc ii]. Then why didthe Duchess become an object of revenge? Ferdinand tries to explain that had she continued as a widow he might have "gain'd / An infinite mass of treasure by her death" [ibid]. This might have been plausible only in absence of an heir, but the Duchess has a son by her previous marriage (mentioned at the end of Act III, scene iii by Ferdinand), who, however remains conspicuous by his absence even at the end of the play where Delio enters "with Antonio's son," the possible "heir." J.W. Lever has pointed out that "Webster based the action on a vendetta resulting from an unconventional match, leading to the deaths of both the revengers and their victim" (86-7). But the revengers are not "motivated solely by their resentment at the innocent marriage of a pair" as Lever has argued (89). The marriage may be "wanton and irreligious" and "their difference of rank… a shocking violation of degree" but the victim is more "sinned against than sinning" (Lever 89; *King Lear*). Ferdinand by his own confessional words at the moment of his death reveals the objective of revenge:

> Whether we fall by ambition, blood, or lust,
>
> Like diamond we are cut with our own dust. [*Dies*](Act V, scene v, 72-3)

The Duchess is thus a victim of inexplicable incestuous lust of Ferdinand along with a "sin" of blood and Ferdinand's greed.Once dead, the Duchess inspires Bosola to take up arms against the offenders and transform himself from a tool villain to an avenger. The second revenge plot too falters: Bosola kills Antonio, whose life he promised to save. Finally, he kills both the offenders and gets killed in the process.

3.10.11 Imagery, Symbols, Ceremonies

Imagery in *The Duchess of Malfi* is perceptible through "concrete" objects, stage props, scenes, action and diction. The set of images used is both mental pictures, appealing to senses, and concepts, appealing to thought and imagination. The concrete imagery drawn from nature reveals both the malign and benign forces. The predatory world of ferocious animals and the rotten world of the scavengers are juxtaposed to the avian imagery associated with liberty and free will. Bosola, in the opening scene of the play, introduces the imagery of "dog days" to reveal the picture of contemporary society:

> I will thrive some way: blackbird fatten best in hard weather: why not I, in these dog days? (Act I, scene i, 47-9)

The Aragonian brothers are described by Bosola with the following simile:

> He and his brother are like plum trees that grow crooked over standing pools: they are rich o'erladen with fruit, but none but crows, pies, and caterpillars feed on them. (*ibid* 51-4)

The world of the play is infested with the scavengers and predators. The benign forces of nature are left at the mercy of these forces. The Duchess of Malfi associates herself with the birds, especially nightingale:

> The robin red-breast and the nightingale
>
> Never live long in cage (Act IV, scene ii, 8-9)

Ferdinand in Act V, scene ii, defines his loneliness with the help of bird imagery:

Eagles commonly fly alone: they are crows, daws, and starlings that flock together. (30-1)

The malignant forces of nature, red in tooth and claw, find expression in the vituperative energy of Ferdinand's outbursts:

> Methinks I see her laughing:
>
> Excellent hyena! (Act II, scene v, 38-9)

Ferdinand's lycanthropic behaviour at night, strolling in the graves, disinterring the corpses, reveals an unresolved anxiety and latent incestuous obsession. The wolf-imagery is associated with him.

Images in the play suggest meanings and associations that gobeyond simple metaphors or similes. These images based on concrete objects become symbolic. There are several clusters or patterns ofthematic imagery of animals, worms, disease, blood, death, necromancy, etc in the play. Delio describes the Cardinal:

Then the law to him
Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider:
He makes it His dwelling,and a prison
To entangle those shall feed him. (Act I, scene ii, 105-8)

Michael Neill, in "Monuments and ruins as symbols in *The Duchess of Malfi*"refers to "the importance of tombs and monuments in the iconography of English Renaissance drama" (71). According to Neill, "Graves, monuments and decaying ruins are recognisable staples of Webster's imagery" (74). Webster has been called a "Tussaud laureate" for his gothic extravaganza through the display of dead man's hand, waxen effigies of the dead, and grotesque murder scenes.

James L. Calderwood relates the release of violent passions of the characters through reversal of ceremonies that involves symbols of disorder and imagery of chaos and decadence. Replete with several symbols and complex poetic imagery, *The Duchess of Malfi* manifests the finest poetic achievement of the Jacobean age.

3.10.12 Theatricality Music and Songs

Webster's play is meant for theatrical performance although it has the poetic intensity of Senecan closet drama. Suitable for both the enclosed and darkened space of the Blackfriars and the open staging at the public theatres of Jacobean London, the play combines several means of performance and staging. The theatricality was much advanced and incorporates most of the time-tested popular theatrical devices of the Jacobean period. For example, the secret betrothal scene in Act I scene i, is performed on an intimate closet space that is verbally and visually created just after the scene enacted on the public court space. After the exit of her brothers, the Duchess instructs Cariola "Leave me: but place thyself behind the arras" and "[*Cariola withdraws behind the arras*]." After the secret ceremony, "CARIOLA *comes from behind the arras*" and Antonio is shocked. The scene is reminiscent of the then popular scene of *Hamlet* where Hamlet stabs Polonius who was hiding behind the arras. In Act II scene iii, Bosola appears on the stage "*with a dark lantern*" encounters Antonio and discovers the horoscope of the son delivered by the Duchess.

The use of Jacobean theatrical technique can be seen in the famous closet scene of Julia, echo scene, madmen scene, execution scene, etc. Clifford Leech in *John Webster: A Critical Study* (1951) has pointed out that the play exhibits "a new naturalism, an acting style which was appropriate to the new drama of infirm orientation…" (63). The gothic and sensational scenes are carefully blended with

scenes that require naturalism and psychological insight. Structural flaws are also rife interspersed in a plot that has a fluid time and flexible spatial orientation. There are of course melodramatic excesses in the play and an orientation towards a mixed genre of sardonic humour and tragedy.

Music and songs contribute to the theatrical effect of the play. Music, however, is cacophonic and chaotic. The "intemperate noise" produced by Ferdinand is out of tune, according to the Cardinal. The erratic laughter of hyena, the wolverine grunts of Ferdinand, the "wild consort / Of madmen," the song by a "Madman… sung to a dismal kind of music" create a theatre of cruelty, disorder and violence. For the Duchess "nothing but noises and folly/ can keep [her] in [her] right wits" (Act IV, scene ii, 4-7). The dance performed by "eight madmen with music answerable thereunto" produce a maddening world of chaos and violence.

3.10.13 Summing Up

In this Unit, you have been introduced to one of the most significant texts under the category of Jacobean Revenge Tragedy. You have seen for yourselves how much more complex motivations relating to power in private and public domains are explored by Webster. While Shakespeare's exploration of the female mind is at one level in his plays, you have also seen the new dimensions in gender perspectives that Webster has invested his play with. The theatrical impact of the play, its varying receptions across ages, and the manifold critical perspectives to which the text lends itself have also been explored for your understanding.

3.10.14 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Discuss *The Duchess of Malfi* as a Revenge tragedy.
2. Write a note on Webster's art of characterisation with reference to the range and variety of characters in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
3. Analyse Webster's use of images and symbols in *The Duchess of Malfi.*
4. Discuss the role and function of Bosola in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
5. Why does the Duchess become the object of Ferdinand's revenge? Discuss with reference to *The Duchess of Malfi.*

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Write a short note on Webster's theatricality in *The Duchess of Malfi*.

2. Comment on the generic classification of *The Duchess of Malfi.*
3. Write a short note on the portrayal of Duke Ferdinand in *The Duchess of Malfi*.
4. Comment on Webster's handling of sources in *The Duchess of Malfi.*
5. Write a short note on the critical reception of Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi.*

Short Answer Type Questions:

Locate, annotate and explain the following:

1. "By what didst thou execute

This bloody sentence?"

2. "Mine? Was I her judge?"
3. "Then the law to him

Is like a foul black cobweb to a spider:

He makes it His dwelling,and a prison

To entangle those shall feed him."

4. "The robin red-breast and the nightingale

Never live long in cage."

5. "I am Duchess of Malfi still."

3.10.15 Suggested Reading

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Unit-11 □ Puritanism and the English Stage

Structure

3.11.1 Objectives

The objectives of this unit are to:

- To equip students with the knowledge of Puritanism and its consequences in the early 17th century England
- To provide students with a comprehensive knowledge of the situation of English drama during the Puritan rule in England.

3.11.2 Introduction

From your reading of *The Duchess of Malfi,* you must have understood that the period we are studying is a complex one from the perspectives of politics and society and it had its resultant implications on culture. In understanding the convoluted polity of the period, you have also understood by now that the role of religion has always been an important factor. In this Unit, we shall introduce you to Puritanism, a religious reform movement that arose in the late 16th and early 17th centuries and has had a varying degree of influence on manifestations in culture in general and literature in particular.

3.11.3 Understanding Puritanism

The terms 'Puritan' and 'Puritanism' have their origin in the 1560s. At its simplest, Puritanism was a religious reform movement in the late 16th and 17th centuries that sought to "purify" the Church of England of remnants of the Roman Catholic "popery" (disparagingly used to refer to the over-arching role of the Pope in Catholic Christianity) that the Puritans claimed had been retained after the religious settlement reached early in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Puritans became noted in the 17th century for a spirit of moral and religious earnestness that informed their whole way of life, and they sought through church reform to make their lifestyle the pattern for the whole nation. Their efforts to transform the nation contributed both to civil war in England and to the founding of colonies in America as working models of the Puritan way of life.

Needless to say, they were a group of people who were on unhappy terms in the religious and social spheres in contemporary England, which however had by then embraced Protestantism and the Anglican Church (Church of England) had been founded. In that sense, Puritanism could be seen as a more radical movement that was felt necessary after the **Reformation**. Puritanism in this sense was founded by John Calvin from the clergy shortly after the accession of Elizabeth I of England in 1558, as an activist movement within the Church of England. The Puritans, as stated earlier, were a group who had started a movement within English Protestantism in both the British Isles and the colonial America. Some even date it back to the activities of William Tyndale (1495-1536).

The major impact of the movement was felt in the period between 1558–1658, that is, from the reign of Queen Elizabeth to the Commonwealth under Oliver Cromwell. The Puritans were insistent on 'purity' of doctrine and ritual. In practice it meant purity from the corruption of both Canterbury and Rome. Their basic efforts were aimed at purging out Catholic elements (in spirit) of the Anglican Church, rather than to set up a rival church. An even more intense and astute Reformation was their sole object, though they had no independent identity. They thought of themselves as alien to their non-Puritan brothers. The Puritan theology comprised of righteousness and sovereignty of God. They thought that they were the chosen people to create the New Jerusalem and bring around the millennium.

Puritanism may be defined primarily by the intensity of the religious experience that it fostered. Puritans believed that it was necessary to be in a covenant (a formal and serious agreement or promise) relationship with God in order to redeem one from one's sinful condition. They further held that God had chosen to reveal salvation through preaching, and that the Holy Spirit was the energising instrument of salvation. Calvinist theology and polity proved to be major influences in the formation of Puritan teachings. This naturally led to the rejection of much that was characteristic of Anglican ritual at the time, these being viewed as "popish idolatry." In its place the Puritans emphasized preaching that drew on images from scripture and from everyday experience. Still, because of the importance of preaching, the Puritans placed a premium on a **learned ministry**. The moral and religious earnestness that was characteristic of Puritans was combined with the doctrine of predestination inherited from Calvinism to produce a "covenant theology," a sense of themselves as elect spirits chosen by God to live godly lives both as individuals and as a community.

You will definitely get a hint from this that such radical views about religion were bound to have implications on politics. We take you a little back in time to the Elizabethan period to understand the root of this.

King Henry VIII, you know, had separated the Church of England from the Roman Catholic Church in 1534, and the cause of Protestantism advanced rapidly under Edward VI (reigned 1547–53). During the reign of Queen Mary (1553–58), however, England returned to Roman Catholicism, and many Protestants were forced into exile. Many of the exiles found their way to Geneva, where John Calvin's church provided a working model of a disciplined church. Out of this experience also came the two most popular books of Elizabethan England—the Geneva Bible and John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*—which provided justification to English Protestants to view England as an elect nation chosen by God to complete the work of the Reformation. Thus, Elizabeth's accession in 1558 was enthusiastically welcomed by these Protestants; but her early actions while reestablishing Protestantism disappointed those who sought extensive reform, and this faction was unable to achieve its objectives in the Convocation, the primary governing body of the Church.

Many of these Puritans—as they came to be known during a controversy over vestments (the Vesterian Controversy dealt with the question of whether clerical

vestments—declared to be "popish" by some—were theologically important) in the 1560s and '70's—sought parliamentary support for an effort to institute a Presbyterian (Calvinist theory of church governance whereby Christ is the only head and all members are equal under him) form of polity for the Church of England. This naturally caused resentment amongst the ranks of the clergy. Other Puritans, concerned with the long delay in reform, decided upon a "reformation without tarrying for any." These "Separatists" repudiated the state church and formed voluntary congregations based on a covenant with God and among themselves. Both groups, but especially the Separatists, were repressed by the establishment. Denied the opportunity to reform the established church, English Puritanism turned to preaching, pamphlets, and a variety of experiments in religious expression and in social behaviour and organisation. Its successful growth also owed much to patrons among the nobility and in Parliament and its control of colleges and professorships at Oxford and Cambridge.

Puritan hopes were again raised when the Calvinist James VI of Scotland succeeded Elizabeth as James I of England in 1603, thereby ushering in what is known as the Jacobean period. But at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 he dismissed the Puritans' grievances with the phrase **"no bishop, no king"**. To James I Puritans were a sect rather than a religion. They were the people, as Trevelyan writes, "who wished either to purify the usage of property, or to worship separately by forms to be 'purified." The Puritans thus remained under pressure. Some were deprived of their positions; others got by with minimal conformity; and still others, who could not accept compromise, fled England.

The pressure for conformity increased under Charles I (1625–49) and his archbishop, William Laud. Nevertheless, the Puritan spirit continued to spread, and when civil war broke out between Parliament and Charles I in the 1640s, Puritans seized the opportunity to urge Parliament and the nation to renew its covenant with God. Parliament called together a body of clergy to advise it on the government of the church. But this body—the Westminster Assembly-was so badly divided that it failed to achieve reform of church government and discipline. Meanwhile, the New Model Army, which had defeated the royalist forces, feared that the Assembly and Parliament would reach a compromise with King Charles that would destroy their gains for Puritanism, so it seized power and turned it over to its hero, Oliver

Cromwell. The religious settlement under Cromwell's Commonwealth allowed for a limited pluralism that favoured the Puritans. A number of radical Puritan groups appeared, including the Levelers, the Diggers, the Fifth Monarchy Men, and the Quakers (the only one of lasting significance).

After Cromwell's death in 1658, conservative Puritans supported the restoration of King Charles II and a modified episcopal (relating to a bishop or to bishops as a group) polity. However, they were outdone by those who reinstituted Laud's strict episcopal pattern. Thus, English Puritanism entered a period known as the Great Persecution. English Puritans made a final unsuccessful attempt to secure their ideal of a comprehensive church during the Glorious Revolution, but England's religious solution was defined in 1689 by the Toleration Act, which continued the established church as episcopal but also tolerated dissenting groups.

The Puritan ideal of realizing the Holy Commonwealth by the establishment of a covenanted community was carried to the American colony of Virginia by Thomas Dale, but the greatest opportunity came in New England. The original pattern of church organization in the Massachusetts Bay colony was a "middle way" between Presbyterianism and Separatism, yet in 1648 four New England Puritan colonies jointly adopted the Cambridge Platform, establishing a congregational form of church government. The hounded-out Puritans from England who migrated there, came to have a firm control on socio-cultural ethos. They rejected all that was associated with the Church of Rome. They discarded all that were adjuncts to the Catholic and the Anglican faiths, like music, incense, rich vestments, etc. Faith, Reason and Logic replaced the sensuous appeals of worship. All that was detrimental to concentration was rejected. Hence sensuous imageries in literary compositions were an anathema. The Bible to them was the highest form of literature. Naturally, by accepting the Bible as the guide and guardian, the writers were least concerned with the literary tradition which had so far made an alchemy of religious and secular aspects of culture and civilization. It was thus an insularity of approach to literature and life. Individual freedom of thought and expression was affected to the worst. Religion/Puritanism controlled law also, as shown by Nathaniel Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*, which, in fact, is a satire on Puritanism. While this was the situation in America, mainland England however, could never again become the preserve of Puritanism. Yet, the Puritan influence during the Commonwealth became a factor to reckon with, both in politics and culture, as we shall now see.

3.11.4 Puritan View of Culture

As with our understanding of the Puritan movement that began in England and gradually petered out to America, any attempt at understanding the cultural milieu they brought in should factor a historical perspective. We need to remember that these Bible believing Christians and their Evangelical spiritual movement dates back to the time when the English Bible was being smuggled into England, thereby giving rise to Biblical Christianity and the English Reformation! With time however and with the coming of new mores, their position did decline, so much so that in his ***An Essay of Dramatic Poesy,*** John Dryden calls the Puritans a **"barbarous race of men"**.

The question before us is, how and in what ways did the Puritan view of culture affect the course of English literature?

For one, the Puritans were a people who caused others sit up and listen. They were bound and determined to make an impact in their generation. Their dreams and their goals were both individual and national. They were quite vociferous in the way they engaged with the challenges of their time. The Puritans were inclined to express their opinion quite forcefully, even to the point of straining the social constraints of a rigid monarchical English society. This would cause them, and the mother country, some significant pains of travail. In their time, the Puritans were considered a formidable force in the socio-cultural sphere. They condemned not the drink, but the drunkard, they condemned not the sex but extramarital sex. They told about a unique life style. Hence there was a strong opposition to all the Italianate influences that were pervasive in England; just as their condemnation of the theatre as a place that fostered vice was very strong. It must be understood that more than the plays themselves, they were against the ways in which play-houses had turned into places of depravity and licentiousness. We shall learn more about this in the next sub-section. In all, the humanist spirit that pervaded the Elizabethan Age was randomly curbed under Puritan influence. The scenario however changed dramatically once the Puritans went out of favour with the Restoration in 1660.

Was Puritanism pervasive in contemporary English Culture?
Even as you read the history of Puritan England, here is some food for thought that you may like to discuss as students of Literature:
The two great poets of Puritanism in England–Milton and Marvell could neither totally adhere to, nor ignore the existing literary tradition. In *Paradise Lost* Milton mingles religious and secular aspects though his motto of 'justify(ing) the ways of God to men'. His adventure lies in treating a Biblical theme in a pagan genre, and

subtly incorporating contemporary politics. Thus Satan becomes Cromwell whose Latin Secretary Milton himself was. And his style too smacks of both religious and secular aspects. The base is the Bible but the superstructure is Pagan/Classical. Milton's Renaissance humanism thus gets the better of his Puritan upbringing, failing which *Paradise Lost* would suffer the fate of a book of liturgy.

Andrew Marvell, another Puritan poet, also, Like Milton, could not disregard the national tradition of poetry and classical/Latin poetry as well. Marvell's *The Garden* in a Puritan's appeal to all to love nature which is the manifestation of God and also a most congenial place for meditation. But many lines show a Spenserian sensuousness and symbolic connotation which a Puritan would not ratify. He re-interprets *The Bible* as to how Eve destroyed Adam's perfect freedom and heavenly bliss. The purification of the soul thus happens not through *The Bible*, nor Puritanism, but by association with the garden. Here he deviates from Puritanism.

Even Bunyan was castigated by many for using an allegorical fictional style in *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

With help from your counselor, try to analyse these contra-indicatory trends in contemporary literature and how these reflected upon the culture of the period.

3.11.5 Puritanism and the English Stage

The English Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were the worst enemies of English drama. The logic of the Puritans was both religious and social. The causes of the Puritan enmity the drama/stage can be enumerated thus:

- ✓ First of all, in The *Book of Deuteronomy*, Moses spoke to the Israelites, "The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God." (***The Old Testament***).

And the Puritans saw how the English stage was encouragious and cheering the male actors dressed up as women, and women as dressed up as men. It was sharp violation of the Biblical injunction, and they looked upon this cross-dressing as inimical both to religion and the moral code.

- ✓ The dramas were full of bawdy and blasphemy. Both pre marital and post marital love were given dramatic representation and the audience relished both, without any qualms. Here again, the Bible is the guide of the Puritans, and they did not take such violation kindly:

> "If a man be found lying with a woman married to a husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman…"

- ✓ Also, the theatres attracted lewd women and apprentices. They increased the danger of plague and lessened the scope of profit and salvation.

In his ***History of England***, Macaulay gives a picture of the Puritans of early 17th Century, which corroborates with the cause of general apathy and angst of the Puritans in relation to the stage–"It was sin…to drink a friend's health, to hawk, to hunt a stag, to play at chess…to read the Fairy Queen…the fine arts were all proscribed."

- ✓ Henri Fluchere wrote in ***Shakespeare and the Elizabethans***, "…Puritans had a horror of beauty, sensuousness and sensuality. The stage appeared to them a school of corruption and lies, a vast industry of debauchery, an ever-increasingly degenerate activity…"
- ✓ Many plays were staged on Sundays. And the playhouses drew away people from Sermons. It was a grave threat to the existence of religion, and the stage was doing all that was beyond religion.
- ✓ Last of all, the players were hated by the Puritans for another reason. The actors were regarded as superfluous sort of men. In their view, an actor might be a vagabond or a rogue, but evading legal hassles he was growing rich at the cost of the simple poor. He flaunted to be a gentleman with dresses costly and extravagant. Neither public nor the puritan eye could take these pleasure-seeking sections patronisingly.

For a long time the pulpit and the stage were looked upon as rivals. The Puritan preacher would brook no much rivalry. A play cannot be a match for a sermon, nor could it be allowed to create any trouble in matters sermonic–that was the viewpoint. It was rather taught by the preachers that the players on the stage would incur God's wrath. It was even argued that the annual plague in London was the effect of sin, and the causes of the sin were players. It therefore stood to reason that the cause of the plagues were players. The Puritans continued this belief and expected the people to follow them. They, however, had about hundred and seventy sects. It must be noted that not all of them were equally averse to pleasure and amusement.

3.11.6 Brief History of Puritan Condemnation of Drama/ Stage

The ordinance of September 2, 1642 is generally held to be the culmination of a protracted effort of the Puritans to ban drama. Or, rather reversely, dramatists/ players after a prolonged struggle for survival finally gave in to the Puritans. The history of the efforts to stop performances of the dramas had started much earlier to 1642.

Roger Ascham was no Puritan. But he made his vehement outbursts against the popular Romances of the day. The tone of his invectives is akin to that of the Crusaders against plays which were dramatised versions of these romances. Then there was Witham Alley, Bishop of Exeter, who condemned the "Wanton Books" in ***The Poore Man's Librarie*** (1565). He was the first man in England to write against the stage. He cited the case of the City of Marseilles that did not allow any player to live within its territory for the sake of gravity. The contention was that plays are killers of soberness and sanctity of a place and a people. The writers of London harped on this example to bring home their point of condemnation of the stage. The third writer was Lewis Wager. In his Prologue to ***Life and Repentance of Marie Magdalene*** (1566), he defended his case as a dramatist. Efforts were there to suppress plays by bishop, preacher and mayor. London thus became an arena of the struggle between Puritan and player.

But the likes of Lodge and Heywood tried their best to defend plays. Lodge's ***A Defence of Stage Plays*** (1579-80) was against Gosson's ***Schoole of Abuse*** (1579). Heywood must have studied Lodge's tract before writing ***An Apology for Actors*** (1612). Heywood argues that The *New Testament* has no such passage to show that drama is a profane art. Moreover, he was of the opinion that drama can well serve as a moral tonic and work decisively on a guilty conscience. He attempts to challenge the Puritans by referring to the ***Bible.*** In 1615 John Greene upheld the Puritan stand through ***A Refutation of the Apology for Actors*** and answers all the defensive points of Heywood. Overbury's ***Characters*** (1614) contains this Puritan-player controversy of the time. In 1616 the writer of ***The Rich Cabnit furnished with a varietie of exquisite Discriptions*** shows the excellent qualities an actor has to possess-dancing, song, elocution, wit etc. Nathaniel Field, actor and playwright,

defended stage acting against the Puritan attacks. By a careful study of the ***Bible,*** he learnt that no trade of life except "conjurers, sorcerers, and witches, ipso facts, are damned". He wrote the quoted words to a certain "Mr. Sutton, preacher att St Mary Overs.' In 1625 an anonymous Puritan wrote a petition to the Parliament, entitling it ***A Short Treatise Against Stage Players.*** It was an attempt to show how drama was the monster of vice and all sensuality.

William Prynne (1600-69) the pamphleteer and the writer of ***Histriomastix*** (1632) deserves special mention in connection with the Puritan attack on the stage. It is a book of eleven hundred pages, summing up, as it were, the Puritan stand against drama as a whole. He went to the extreme by calling some French actresses "notorious whores", who were all Queen's persons. The result was that he was condemned to stand in the pillory, pay penalty, lose both ears, and get perpetually imprisoned. He was also to lose his Oxford degree and was expelled from Lincoln's Inn. His life sentence was afterwards cancelled by parliament. Prynne's objective was to suppress stage acting, though the royalty of his time was favouring drama. The fact is that drama before suppression in 1642 was in a prosperous condition, and it is evident from a tract named ***The Stage-Players Complaint*** (1641), which is an anonymous work.

The 1642 Ordinance was for full suppression of Stage plays. It brought to a close the glorious tradition and triumph of drama in the reign of Elizabeth and her two successors. Despite a long struggle for existence against the Puritans for three quarters of a century, the players and writers made themselves a laughing-stock as it was to the puritans that victory finally fell. By this ordinance the demolition of all play houses was decreed. All actors were seized and whipped. Every audience attending a drama was liable to a fine of five shillings. The two straight ordinances of the parliament in 1647 and 1648 created a fear psychosis among the writers, actors and audience. These ordinances, however, saw some protests in the form of two tracts: ***The Actors Remonstrance*** (1643), and ***The Players Petition to the Parliament*** (a piece of satirical verse). There was another book ***Mr William Prynne, his Defence of stage-players*** (1649).

The Puritan attack on the stage was not for reforming the theatre, but for abolishing it. To the puritans the stage served no ethical or moral function. It was rather posing a threat to all that was salubrious to mental, moral and spiritual health. Dramatists like Thomas Lodge, Thomas Nashe and John Heywood-on the

other hand-regarded drama as an engine for moral instruction. They advocated for a synthesis of art and ethics. But their advocacy frittered away before the power of the Commonwealth and the tensions of the Civil War.

Did drama then die in full during Oliver Cromwell's rule?

During Cromwell's rule, drama pulsated in noblemen's houses, "Drolls" or farces or humorous scenes adapted from plays and stages were enacted, e.g. '**Merry conceits of Bottom the Weaver'** from ***A Midsummer Night's Dream;* 'The Grave Diggers' Colloquy'** from ***Hamlet;* 'Falstaff, the Bouncing Knight'** from ***Henry IV*** and so on.

Rules banning the stage were however beginning to be relaxed towards the close of Cromwell's rule. William Davenant was allowed to stage his ***Siege of Rhodes.*** Part 1 of *The Siege of Rhodes* was first performed in a small private theatre constructed at Davenant's home Rutland House in 1656. Special permission had to be obtained from the Puritan government of Oliver Cromwell by calling the production "recitative music", music being still permissible within the law. When it was published in 1656, it was under the equivocating title *The siege of Rhodes made a representation by the art of prospective in scenes, and the story sung in recitative musick, at the back part of Rutland-House in the upper end of Aldersgate-Street, London*. The 1659 reprinting gives the location at the Cockpit in Drury Lane, a well-known theatre frequented by Samuel Pepys after the Restoration (1660). The Rutland House production also included England's first professional actress, Mrs. Coleman. Davenant went on to open the Cockpit theatre in Drury Lane, and produced two similar operas ***The Cruelty of a Spaniard in Peru*** and ***The History of Francis Drake.***

3.11.7 From the Puritan Ban on Playhouses to the Resurgence of Drama

You have by now formed a fair idea of the cross-currents that pervaded the cultural scene in general and the theatre in particular under Puritan influence. It would be interesting to cast a look at the events that surrounded the closure of playhouses in 1642, what followed, and how the resurgence of drama came about with the Restoration of monarchy.

In 1622 there were but four principal companies—the King's, which acted at the Blackfriars and the Globe; the Prince's, at the Curtain; the Palgrave's, at the Fortune; the Queen of Bohemia's, at the Cockpit. The year 1629 was significant in dramatic history; it being the first year in which a female performer was seen in the English theater. The innovation was introduced by a French company, but the women were hissed and booed off the stage. This was at the new theater just opened in Salisbury Court. Three weeks afterwards they made a second attempt, but the audience would not tolerate them. King Charles and his Queen had a great love for dramatic entertainments; the latter frequently took part in the Court Masques, which brought down upon her the brutal language of that canting fellow Prynne. Yet in 1635 Sir Henry Herbert, the Master of the Revels, under whose jurisdiction all theatrical affairs were then placed, mentions only the King's company under Lowin and Taylor at Blackfriars, the Queens under Beeston at the Cockpit, the Prince's under Moore and Kane at the Fortune; in the next year he adds a fourth, doubtless Salisbury Court, to the list, which house was probably closed on the previous date.

On the 6th of September, 1642, the theaters were closed by ordinance, it being considered not seemly to indulge in any kind of diversions or amusements in such troubled times as the political turbulence indicated. In 1647 another and more imperative order was issued, in consequence of certain infractions of the previous one, threatening to imprison and punish as rogues all who broke its enactments. Close upon the heels of this second came a third, which declared all players to be rogues and vagabonds, and authorized the justices of the peace to demolish all stage galleries and seats; any actor discovered in the exercise of his vocation should for the first offense be whipped, for the second be treated as an incorrigible rogue, and every person found witnessing the performance of a stage play should be fined five shillings, as has been mentioned earlier. Verily, the reign of Praise-God Barebones had commenced. But not even these stringent regulations were found sufficient, and in the next year a Provost-Marshal was appointed, whose duty it was to seize all ballad singers and suppress all stage-plays. It is mentioned in *Whitelocke's Memorials*, that on the 20th of December, 1649, some stage players were seized by troopers at the Red Bull, their clothes taken away, and they were carried off to prison.

As you have read earlier, towards the end of Cromwell's period in 1658, this paranoia began to wane wand with Davenant, theatrical acting began to resurface. Two years later came the Restoration, and a new order of things dramatic. Theaters began to revive, and plays were openly performed at the Red Bull, the Cockpit in Drury Lane, and the theater in Salisbury Court. The flamboyant Charles II was a huge patron of theatre and helped breathe new life into British drama. A **patent** was even issued for two new theatre companies, and these were allowed to organise 'serious' drama. Led by William Davenant, **The Duke's Men** was for younger performers, while older, more experienced actors were in **The King's Company**, led by Thomas Killigrew. While the two companies created new opportunities theatrically, their monopoly on performances hampered the growth of British theatre. Soon further letters patent were granted to theatres in other English towns and cities, including the Theatre Royal, Bath in 1768, the Theatre Royal, Liverpool in 1772, and the Theatre Royal, Bristol in 1778. The theatres that were not patented had to be satisfied with showing only comedy, pantomime and melodrama. These monopolies on the performance of "serious" plays were eventually revoked by the Theatres Act 1843, but censorship of the content of plays by the Lord Chamberlain under Robert Walpole's Theatrical Licensing Act of 1737 continued until 1968.

Many scenic innovations developed during the Restoration. One of the most innovative and influential designers of the 18th century was Philip Jacques de Loutherbourg. He was the first designer to break up floor space with pieces of scenery, giving more depth and dimension to the stage. Other designers experimented with lighting by using candles and large chandeliers which hung over the floor of the stage. Actors began to get paid on how popular they were, and they usually played the same type of roles; for instance, tragic actors always played tragic roles. The female was known as the ingenue and the male came to be known as the juvenile. Playwrights got the proceeds from the third night's performance and also the sixth night's performance, but only for the original run of the show. Pantomimes would also be performed before and after a play.

On the thematic front Restoration theatre became a way to celebrate the end of Puritan rule, with its strict moral codes. To celebrate the opening of the theatres Restoration plays were lavish, often immoral by Puritan standards, and poked fun at both royalists and roundheads. The lightheartedness of the plays reflected a

society recovering from years of division and unrest. Although the audience enjoyed tragedies, comedies were the hallmark of Restoration plays. Classics such as Romeo and Juliet were rewritten and given a happy ending! The theatre that re-emerged was however no longer national in character; there was the pervasive presence of French playwrights like Corneille, Racine and Moliere, and also Spanish tales and plays as were already popular on the continent. The age was not one of heroism, and this was naturally reflected in the parody of heroic drama that was produced. As corollary to this, comedy that inculcated the manners of restoration England became the widespread mode. You will learn more about this revived dramaturgy in Module 4 Unit 1. Though for thematic reasons, drama after the Puritan period has been put into a separate Unit, it is advisable that you read it as continuity.

3.11.8 Summing Up

In this Unit you have learnt of

- Puritanism as a religious movement that came to assume widespread socio-cultural dimensions, though it has always enjoyed varying fortunes in England.
- The impact of Puritan strictures on culture in general and on drama in particular, leading finally to the closure of playhouses.
- Drama as subversive activity during the period of the ban from 1642b to 1660.
- The revival of dramaturgy in a changed form in Restoration England.

3.11.9 Comprehension Questions

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. How did the Puritan movement mark a significant break from the humanist influence that pervaded Elizabethan England?
2. Write a brief essay on the impact of Puritanism on 17th century drama.
3. Show how the Restoration brought about a revival of drama after the Puritan ban. How was this drama different from earlier Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre?

Medium length Answer Type Questions:

1. Write a brief note on the conditions that led to the Civil Wars in England.
2. Why were the Puritans strongly against the theatre? Write about some of the tracts written to substantiate their views.
3. From the cultural perspective do you feel Puritan rule was a cross between the Jacobean and Restoration periods? Give a reasoned analysis.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. What do you know about the Long Parliament?
2. Write short notes on (a) Histriomastix (b) Siege of Rhodes
3. What is Patent Theatre? Write about the resurgence of theatres under Charles II.

3.11.10 Suggested Reading

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Unit-12 □ The Closing of Theatres: Cultural Implications

Structure

3.12.1 Objectives

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners are expected to:

- Understand the effect of the closing of theatre on the existing culture of London and England as a whole.
- Evaluate both the positive and the negative impacts of the event, as any student of history should.

3.12.2 Introduction

In the previous unit you have read about the term "Puritan" and what "Puritanism" means. Their insistence on maintaining the purity of the doctrine and religious practices gave way to one of the most controversial periods of the seventeenth century.If the seventeenth century England can claim the credit for the epoch-making event of the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible in 1611, it also records the shameful suspension of the theatres for eighteen years in 1642. On September 2, 1642, the Long Parliament of England issued the order to close the theatres in London. It was made at the onset of the First English Civil War. Further ordinances were made in 1647 and 1648, ordering players to be whipped

and hearers to be fined. A long dramatic tradition enriched by Shakespeare and Jonson and others was thus broken. The theatres reopened with the restoration of Charles II in 1660. The event had far-reaching consequences.

3.12.3 Puritanism and Amusement

In this discussion on the extent of the implications of the ban on theatres by the Puritans, we should note that this religious sect of Christianity has opposed not only the theatres but also any type of amusement. There were thus bans on singing and dancing. To them, stage plays were immoral and a waste of time and would encourage idleness and blasphemy. Dancing too was a frivolous activity leading to lust and immoral behaviour. Gambling was a form of theft, and waste of money, leading to poverty and despair. Sports and games too were a waste of time and energy that could be well harnessed to religious activities. Violence and injury were the attended aftermath. They also discouraged the celebration of Christmas and Easter as holidays particularly because these were of pagan origin.

3.12.4 Causes of the Closure of the Theatres in 1642

The primary cause of the closure of the theatres was the outbreak of the English Civil War. Religious and political concerns were also working behind the order. The Puritan beliefs were gradually gaining ground ousting the Catholic ones. As the Puritans claimed to be purer than the Catholics, they held theatre to be immoral, frivolous, and a distraction from religious devotion. Added to this was the deepening conflict between the Crown and the Parliament. Social and political instability would worsen the situation. To forestall such a crisis, theatres had to be closed because theatre halls were the places for social gatherings and exchange of views. The Parliament declared a period of "humiliation" and national mourning due to the Civil War. Any type of amusement was deemed to be inappropriate and detrimental to the fostering of such an ambience.

Politically the Puritan rulers were against music, dance, drama etc as those were the popular forms of entertainment among the Catholics, which they enjoyed at social events and gatherings. After the ban, the Catholics gathered in private homes for prayers and religious instructions. These gatherings provided a sense of community and support even in such a hostile environment. Masques (lavish and

spectacular performances combining music, dance, poetry and elaborate costumes), banquets and balls, hunting and hawking, bear-baiting and bull-baiting, cock fighting held in cockpits offering gambling opportunities, plays staged at the theatres like the Globe and Fortune, and games like football, cricket, horse racing, visiting taverns for drinking were mostly stopped for keeping the people away from social gatherings and impurity of mind.

In short, political power was used for religious gains, and religion was appropriated for the political stability of the Puritan rulers.

3.12.5 Impact of the Closure on Culture

The closure of the theatres under the Puritan regime marked a significant cultural shift. Theatre, a central medium of public engagement and entertainment, was replaced by religious activities and private recitations. The absence of the theatre led to morality and didacticism among the cultural outputs of the era. The closure reshaped cultural consumption, reinforcing Puritan ideals while inadvertently nurturing literary innovations. Let us now have a panoramic view of the impact of the closure of the theatres on English culture. I shall discuss the matter under both Negative and Positive heads.

3.12.5.1 Negative Impacts:

I. **Playwrights:** As there were no stages open to performance, there was naturally a decline in playwriting. With no immediate marker for consuming new works, no room for the risk of devoting time to such a futile and dividendless exercise as writing plays. Playwrights were virtually unwanted and vocationless people in society.

II. **Actors:** All types of actors lost their livelihood. The highly successful actors had so far earned substantial sums almost equivalent to a skilled craftsman or a professional. The actors in the supporting roles earned according to the success of the play and sale of tickets. The actors who worked within acting companies also had a share of profit and expenses. The closure of the theatres put an end to all of this. Some actors, for survival and the continuation of their acting skills, migrated to other countries like France.

III. **Stage Industry:** Before the closure of theatres, the stage was an important industry. Besides actors, there were musicians, stage hands (who set up

the stage, shifted scenery and handed props), costumers, scenographers, producers, patrons etc-all of whom became unemployed. The theatre owners lost revenue generated from the sale of tickets. The investors also incurred financial losses. In short, there was widespread unemployment, poverty and the decline of a thriving industry related to culture.

IV. **Cultural Void and Isolation:** The loss of live performance brought with it the loss of a shared culture and experience. There was a cultural vacuum and a resultant social fragmentation. Sharing an expression of Matthew Arnold, we might say, people were "in the sea of life enisled"

V. **Condition of Theatre Buildings:** As there was no stage performance, the theatre buildings were in disuse, disregarded and given to dilapidated state. Repairing work for such buildings would be a bad investment. Such a property was more of a liability than an asset to the owners.

In the Interregnum period, we the time is called, the tendency of art and culture was to suppress the Royalist sentiment or celebration of royal power and to promote the Puritan ideology. It was for solidifying the political influence of the Puritans through a monolithic culture.

3.12.5.2 Positive Impacts:

Every historical event has its negative as well as positive impact. Let us now note some aspects of the positive impact of the closure of the theatres.

I. **Other forms of entertainment:** As the stage had nothing to entertain, other forms of entertainment emerged. These include "drolls", that is, short farcical scenes adapted from prior popular plays. These were performed in a more informal setting like taverns and private houses. Some such drolls were "The Merry Conceits of Bottom the Weaver" from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or the "Jovial Crew" from Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist.* Such drolls are claimed to be predecessors of pantomime and music hall. These also sustained the theatrical tradition, provided the joy of live performance and contained a veiled social and political commentary.

Puppet shows increased in number. Both the adults and the children could enjoy those. All types of puppet-shows viz Marionettes or string puppets, Glove Puppets or hand puppets, Shadow Puppets etc gained popularity. These shoes were used to tell stories from mythology and religion. These also often satirised political and social issues, providing a platform for social commentary. As these shoes were relatively inexpensive and accessible to the people of all strata, they provided a ready source of entertainment during the Civil War.

II. **Growth of study habits and print technology:** Having less scope for social mixing, amusement, games and sports, people increased their habit of reading and the exchange of literary works. The Puritan government was initially strict in its censorship of literature, but gradually it relaxed its control. This allowed for the expression of ideas in politics, religion, science, and literature in print. At the same time, printing technology developed to cope with the rising demand for books. The natural result was the surge in literacy rate. The birth of new religious and political groups, eg the Quakers and the Levellers, had their respective publications for followers in the form of pamphlets and tracts. The print culture revolutionised the literary aspect of the age. The increase of the reading public was necessary for the spurt in periodical essays and the arrival of novels in the eighteenth century. Allardyce Nicoll writes, "...there were many in England, who remembering pleasant days spent in the theatres, turned from the stage to the study…"

III. **Growth of other forms of literature**: Having little prospect in writing drama, the writers now turned their attention to other forms of literature such as prose, poetry and religious works. Metaphysical poetry flourished at this time. Milton's *Paradise Lost* had "...begun as early as 1658, and issued in 1667." (Albert) His pamphlets and tracts like *Of Education* (1644) and *Areopagitica*(1644) are treasures of English Literature. "The Westminster Confession of Faith" (1646-48) was a systematic summary of reformed theology. The rise of the dissenting groups encouraged religious pluralism and it remains an important document in Reformed theology.

IV. **Time for theatrical experimentation**: The people connected with the theatre had now ample time for theatrical experimentation. It was evident in the disappearance of the old open-air public theatre. The new theatres would be rooted in and artificial light would be used. Secondly, emphasis was laid on scenery so that "more was left to the eye and less to the ear". Thirdly, for the first time, a woman would appear on the English stage to speak the prologue to *Othello* and play the part of Desdemona. Above all, the new genre of comedy viz "comedy of manners" was going to be born and hold the English stage for a considerable period of time. This new type of comedy exercised a great influence not only on the future comedy of the country but also on the emergence of the novel.

V. **Breakthrough by *The Siege of Rhodes*:** The discussion on the positive impact of the 1642 ban on theatres remains incomplete without the mention of Sir William D'Avenants's*The Siege of Rhodes*. D'Avenant was the poet laureate under Charles I, and was closely associated with the royal causes.

His plays had been staged before the Civil War. Now he obtained permission to open to the public an "allegorical entertainment by declamation and music after the manner of the Ancients" in 1656, named *The First Days Entertainment at Rutland House*. It was followed in the same year by *The Siege of Rhodes.* D'Avenant had resided in France and England. He brought many ideas and preferences which were assembled in this hybrid work, especially those of Corneille, French romances and Opera. The French model entered England through him and lasted for a whole century. It has the germ of both English opera and heroic tragedy. The innovative use of stage machinery and special effects in the drama are achievements that the Interregnum can justly boast of.

3.12.6 Summing up

The closure of the theatre was not just a cultural event but a political act with lasting consequences. There is no doubt that English drama, at the Restoration, appeared in a new form and style, but it made a precedent for government intervention in artistic expression. It showed the power of the state to control cultural output and suppress dissenting voices. It also showed the relationship between the state, art and society. This tendency to curb/control the freedom of art/artists is continuing even today.

3.12.7 Comprehension Questions

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Briefly narrate the causes of the closing of the theatres in 1642.
2. How did the closure of theatres in 1642 impact the writers and the actors?
3. What do you learn about the different types of amusements of the time?

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Write briefly in the positive impact of the ban on theatre.
2. Why is the Siege of Rhodes an important achievement of the Interregnum?
3. Mention the innovations brought the state during 1643-1660.

Short length Answer Type Questions:

1. How was stage an important industry in the seventeenth century?
2. Discuss puppet shows in the Interregnum as a means of amusement.
3. How the discussion on the 1642 ban on theatres is relevant even today?

3.12.8 Suggested Reading

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Module-4
Drama from the Restoration to the Romantic Period

Module-4

Unit-13 □ English Drama–Restoration to the Anti-Sentimental

Structure

4.13.1 Objectives

Upon the Completion of this unit, the learners are expected to:

- Have a comprehensive knowledge about the reopening of the drama in the Restoration Era and its development.
- Understand the new cultural implications of drama in Seventeenth century England.
- Realise the relevance of drama in the Eighteenth-century age of prose and reason.

- Understand how the stage had transformed by the end of the Eighteenth century

4.13.2 Introduction

The study of drama in any period provides a vital index as regards the prevalent culture of the age. The assumption is based on the fact that drama being a vibrant medium, it provides a clue as regards the kind of audiences frequenting the theatres, the kind of plays being enacted and the responses of the ruling class and the audiences to it. The Restoration, which marked the Neo-Classical Age was an era of diminished personal glory and a far cry from the days of Renaissance Humanism. After the re-opening of theatres, what emerged was largely a class drama that was by and large a cultivation of upper-class ethos that had no much links with the common man. Drama further developed as we move on to the eighteenth century. The Long eighteenth century was basically an age of prose and reason. Enlightenment spawned a culture that prioritised rationality in every sphere. The basic temper of the age was prosaic, and hence not really congenial to the growth of drama. However, the development of drama during this age was not inconsequential. Different kinds of drama emerged during the period-pseudo-classical tragedy, sentimental tragedy, ballad-opera, anti-sentimental tragedy and many more. Towards the end of the century, drama had transformed a lot.

4.13.3 The Restoration and Drama

You have already read about the handful of theatres that were somehow operative in a rather clandestine manner even during the closure years. Things began to change drastically after the Restoration on all fronts, and the revival of drama too got its share of such dues. John Rhodes, a theatrical figure of the early and mid-17th century was permitted to form a dramatic company. He was connected with the King's Men during the final phase of the development of Renaissance drama, and might have been the 'keeper' of the Cockpit Theatre (you have read about this earlier) during the ban years. In the intervening period between the death of Cromwell and the return of Charles II, when General Monck was in charge, Rhodes obtained a license to open a theatre. He leased and refurbished the old Cockpit

Theatre, gathered a troupe of young actors, and began to stage plays. His 1660 production of Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* was the first Shakespearean revival of the new era.

On assuming the throne, King Charles II issued patents to Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant, granting them the monopoly right to form two London theatre companies to perform "serious" drama. The letters patents were reissued in 1662 with revisions allowing actresses to perform for the first time. Killigrew established his company, the King's Company at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1663; Davenant established his company, the Duke's Company, in Lisle's Tennis Court in Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1661, later moving to Dorset Garden in 1671. Killigrew was a privileged servant in the royal household. The plays written were ***The Parson's Wedding, Selindra, Pandora, The Siege of Urbin*** etc. All of these were however, acted. Davenant had many of his plays staged, like ***Love and Honour, The Wits, The Platonick Lovers.*** Some older dramas were also refashioned, ***Macbeth*** for examplewas altered, ***Measure for Measure*** was renamed ***The Law Against Lovers.*** And ***Romeo and Juliet*** was made into a comedy. Samuel Pepys records how old dramas were revived. He saw the dramas of Shakespeare, Jonson, Fletcher, Shirley staged before 1663. A taste for heroic in drama was evident in ***The Siege of Rhodes.*** Liking for tragic-comedy was evident in ***Love and Honour.*** As Puritans could no longer exert any grip on the stage, the writers could now extol monarchy. And lampooning of the Cromwellian regime and his personal life became the trend in many dramatists. For example, in a play like ***The Rump,*** Tatham boldly lampoons Lombert, Fleetwood, Hewson and other notable personages of the moment.

As the Puritans had almost made theatre-going a taboo, the post-Restoration period naturally saw the court hating the Puritans. The people were already weary with the restrictions imposed by the Cromwellian rule. They thought of it as a "nasty, gloomy, sullen, fanatical government." The Restoration was able to generate a feeling of deliverance from an intolerable religious and moral tyranny. People naturally began to throng the theatre halls once again for pleasure, and the drama of wish-fulfillment (rather than that of a dream world) engendered by the attitude of the Court Wits catered to audience tastes well enough. Interestingly, this drama continued well into the 18th century, by which time both the French polished court

wits and their ideals of social behaviour had by and large disappeared from the social scene.

But the paradox of the beginnings of Restoration Drama lies in the discovery of the citizens that the stage had eventually become a fashionable pastime of courtiers. They saw how there was no restraint in presenting the profligacy and licentiousness on the stage. The theatre was in fact run by 'gentlemen for gentlemen'. The gallants were crowding the halls more to see the actresses than the plays proper. The Puritan restrictions at least had been conducive to putting a rein on such profligacy of attitudes and attractions. That way, insipient reactions to the prevalent mode of class drama were always there; which later culminated in the rise of the Sentimental Drama. But we shall come to that at a later time.

The position of the playwrights was all the more precarious. They had to write according to the demands of the courtiers and the so-called gentlemen, and present everything to please their patrons. At the same time, they also had to show the obligatory commitment to society at large. If the Puritan rule of Cromwell threw the writers out of their profession, the Restoration restricted their freedom of expression, for they had to write according to the demands of the patrons and the fashionable class. In the ultimate analysis therefore, it was the demands of art that were being compromised.

The Puritan rulers had once sought decency and discipline in society by keeping the people off the 'evil' influence of the stage. In their residual form, they (playwrights) were trying to do the same thing now through the stage. They presented the real situation of the society and made a mild criticism of the same in a satiric tone. They were no Puritans as such, but, paradoxically, the desire for restoring order and good sense to the society was persistently present in them. What the Puritans wanted to do by dispensing with the stage, most of the Restoration writers wanted to attempt through the mechanism of the stage. The undercurrent of the spirit of Puritanism was thus evident in the writers even when the Puritans were dislodged from power at Restoration. If the writers had to face the authority of Puritan rulers, now they searched for the authority of Classical tales to combat the general enthusiasm for sensual and coarse joy. If the Puritans had thought return to Roman catastrophe, the Restoration writers went to French, Greek and Roman Literature to avoid social, moral and intellectual catastrophe. The "liberty

of tender conscience" was present among the Puritans and among the Restoration writers as well. If the Puritans made the ***Bible*** their rule of faith and conduct, the classics held the same position for the writers. And their tendency is more markedly present in Augustan literature of the following age.

In terms of dramatic influence, Ben Jonson was widely accepted, not for the morality component of his plays but for the comic tone and manner. Restoration theatre being a 'half-way' between Elizabethan drama and 19th century theatre, contemporary playwrights took up the aerated and dandified treatment of Jonson's plays that were started by the likes of Beaumont and Fletcher earlier on. The same was being done with plays by the French Moliere and the Spanish Calderone–the morality element and generosity of spirits edited and the humour component worked up to excess.

4.13.4 Salient Features of Restoration Drama

If eighteenth century literature has its greatest literary activity in novel and satire, the Restoration has undoubtedly had it in theatre. We have already discussed how the Puritans had closed the theatres by an Ordinance in 1642. For fourteen years there was no regular performance. Actually, the Puritans banned all pleasure, and the Restoration quickly re-initiated it, which, however, suffered the charge of degenerating into licentiousness equally fast. Public festivals were re-established, popular entertainments got royal consent and the theatres were reopened. Coarse voluptuousness and utilitarianism replaced emotional exuberance and enthusiasm. Drama in this period has widely been perceived as the mirror of the society, the national temperament. On the one hand there was the attempt to please the patrons of drama (the courtiers and the aristocrats) by presenting what they expected; on the other, the search for discipline, rationality, and knowledge continued in somewhat subverted forms.

Charles II came from France and the restoration of monarchy and Catholicism took place. Naturally the influence of France on the Restoration theatre has been a much-discussed issue. The influence of France on English theatre was quite inevitable for several reasons. First of all, since the fourth decade of the seventeenth century the English and the French coasts had frequent interactions. Many persons were banished to France after the civil war. They saw the essence of monarchical

culture there, and on returning to England, they attempted to restore the prestige of French Monarchy to England with the restoration of the Stuart dynasty.

Secondly, many writers of Charles II's reign were exiled to France. They saw and imitated many manners of the French and trends of French Literature, particularly drama. The French influence, after the Restoration, was perceptible in the court, the fashionable circles of the capital and provinces, in fashions and manners of life, in modes of feeling and thinking, in language. Even aesthetic criterion and tastes of the Englishmen were determined by the French examples. So, the exiled writers like Davenant, Waller, Denham brought to England the models, images and rhythms of the French. Corneille, Moliere, Scudery or Quinault, Racine were always followed by the dramatists, both in comedy and tragedy, many an influence of the French dramatists can be discerned. The King also wished that the plays should be written in French manner.

It would, however, be wrong to say that Restoration drama had nothing to do with the native tradition. How is it possible to forget the national tradition which saw about one thousand plays in sixty-three years before 1642? Drama had its zenith of glory in the Elizabethan age. But it was weakened by an inward exhaustion with the passage of time. Tragi-comedies by Beaumont and Fletcher show this decadence. Now characters seem to have lost the Shakespearean depth and plots have negatively gained in complications. Love for adventure and heroism spread all over Europe and England was not exempted. The King himself was much responsible as a trend-setter of Restoration drama. He put his courtiers, court ladies, the men of fashion, gallants, men of chivalry in great favour. He liked exploits, hyperbolical language, heroism etc. And dramatists tried to fulfill these likings on the stage. The net result was the birth of comedy of manners and heroic tragedy. The Restoration theatre/ drama was more an output of the King's interest and the likings of the selected audience than the taste of the general public. The scope of drama was narrowed down. And it becomes obvious when Restoration Drama is compared with the Elizabethan drama. There is neither that cosmic and general appeal, nor the participation of the milieu of all classes. Nevertheless, the birth of modern stage is attributed to the Restoration period. The modern spirit is also first found in its drama. Actresses were first introduced on the stage. Sceneries were employed. There was the change of platform to picture frame stage. For more on

restoration drama and the contemporary stage, you may look up the following websites:

http://www.theatrehistory.com/british/restoration_drama_001.html

dialnet.unirioja.es/descarga/articulo/1703881.pdf

*www2.anglistik.uni-freiburg.de/intranet/.../**Drama**TypesofStages01.htm*

However, of greater important than the stage was the new set of audience. For the first time a direct relationship of the actors with the audience was created. The actors and the audience knew each other. This close relationship was further enhanced by the elaborate prologues and epilogues to plays. The dramas were more for acting than reading. Naturally the audience and particularly the patrons were arbiters of dramatic aesthetics. It is said:" The drama's laws the drama's patrons give." As the courtiers made the theatre the meeting place, their fondness for licentiousness was included in the dramas. But the citizens who still retained some of the Puritan conventions thought of the theatre as no better than a sore plague, and hence avoided its evil contagion.

Restoration drama was actually meant for the courtiers and their satellites. As the King was much given to nepotism, the actors and artists were all nearest to the court. The result was that drama became a toy in the hands of the courtiers. To satisfy them, the sentiment of the court was reflected in drama. Coarseness and immorality were incorporated to set off the Puritan suppression and restrictions. Pleasure was the chief criterion of popularity of a drama. The greater the pleasure, the better the drama, became the prevalent attitude.

A good result even of this bad aspect of the theatre was that the art of acting was given utmost importance. Without a high standard of acting, a drama could not succeed on the stage. Along with the demand for higher histrionic skills, the demand for new plays was always increasing for the audience wanted more and more to satisfy their carnal desires. To cope with the demand the supply of new plays was uninterrupted. To make the stage a place of greater attraction, the Elizabethan traits of music, dance and song were revived.

Restoration drama thus apparently lagged far behind Elizabethan drama. Still the positive points added to the history of English drama were that the dramatists brought grace, wit, elegance, refinement of dialogue. These are the stuff that Restoration drama can boast of. The writers made a nice synthesis of the native and foreign dramaturgy and produced a drama no less interesting than Restoration non-dramatic prose or poetry.

4.13.5 Restoration Comedy

David Daiches rightly finds in Restoration Comedy an illustration of 'the rise and decline of a deliberately induced pseudo-courtly ideal in England, or at least in London'. One sees in Restoration comedy new types of characters, situations and language after going through Shakespearean and Jonsonian plays. The elements of humour in the former and the 'humours' of the latter are now replaced by 'manners' and what Lamb calls 'sports of witty fancy'. Restoration comedy is rightly called the 'Comedy of Manners'. But the manners refer not to the masses but to a class-the elegant class with all its features, dress, morality, speech and what not. This comedy represents only a part not the whole society. And this society demands drama to represent all the ethos they love-licentiousness, elegance of court life, absence of any standard of sexual morality, pleasure etc. Some features of this new type of comedy can be discussed for a proper understanding of the genre.

- Concerning theatre and drama the most striking difference between the Elizabethan and the Restoration ages is that **the Elizabethan period had fifteen playhouses, but after 1660 (Restoration), there were only two**–Killegrew's Theatre Royal and Davenant's Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre (Duke's House), owned by courtiers.
- Secondly, **some playwrights were themselves courtiers as we find with Etherege and Wycherley**. They were dramatists by fun and courtiers by profession. They tried to represent the sentiment/ likings of the court only. The inevitable result was the narrowing down of interest and vision
- Third, the **plots of Restoration comedy deal with complications that the age was conversant with**. Not only that, the pattern is followed in play after play. The writers harked back to the French dramatist Moliere for that art of plot construction. The Spanish drama also influenced the writers in the presentation of love of intrigue and incident.
- If we cast a look at most plays, we see that Elizabethans or eighteenth century or even twentieth century comedies at times deal with the theme of love. In Restoration comedy however, love is straight-forward lust. It is denuded of its spiritual, mystical, emotional significance. Love is

now gallantry, a game rather than an experience, not a passion but a fashionable pastime.

You have by now understood that it was Restoration comedy that held the key to dramatic representation of the predominant ethos of the period. Among the prominent playwrights of this genre, we must mention William Congreve, William Wycherley, John Vanbrugh, George Farquhar, Thomas Shadwell and of course Dryden.

William Congreve (1670-1729) is, undoubtedly, the greatest of the Restoration comic playwrights. For understanding the true nature of 'comedy of manners', we have to go through his plays (except ***The Mourning Bride***). His comedies include ***The Old Bachelor*** (1693)***, The Double Dealer*** (1693)***, Love for Love*** (1695) and ***The Way of the World*** (1700), the last of these is included in your syllabus. The plays are marked by a faithful reflection of upper-class society, the immorality balanced by artificial wit, cynicism, polish and brilliance. An air of artificiality hovers over all his comedies.

William Wycherley (1640-1715) wrote ***Love in a wood*** (1671)***, The Gentleman Dancing Master*** (1672)***, The Country Wife*** (1674)***,*** and ***The Plain Dealer*** (1676). His contemporaries called his plays "manly". It is perhaps because every person in his plays is a fool and every clever man is a rogue. Still he contributes to Restoration comedy by his wit and presentation of the follies of man.

George Etherege (1635-91), a courtier, wrote his plays: ***The Comical Revenge*** or ***Love in a Tub*** (1664)***, She Wou'd if She Cou'd***(1668)and ***The Man of Mode*** (1676). Etherege precedes Congreve. His plots lack the symmetry of Congreve. But he paints upper class with all realism and sincerity.

George Vanbrugh (1664-1726), wrote such plays as ***The Relapse*** (1696)***, The Provok'd Wife*** (1697)***, The Confederacy*** (1705). In his personal life he was a soldier, a herald and an architect. His architectonic skill is betrayed in his joy to construct a play of solid workmanship. He is fond of farce and is good at caricature.

George Farquhar (1678-1707) died at an early age, just twenty-nine years. He wrote seven plays, the best of which are his last two-***The Recruiting Officer*** (1706) and ***The Beaux's Stratagem*** (1707). He brought a change to Restoration by (i) taking his material from beyond the upper classes, (ii) making the characters ordinary people who conversed in normal tones (iii) showed a growing respect for moral standards, and (iv) exhibited some traits that look forward to the sentimental comedies by Steele. Hence there is a unique mixture of laughter and tears in his comedies.

Thomas Shadwell (1642-92) has been immortalized in a passage of ***MacFlecknoe*** by Dryden. He followed Ben Jonson more than Congreve. He wrote

many plays for many years, the important ones are ***The Sullen Lovers*** (1608)***, The Squire of Algatia***(1688)***, Bury Fair*** (1689). His plots are well constructed on everyday life. Like Farquhar, he avoids the artificial world. His wit is also real. Like Farquhar, he also prepares the ground for sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century.

As far as Dryden, the versatile talent of the period is concerned, he does not show much brilliance, in comedy. In 1663, ***The Wild Gallant*** appeared, but proved to be a play of mediocre merit. It showed that Dryden was not at all a promising comic playwright. Even in ***An Essay of Dramatic Poesie,*** he declared that he was incapable of achieving any much success in the dramatic art himself. Dryden's plays like ***The Spanish Friar*** (1681) and ***Marriage a-la-Mode*** (1673) are basically tragi-comedies. The latter contains double intrigue in contrasting plots, and some of Dryden's finest songs. ***Amphitryon*** was produced in 1690. It was adapted from the comedies of Plautus and Moliere on the same subject.

In conclusion we might say that Restoration Comedy was the predominant theatrical mode no doubt, but many of its traits recur in sentimental comedy, anti-sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century. Even Bernard Shaw and Oscar Wilde could not avoid its influence.

4.13.6 Restoration Tragedy

The superficiality of the Restoration Age is largely reflected in its comedy, hence it is mostly artificial in tone and metropolitan in manner, as befitted the period. The age introduces heroic tragedy into English drama. This form was introduced by Davenant and popularised by Dryden who stated that an "heroick play ought to be an imitation of an heroic poem; and consequently that love and honour ought to be the subject of it."Like Restoration Comedy, heroic tragedy also owes much to France. French romance and French tragedy of the reign of Louis XIV and particularly the dramaturgy of Racine made the English writers seek models in them. There were translation, and adaptations galore of the French plays. Along with France the melodramas of Italy also constituted a major foreign influence. In the French romances an unreal world is shown to be at the heart of the web of intrigues. The heroes are drawn in a grand scale and the tone is rather high. Davenant, Dryden and Orrey-the three founders of heroic tragedy took materials of the plots from these romances.

- **Love and honour** constitute the mainspring of heroic tragedy. It is an idealistic love, removed from reality. And the **heroism of heroic tragedy**

lacks grandeur. The heroes fail to arouse our wonder and admiration. Moreover, all the heroes seem to be made up of the same stuff, a fatal resemblance among them, leading to some monotony.

- There is an **extravagance of action**. And Dryden defends it in his ***Essay on Heroic Plays*** in the Preface to ***Conquest of Granada***: "a heroic poet is not tied to bare representation of what is true, or … probable; … but he might let himself loose to visionary objects, and to the representation of such things … may give him a freer scope for imagination."
- **In characterization there is lack of variety**. The writers try to hood this failure by incidents, plot and material devices-exoticism, staging, machines etc.
- The **sentiment and style attain a height beyond the mediocrity of human life**. And naturally there is much rant and bombast.
- **Rhyme is the chosen medium**. In the period 1664-67 about fifty three rhymed heroic plays were written in sonorous style and rhetorical abundance. You can pretty well imagine how painstaking such a huge number of similar pieces of monotony would have been!

Dryden wrote ***Indian Queen*** (staged 1663)***, Indian Emperor*** (1665)***, Tyrannick Love*** (1669)***, The Conquest of Granada, Aurangzebe***(1675). The plays are marked by intricate plot, heroic sensations bordering on the absurd numerous scenes of battle and murder and all of it in rhymed couplets. The lyrics in the plays, it must however be mentioned, did have charm and variety.

Roger Boyle, first Earl of Orrey (1621-79) wrote ***Henry V, The General, The Black Prince Mustapha, Typhon, Herod the Great*** and ***the***unpublished***Zeroastres.*** Of these ***Henry V*** and ***The Black Prince*** are in the tradition of the native chronicle play. The other plays have an unreal romantic world. The influence of Corneille is evident in many characters and scenes. On the whole, Boyle is remembered for his presentation of conflicts and a language which is refined.

Thomas Otway (1651-85) wrote ***Alcibiades*** (1675), ***Don Carlos*** (1676)***, The Orphan*** (1680)***, Venice Preserved*** (1682). ***The Orphan*** is a pathetic tragedy. ***Venice Preserved*** is not actually a heroic tragedy. It is a real tragic work in so far as its construction, characterisation and blank verse are concerned.

Nathaniel Lee (1653-92) wrote ***The Rival Queens*** (1677)***, Nero*** (1674) and other plays. He has less artistic control and his rant often reaches a frenzied climax. But it must be admitted that he has a command over pathos.

Elkanah Settle (1648-1724) wrote ***Cambyses; King of Persia*** *and* ***Emperor of Morocco*** (1673) to mention his most notable works. Dryden along with Crowne and Shadwell wrote a pamphlet of criticism of the last play. ***Cambyses*** has prison scenes, scenes of horror, supernatural elements, outlandish countries depicted and catalogue of names.

John Crowne (1640-73) wrote the heroic plays ***Caligula*** (1698)***, The History of Charles the Eighth of France,*** or, ***The Invasion of Naples by the French,*** and ***The Destruction of Jerusalem by Titas Vespasion.*** The plays are mostly artificial and dull.

4.13.7 Some Other Types of Contemporary Drama

There were also some other types of drama besides 'comedy of manners' and 'heroic tragedy'. **Otway's*****The Orphan*** and ***Venice Preserved*** have already been mentioned. The most important of such plays is **Dryden's*****All for Love*** or ***The World Well Lost*** (1678). It is a blank verse tragedy, an imitation of Shakespeare's ***Antony and Cleopatra.*** It is Dryden's most performed and best-known play. It is an exemplary neo-classical tragedy which is notable for an elaborate formal presentation of character, action and theme. **Thomas Southern** (1659-1746) wrote ***The Fatal Marriage*** (1694) and ***Oroonoko*** (1695), both founded on novels by Aphra Behn (1640-89). **Mrs Behn** also wrote some plays as ***Forced Marriage*** (1670), followed by some fourteen others. There were also some serious plays like ***The Villain*** by Thomas Porter, ***The Fatal Jealousie*** by Nevil Payne, tragi-comedies like Mrs. Behn's ***The Dutch Lover*** or Sir William Killigrew's ***Selindra.***

4.13.8 The Status of Dramaturgy in the Eighteenth Century

In the eighteenth century the status of drama gradually declined due to several causes. Except Sheridan and Goldsmith who made some valuable contribution to theatre, other dramatists of the age failed to keep up the momentum given to it by the Elizabethan and Restoration dramatists. An overview of the social and literary climate of the age will be helpful to establish the causes for the decline of drama in the eighteenth century.

- **First and foremost**, in this century novel became the dominant genre. The rise of the novel coincided with the rise of the bourgeois. As critics like Ian Watt have argued, novel reflected the life of the rising middle class and was imminently better suited to their tastes.

- **Secondly**, people of the eighteenth century went to theatre-houses for the draw of actors and actresses who became more important rather than the playwrights or the body of their work. Consequently, the content of the plays became shallow and hollow.
- During this time the theatre-managers were more interested in garish costumes and scenery than in the essential content of the play. The incorporation of French culture generated an ostentatious taste. People flocked to the theatre-houses to watch the display of extravagant fashions.
- Comedies written during the age deviated from the ideal and became more sentimental. The liberty that the Restoration dramatists used to enjoy was censored. Jeremy Collier pilloried the Restoration dramatists and canvassed for moral reform in the drama. Apart from Goldsmith and Sheridan, no other playwright in the field of comedy sustained the true ethics of comedy.
- Licensing Act of 1737 further delimited the potentialities of drama putting it under the power of surveillance. Sixthly, Kings and Queens of that period hardly cared for the nourishment of drama. William III or Queen Anne were not interested in theatre. Whereas Elizabeth I or James I provided the patronage to the theatre, the likes of Anne or George simply ignored them. Lack of royal support made it hard for the playwrights to sustain this profession.
- The incorporation of classical spirit inspired playwrights on a series of rational tragedies where emotions were balanced. Adherence to rules delimited the free play of emotions and passions.

4.13.9 Eighteenth Century Tragedy

- **Pseudo-classical tragedy**-As the *zeitgeist* set great store by classical temper, tragedies modelled on classical themes began to be composed. Joseph Addison composed *Cato* (1713) in a classical format. The play is based on the last weeks of the life of Cato; besieged in Utica by Caesar in 46 BC. Cato has been betrayed by Sempronius, a senator, and the Numidian general, Syphax. Faithful to him is Juba, Prince of

Numidia. It scrupulously adhered to classical unites. It was a response to contemporary political scenario of England and brings out the dramatist's concern with social stability. James Thompson also wrote some pseudo-classical tragedies. He started with *Sophonisba*, followed by *Agamemnon* and *Edward and Eleanora*. Samuel Johnson composed a classical tragedy named *Irene*. The story, from Richard Knolles, deals with Irene, a Greek slave loved by the emperor Mahomet.

- **Romantic tragedy**-Along with pseudo-classical tragedies romantic tragedies were also attempted. Nicholas Rowe (1674-1718) was the chief exponent of this genre. Rowe tried to break away from the classical rules and returned to the Elizabethans. Pat Rogers remarked, "In his preference for remote, exotic or historic subjects, he is wholly unoriginal. Nor does the strong element of political allegory in his work make for a departure from existing practice in itself. What is new in Rowe is the content. Where heroic tragedy had underwritten monarchical and absolutist principles, he used the form to express Whig ideas of liberty and the constitution." His first drama was *The Ambitious Stepmother* (1700) where we find a concentration on pathos, on suffering, and on feminine response. It was not successful. Much better was *Tamerlane* (1701) that allegorises the virtues of William III through the character of Tamerlane and vices of Louis XIV through the portrayal of the cruel tyrant Bajazet. He achieved success with *Fair-Penitent* (1703), based on Massinger's *The Fatal Dowry*. The heroine Calista, abandoned by Lothario, and eventually committing suicide, drew enormous sympathy from audience. Lothario became Samuel Richardson's model for Lovelace in *Clarissa*. *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* (1714) was, as stated by Rowe on the title page, 'written in imitation of Shakespeare's style.' Jane's story shows the vicissitudes of fortune. From a wealthy position, she is reduced to poverty and destitution due to reversal of fortune. At her lowest ebb, she is rescued by her husband. *The Tragedy of the Lady Jane Gray* (1715) also circles round the pathetic life of a woman. In these tragedies, Rowe introduced the trope of 'she-tragedies' (his own phrase) that focus on the central figure of a suffering woman and depend largely on the pathos for the effect.

- **Bourgeois tragedy**-The third type of tragedy that developed during this tie was bourgeois tragedy. Bourgeois tragedy did not focus on Kings or Queens. The protagonists belonged to middle or lower-class background. Lots of factors contributed to the emergence of bourgeois tragedy. Firstly, lack of royal patronage compelled the dramatists to depend on the public. Neither Queen Anne nor George I was interested in the theatre. The emergent bourgeois class provided patronage to the dramatists. As they were guided by puritanical mindset, they wanted to see the reflection of such ideology in the dramas. The aristocratic families stopped providing patronage to the playwrights as they incurred heavy loss. Tradesmen were the chief sponsors of drama. They were impatient of the classical dictates on tragedy. Resultantly, a new genre of tragedy developed that endorsed middle-class values, catered to the demands of the rising middle class.

George Lillo was the chief exponent of this type of tragedy. His most famous play was *The London Merchant*.Modelled on an ancient ballad, "The Ballad of George Barnwell", Lillo situates the story at the historical era just before the sailing of the Spanish Armada. In the prologue to the play Lillo clarifies his intention of writing a domestic tragedy. It was published in 1731. This drama tracks the downward path of a novice named Barnwell, seduced into evil ways by Millwood, a courtesan. Barwell becomes her creature and even robs his employer, the honest merchant Thorowgood, whose moral probity is expressed in his observations to the upright apprentice Trueman. Eventually Millwood persuades Barnwell to murder and rob his uncles and for that crime the two of them are hanged. Lillo wrote this tragedy in prose. Through this drama Lillo preaches a moral lesion. The dramatist shows his disapproval of the conduct of Millwood. Thorowgood is projected as a morally upright person. Lillo holds an important place in the history of English drama. He set in motion powerful forces that pointed towards natural tragedy. He purposefully set aside the dignity of rank and title and the ceremony of verse. He animated domestic drama and paved the way for prose melodrama and tragedy.

After Lillo, other dramatists attempted to compose similar plays. Among them worth mentioning are John Hewitt's *Fatal Falsehood* or *Distressed Innocence* (1734) and Thomas Cooke's *The Mournful Nuptials* or *Love the Core of all Wooes*, but they were prosaic and lacked conflict, the essence of drama. Much more forceful dramatist was Edward Moore. His *The Fatal Curiosity* (1736) was a domestic tragedy. It was based on an old Cornish story of murder. It was set in Jacobean

England. The plot circles round an old poor couple whose only son is believed to be lost at sea. A stranger deposits a casket with them and the old man, Wilmot, murders the stranger at the prompting of his wife. The murdered man proves to be their son. Camus used it in *Le Malentendu* (1945).

4.13.10 The Ballad-Opera and Pantomime

Eighteenth century also saw the efflorescence of pantomimes and ballad-operas. It came as a kind of comic relief. The heavy dose of heroic tragedy was too much for the audience to bear with for a longer period of time. They craved for some respite from the heavy dose of heavier tragedy. That is why they found in ballad-operas and pantomimes a perfect medium to indulge in entertainments. Pantomime adapted some of the features of the Italian *commedia dell'arte*. It originated in ancient Rome and dealt with religious or warlike episodes performed by actors in masks. It was accompanied by music. In the eighteenth century it was introduced to England. From the Restoration era the demand for dances was felt in theatres. To cater to such a demand many theatrical managers appointed some dancing masters from Paris. By the end of the seventeenth century the demand for such mimic dancing kept on increasing. This sowed the seeds of pantomimes. Along with regular dramatic performances pantomimes were being staged. A typical pantomime had two parts: in the first part, a mythological or historical theme was treated. The second part circled round the comic pranks of Harlequin. Music and dancing accompanied both parts. The success of pantomimes set the platform for the ballad-opera. Opera had its genesis in Italy at the end of the sixteenth century.

John Gay (1685-1732) invented the ballad-opera. His *The What D'Ye Call It* (1715) is a burlesque on the moral falsity of heroic tragedy. This farce also ridicules the morbid taste for sentimentality in comedy. He is best known for *The Beggar's Opera*(1728) which was the source for Brecht's *Threepenny Opera*. It lampoons the London underworld. In it one can discern political attack on the ruling party of Robert Walpole. It offered light entertainment in sharp contrast to the sentimental mode prevalent at that time and dealt with life in the criminal world. The genesis of the opera can be seen in one of the letters of Jonathan Swift addressed to Alexander Pope in 1716, "I believe...the Pastoral Ridicule is not exhausted; and that a Porter, Footman, or Chair-man's pastoral might do well. Or what you think of a Newgate Pastoral?" Gay seemed to have followed the suggestion of Swift but chose the form of opera over pastoral. Polly, the daughter of Peachum, a receiver of stolen goods, falls in love with a highwayman named Macheath. He is held captive by Peachum in Newgate so as to claim reward money. This Newgate is controlled by

Lockit, who is a partner of Peachum. The comedy of the play arises when Lockit's daughter Lucy falls in love with Macheath and becomes instrumental in his escape.

After Gay, **Henry Fielding** was the most formidable figure in the field of ballad-operas and burlesques. Inspired by dizzy heights of success that *The Beggar's Opera* reached, Fielding penned a tragic burlesque, *Tom Thumb*, later reworked as *The Tragedy of Tragedies*. Written in blank verse, it satirised heroic tragedy. Laughter issues out of the device of placing tiny Tom as hero. Fielding popularised the burlesque form. Many writers of that time tried their hands in burlesques but most of them were average plays. In this connection mention may be made of Sheridan's *The Critic* or *A Tragedy Rehearsed* (1779).

The popularity of the pantomimes rose to such a level that the Patent Theatres started rivalry with each other. For example, Rich produced *Necromancer* or *The History of Dr. Faustus* to challenge Thurmond's pantomime entitled *Harlequin, Doctor Faustus*. Arthur Murphy wrote about the popularity of the pantomimes:

A gothic taste has taken possession of the public. Nature is banished, we give credit to the magician's wand, and harlequin's wooden sword. The seasons are confounded together…all climates are presented before us; heaven and hell appear; good angels and evil demons meet; the trap door open; Pluto rises in flame-coloured stockings; and this monstrous chaos makes the supreme delight of an enlightened nation.

4.13.11 The Development of Sentimental Comedy

The sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century emerged in reaction to the indecency and immorality of the Restoration comedy of manners. Restoration comedy of manners ushered in licentiousness in all walks of life. The most excoriating response came from Jeremy Collier who in 1698 launched a diatribe against the vulgarity of the Restoration comedy of manners in his pamphlet entitled *A Short View of the Profaneness and Immortality of the English Stage*. Moreover, the Licensing Act of 1737 limited the production of plays. In sentimental comedies laughter and humour were totally absent. The true spirit of comedy took an exit. The absence of humour paved the way for the emergence of pathos. Pathetic situations started dominating the plays. Dramatists such as Colley Cibber and Steele presented tearful incidents on stage. In their hands comedy ceased to be comedy and became a medium for the presentation of pathetic incidents. These dramatists were primarily moralists. They almost preached sermons on middle class morality under the garb of comedy. Dialogues were prosaic. Their only aim was a moral edification of the

readers. In respect of characterisation, sentimental comedies lacked standard. The dramatists failed to portray real men and women on stage. On the other hand, they presented them as they ought to be. That is why characters lacked lifelikeness and tended to be mere abstractions. Moreover, the writers of this school introduced characters from middle class society and banished characters belonging to the lowest strata of society. Therefore, a limited representation of people was seen on stage.

Colley Cibber (1671-1757)**-**Cibber was a prolific writer of plays. He followed he dictates of Jeremy Collier who criticised the vulgar comedy of manners. In 1696 he wrote his first play *Love's Last Shift*.Itis a typical sentimental comedy. Lovelace, who is the hero of the play, goes o England after having abandoned his wife. However, he falls into debt and returns home. His wife Amanda, despite the ill-treatment, remains loyal to him. Disguising herself, she starts seducing Lovelace and then unveils her true identity. Greif-stricken, Lovelace admits his fault and the two are reunited. *The Careless Husband* (1704) was theatrically more successful. Here Cibber also upholds the virtue of tolerance. Some stock-in-trade features of his first play are also incorporated in this play. Here we also find an ill-treated wife who is neglected by her husband Sir Charles Easy. Charles has a secret relationship with her maid Edging. On knowing that his wife is aware of his infidelities, he is moved to reconciliation with his wife. In plays such as *The Double Gallant*, *The Lady's Last Stake*, *The Refusal* we find a series of 'she-comedies'. *The Non-Juror*, Cibber's most successful play, was an adaptation of *Tartuffe*. He worked on Vanbrugh's incomplete drama *The Provoked Husband* and made it complete. Here we find a robust social commentary.

Richard Steele (1672-1729)-Plays of Richard Steel also aimed at moral edification. In his plays we find the fullest development of the sentimental tradition in drama. His belief of domestic happiness and faithful love are faithfully mirrored in his plays. He started his career by writing Funeral. Embarrassment between young lovers is the central theme of the drama. *Lying Lover* gives expression to his hatred of duelling. In *Tender Husband* two plots are nicely mixed: one circles around Captain Clerimont, an intriguing officer and the other moves around his boorish elder brother. Lawyer Pounce sutures these two plots. *The Conscious Lovers* is his best play. It is modelled on Terence's *Andria*. Bevil Junior, the hero of the play, is about to be married to Lucinda, the daughter of Sealand. In the meantime,

he has befriended an unknown girl named Indiana and falls in love with him. The problem is ultimately resolved when Indiana is discovered to be the daughter of Sealand. Pat Rogers said, "It is a studied and painfully well-intentioned homily, all about filial duty, benevolence, marriages of convenience and a host of thoroughly undramatic issues. The topics canvassed by Steele in this contrived fable were of very real contemporary concern, and many a pulpit must have rung with comparable utterances to those of the characters."

Susanna Centlivre (1667-1723)-Mrs. Centlivre is famous for her Comedy of Intrigue. In her plays one can discern the picture of the emerging mercantile society. She also exploited the local colour exquisitely in her plays. Her first play was *The Perjured Husband* (1700), a cross between a tragedy and a tragi-comedy. In plays such as *The Gamestar* and *The Basset Table* she attacked the fashionable vices of gambling and card-playing. Her most famous play was *The Busie Body* (1709). The union of Sir George Airy and Miranda is thwarted by Miranda's guardian, Sir Francis Gripe who intends her for himself. Sir Francis's son Charles, who is also George's friend, is in love with Isabinda, whose father is unwilling to accept the match. Marplot, Gripe's ward, tries to help the lovers but because of his simplicity he complicates the actions. Through a series of deceptions Airy and Miranda are ultimately united, and Charles winds Isabinda. It is because of the appeal of Marplot that the play was played simultaneously at both Covent Garden and Drury Lane. The popularity of the play led Centlivre to compose its sequel *Marplot in Lisbon*. Her *The Wonder: a Woman Keeps a Secret* (1714) is partly modelled in Ravenscroft's *The Wrangling Lovers* (1677). *Bold Stroke for a Wife* is purely original. The main plot of the play circles round the love of Colonel Fainwell and Anne Lovely. Problem arises as Anne has to receive consent from her four guardians who have four different tastes of fashion. Taking up different disguises, he tries to impress each of them.

Richard Cumberland (1732-1811)-Cumberland wrote about 30 plays, most of which were tragedy. His plays are remarkable for the moral tone. His best play is *The West Indian*. Belcour, the hero of the play is an honest but rakish youth who has been brought up in the West Indies. After arriving in London, he falls in love with Louisa whom he mistakes, initially, for a whore. Ultimately, Belcour reforms himself and is united with her. The play is an archetypal example of

sentimental play. He defended the Jews in *The Jew* (1794). He transforms the heartless moneylender into a generous person who is ever ready to extend his helping hands to the distressed.

Thomas Holcroft (1745-1809)-Holcroft introduced continental melodrama into the English stage. His first comedy, *Duplicity*, was staged at Covent Garden in 1781. He rose to the dizzy heights of success with the production of *The Road to Ruin.* The hero of the play, Harry Dornton, is a wild but high-minded young man. His love of gambling brings upon him huge financial loss. However, he reforms himself on learning that due to his follies his father is on the precipice of disaster. He decided to marry an old but ugly widow due to financial loss. However, everything ends happily because of his goodness of heart.

Hugh Kelly (1739-1777)-She is a formidable name among the dramatists of sentimental school. Her famous plays are *A Word to the Wise* and *Married Philosopher*. Her *False Delicacy* was an enormous success.

4.13.12 The Development of Anti-Sentimental Comedy

As sentimental plays drove laughter out of theatre, a reaction set in. You must remember that the surfeit of pathos was too much to bear for the people. Most pungent response came from Oliver Goldsmith and R.B. Sheridan who launched an attack against the overdose of sentiments and moral effusions in dramas. They took up the cudgels against the melodramatic plays that occupied the English stage for a long time.

Oliver Goldsmith (1730-1774) attacked the morbid taste for sentimentality in his essay The *Present State of Polite Learning*. Goldsmith criticised the comedy of sentiment in his *Essay on the Theatre* (1772). Upholding the classical formula that tragedy represents the misfortunes of the great, and comedy the frailties of the humbler people, he elaborated that the sentimental play did not fit into the mould of neither tragedy nor comedy. Goldsmith objected to it because in lieu of amendment of vices through correction, sentimental drama nurtured tearful episodes. Goldsmith's first attempt was *The Good-Natured Man*. He clarified his stance in the preface to the play, "When I undertook to write a comedy, I confessed I was strongly pre-possessed in favour of the poets of the last age and strove to imitate

them." It is a comedy of character. In *The Good-Natured Man* Goldsmith worked within the convention of the sentimental play. This was not a successful play. Protagonist of the play, Young Honeywood, was a combination of sentimentality and cynicism. Honeywood chooses to send ten guineas to a poor gentleman and his children in the Fleet prison instead of repaying the sum to a broker, and is kind-hearted enough to refuse to have a servant hanged for robbing his plate. And the result is that he falls victim to his creditors who send bailiffs to arrest him in his own house. And when he is released through the help of the girl he loves, Miss Richland, he is credulous enough to believe that a government official and an imposer, Lofty, has secured his freedom, and thus he even tries to persuade Miss Richland to grant Lofty's suit of love. Eventually, with the help of Miss Richland and his uncle Sir William Honeywood, the hero realises his own folly and is reunited to Miss Richland.

She Stoops to Conquer (1773) was his *magnum opus*. In the prologue to the play, Garrick called the sentimental comedy 'a mawkish drab of spurious breed' and lamented 'the Comic Muse long sick is now a dying.' Goldsmith is represented as the doctor, curing the patient by his skilful treatment. Partly based on the incident in the author's life, this play explores, through wit and humour, the class tension prevalent at that time. Marlow, the hero, is not at ease with the women of his class. However, he is quite comfortable with lower class women. Comedy arises when Miss Hardcastle, an upper-class lady, takes the disguise of a maidservant in order to woo him. The entire play, with its fun and humour provided by Tony Lumpkin, makes a satiric dig at the sentimental tradition. Young Marlow, the hero, whose match with Miss Hardcastle has already been fixed by his father, goes with his friend Hastings to visit the Hardcastles. They lose the way, and meeting at an alehouse "Three Jolly Beggars" Tony Lumpkin, Mrs. Hardcastle's boorish son by a former marriage, are waggishly directed to the house of the Hardcastles as to an inn. The mistaking of a private residence for an inn becomes the pivotal circumstance which leads to all subsequent comic situations. Although this play is branded by some critics as a farce, it is not a farce but a typical comedy of manners where we get a picture of social follies and manners. The humour of the play is Shakespearean in nature. You will learn more about this play in the subsequent Unit.

The greatest dramatist of the eighteenth century was **R.B. Sheridan** (1751-1816). The attack which was initiated by Goldsmith against sentimental dramas was

continued by Sheridan. But while Goldsmith tried to revive the spirit of Elizabethan comedy, Sheridan attempted to restore the spirit of comedy of manners. He dealt a heavy blow to the surfeit of pathos. His plays eschewed the vulgarity of the comedy of manners.

His fame chiefly rests on his play *The Rivals* (1775). This play is partly autobiographical. Sheridan's own love affairs with Miss Linley and his elopement with her provides the backbone of the love episode of the main plot. Captain Absolute is in love with Lydia Languish, the niece of Mrs. Malaprop. However, Lydia has a typical sentimental disposition. By reading sentimental romances, she has adopted a sentimental taste that makes her prefer a poor half-pay lieutenant to the heir of a baronet. Captain Absolute disguises himself as a half-pay ensign (Beverley) to woo Lydia. His father, Senior Absolute, proposes the match between his son and Lydia to Mrs. Malaprop but Captain Absolute hesitates to disclose the disguise lest Lydia should get offended. Problem complicates when Bob Acres, another rival for the love of Lydia, challenges Beverley to a duel, partly provoked by Sir Lucius O' Trigger. Ultimately all ends happily and Lydia is cured of her sentimentality. The sub-plot of the play dealing with the love affair of Falkland and Julia carries some elements of sentimentality.

This play is conspicuous for the presentation of the character of Mrs. Malaprop. She thinks herself as a queen of the dictionary. But she does not use right words in right places. The desire to parade her sagacity that ultimately results in absurdity provides humour and fun to the play. A brief specimen of the brilliant malapropism is given below, "If I reprehend anything in this world, it is the use of my oracular tongue and a nice derangement of epitaphs." The Rivals throws a flood of light on the fashionable eighteenth-century life. The artificiality of the eighteenth-century Bath society is beautifully brought out by the dramatist. It presents a society where people constantly run after pleasure and mirth avoiding any moral principle. The opening conversation between Fag and the Coachman is instrumental in bringing out the hollowness of the society.

The School for Scandal (1777) is Sheridan's masterpiece. It shows contrast between two brothers: Joseph Surface, a mean-hearted hypocrite and Charles, an open-hearted but reckless. This play, one of the classics in English drama, is a pungent satire on the moral degeneration of the aristocratic bourgeois society, on the

vicious scandal-mongering among the idle rich, on the abnormal marital relations between rich and above all on the hypocrisies behind the mask of moral uprightness. This comedy is remarkable for a number of hilarious scenes. Among them mention may be made of scandal-mongering and the famous auction scene in which Charles Surface sells his family portraits.

4.13.13 Transformation of the Stage

In the eighteenth century several theatrical developments took place. Playhouses were no longer reserved for the privileged few. Middle-class spectators were showing interest in theatre. Towards the close of the seventeenth century the old aristocratic set up started crumbling. Many aristocratic families were reeling under financial difficulties. Meanwhile, merchant families were in a well-off position. The tradesmen were keen enough to take part in the fashionable society in which the aristocrats were luxuriating. They were enthusiastic to be a part of the world. As a corollary, the potential playgoing public was enlarged. The increasing size of the audience contributed to the emergence of new playhouses. During the time of Charles II, only two theatre companies were granted licence. By 1732, five playhouses came into existence:

(a) The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, which had maintained the contentious management of Christopher Rich with a management by three proficient actors: Colley Cibber, Robert Wilks and Thomas Doggett.

(b) Lincoln's Inn Fields, which had been managed by Christopher Rich's son John. This was supplanted in 1732 with the sumptuous new Theatre Royal, Covent Garden.

(c) The Queen's Theatre, Haymarket, designed as an opera house by Sir John Vanbrugh in 1705 and also known as the Opera House.

(d) The Little Haymarket Theatre had been built in 1720 by John Potter, who speculated on the growing market with a small, unlicensed house.

(e) Goodman's Fields, also unlicensed, had opened under Thomas Odell in 1729, and continued under Henry Giffard in 1732.

London was the locus of the theatrical activities. However, significant growth of playhouses was seen elsewhere as well. Hitherto touring players did not have

their own playhouses. In the eighteenth century they started erecting their own playhouses.

4.13.14 Summing Up

Restoration of Charles II was also, historically speaking, the restoration of drama. And the dramatists, in this respect, deserve due recognition. We can safely conclude that neither Restoration Comedy nor Heroic Tragedy of the age went without criticism. None of the two could come close to the expectation levels of an audience that had a history of Elizabethan drama. But then, it must also be remembered that to equal the preceding era was not the avowed purpose of dramaturgy in the Restoration at all. Eighteenth century tragedy had different varieties. It saw the growth of pseudo-classical tragedies. Ballad-operas and pantomimes came as a kind of comic relief. The heavy dose of heroic tragedy was too much for the audience to bear with for a longer period of time. John Gay invented the ballad-opera. His *The Beggar's Opera* satirised the political party of Robert Walpole. Eighteenth century saw the proliferation of sentimental dramas. Anti-sentimental comedies came as a protest against the overdose of sentiments in dramas. Most pungent response came from Oliver Goldsmith and R.B. Sheridan who took up the cudgels against the morbid taste for sentimentality in comedies. New playhouses emerged during this time. The newly-emerged merchant class vied with aristocrats to be a part of the fashionable world that they inhabited. As a result, the potential playgoing public only enlarged

4.13.15 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. Write a brief essay on the impact of Puritanism on the seventeenth century drama.
2. How did the Restoration stage become a reflection of the Age? Analyse in retrospect the Puritan ban on the theatre.
3. Bring out the salient features of Restoration Comedy by referring in particular to the works of any two major dramatists.
4. Give a brief account of the eighteenth-century tragedy.
5. Write an essay on the development of the sentimental comedy of the eighteenth century.

6. Who were the pioneers of anti-sentimental comedies? Estimate the importance of their work in the drama of the eighteenth century.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Why would you consider Heroic Tragedy no less an artificial picture of the Age than Restoration Comedy?
2. Assess the contributions of Dryden and Congreve in their respective spheres of Restoration drama.
3. What in your opinion are the salient features of Restoration drama? Would you consider it a truly national theatre?
4. Give a brief account of the pantomime and opera produced during the eighteenth century.
5. What are the causes for the decline of drama during the eighteenth century?
6. Write a note on the transformation of stage during the eighteenth century.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. Why do you think was the position of Restoration playwrights precarious? How did they try to strike a balance?
2. Mention in detail some of the continental influences that affected Restoration drama.
3. Write a brief note on other types of contemporary drama in Restoration England.
4. Assess the contribution of Oliver Goldsmith as a dramatist.
5. Write a note on the significance of *The Beggar's Opera*.
6. Assess the contribution of Richard Steele.

4.13.16 Suggested Reading

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Unit-14 □ John Dryden: *All for Love*

Structure:

4.14.1 Objectives

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners are expected to:

- Be well versed with Dryden's *All for Love* as a re-working of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*
- Understand how Dryden appropriates the Shakespearean text to suit his cultural milieu.
- Be able to write long, short and medium length answers from this unit.

4.14.2 Introduction

You have already come across John Dryden as a verse-satirist and a literary theorist of the Restoration Period in England.The very fact that you are now studying a full-length play by him will give you a fair idea of Dryden's multi-

faceted genius. The Restoration, you must have realised by now, was not an age where heroism could be looked upon in the same vein that you could do in earlier periods. Hence it is natural that the tragic plays of the period, which were popularly known as Heroic Tragedies, would not be on the same wavelength as tragedies of the Renaissance or the Elizabethan period. The strain of artificiality is pervasive in this genre. You need to know in this regard that in Dryden's own conception, a heroic play ought to be 'an imitation of an heroic poem; and consequently that love and honour ought to be the subject of it'.

This Unitintroduces you to Dryden's *All for Love*, which is sub-titled 'The World Well Lost'. To begin with, it is a heroic drama that first appeared in 1677. It is written in a free adaptation of Shakespeare and modeled upon the design of classical tragedy. It is considered to be an approved imitation of Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra.* In fact, re-workings of Shakespeare's plays have been a common feature in subsequent ages, till our own times. In terms of thought and content, Shakespeare is so rich that he has always lent himself to adaptations in subsequent periods, albeit story lines have changed in keeping with temporal spatial frameworks. In course of this Unit therefore, you will come to know how Dryden appropriates the Shakespearean text in a way that suits his milieu, which, as we have stated at the outset, was very different from Shakespeare's. As additional activity, it is suggested that with help from your counselor, you acquaint yourself with Shakespeare's immortal tragedy that combines love, polity and statecraft– *Antony and Cleopatra*.

4.14.3 Heroic Tragedy and John Dryden

If you look back at the sub-section on 'Restoration Tragedy', you will remember that as a type, this form of drama had a rather short life span. Given the artificiality of the age and the kind of elements that such drama tried to depict, this was perhaps pre-destined. Yet, within this brief period, there were quite a handful of playwrights, just as there were a number of plays written; though not all attained equal popular acclaim. To repeat certain facts that you already know but would do good to recollect, heroic drama dealt with exalted spectacles and almost superhuman attributes and activities of a hero, and was modelled on the themes of heroism, courage, love and honour. This genre was primarily modelled after

the French Neo-Classical tragedy and was normally written in rhyming pentameter couplets. Chronologically, Dryden's *All for Love* is a Heroic Drama written in the final phases of the existence of this mode and with his genius, he naturally produced one that stands above most of the rest. This is however not to say that this play manages to completely elude the inherent limitations of the genre. One interesting variation in Dryden's work is that he does not use the rhyming couplets, but writes in **blank verse** as Shakespeare did.

Dryden however rigorously follows Aristotle's idea of Unity of Action, mentioned in *Poetics*. According to Aristotle, a tragedy must have a single course of action without any subsidiary plot. Dryden strictly adheres to this, and the unity of place is also maintained as the scene of action never shifts from Alexandria. This is unlike Shakespeare who takes us across the world from Rome to Egypt in his play! In case of the unity of time, there exists in the play a case of illusion of reality. The acts do not have any scene division, and the unity of unbroken time is maintained by such an illusion separately in every act. Dryden's play may thus be seen as having certain interesting experimentations by way of re-doing Shakespeare with classical precepts in mind.

So, what exactly does Dryden do to make *All for Love* approximate the genre of the heroic tragedy?

The play deviates from his early practices as a writer of heroic tragedies on two seminal points. Firstly, Dryden eliminates the compulsory heroic couplet, and utilizes blank verse introduced by Shakespeare as a successful form of dramatic dialogue. Secondly, the strong political grandiose element as an inseparable element of heroic drama is neutralized by a more delicate handling of the central emotion of love and passion between Cleopatra and Antony. Dryden deals chiefly with the theme of love, and following a neo-Aristotalian appropriation available in French readings of *Poetics* strictly adheres to the unities of time, place, and action and concentrates on the activities and fates of the lovers on the last day of their life. The heroic element of dealing with celebrated historical figures is achieved in the play, and the treatment of the central issue of love and passion is not done without drawing a thorough portrait of the political affairs involving the bond between the lovers. The play evidently portrays the grandeur of passion and love, while not banishing the grandeur of grand political affairs in the bombastic display of episodes

of sublime stage action like Antony's falling on the sword in the Roman fashion, and Cleopatra's queenly embracing of death with asp-bites. Thus, Dryden's heroic tragedy in *All for Love* is definitely an evident departure from the characteristics of Dryden's early heroic tragedies. However, the same has revolutionized the realm of heroic drama by a successful handling of the blank verse in imitation of Shakespeare.

4.14.4 Dryden's 'Preface', 'Prologue' and Shakespearean Adaptation

- **Preface:** Dryden's *All for Love* has a Preface that tries to introduce the audience with the intentions that the author had in imitating Shakespeare's drama. He also says that in portraying the hero and the heroine he has not described them too moral (since it will be unjust to make them suffer). At the same time the lovers are not projected as unscrupulous villains as then they shall not be able to arouse the desired sympathy from the audience. He mentions that in the construction of the plot he has adhered to the Classical unities, and the story does not deal with any subplot outside the realm of the main action of the play. He also mentions that introducing Octavia is an error, since the character takes away a considerable amount of audience's sympathy. He thinks that by imitating 'divine' Shakespeare he has transcended his earlier achievements. He also mentions that as practitioner of art he does not consider it morally right to arouse too much of sympathy for the lovers who are engaged in illicit and improper love.
- **Prologue:** In the Prologue to *All for Love* Dryden wittily states that he is expecting adverse comments from the critics, and later on he also states what kind of heroes and heroines the audience should see and search for in dramas. However, finally Dryden submits himself and humbly says that the audience should not expect great mastery from him in the portrayal of the heroes and heroines since he is lower in standard when compared to great writers.
- **Dryden's Handling of Materials from Shakespeare, and other Historical Sources:**

Dryden writes in the 'Preface':

> In my style, I have professed to imitate the divine Shakespeare; which that I might perform more freely... I have not copied my author servilely'.

Such an introduction to the text by the dramatist himself clearly establishes the fact that Dryden was not a blind imitator, and he utilizes the materials drawn from Shakespeare and other historical sources freely in order to achieve an effective mode of dramatizing the passions and love of Antony and Cleopatra. In fact, being an imaginative creative artist and a scholar, Dryden manages to centralize the theme of love and mutual passion existing between Antony and Cleopatra and therefore he does not give much dramatic space to various political affairs involving Antony, Octavius, Pompey, and Rome and Egypt in general. While in Shakespeare, there is ample room provided to Octavius Caesar, in Dryden's play he is mostly treated as a back-stage or off-stage phenomenon of threat surrounding the future of Egypt. Dryden drops theAntony-Pompey episode, and other political paraphernalia. Cleopatra appears to be more 'womanly' and 'feminine' rather than the strong politician role portrayed in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Moreover, Dryden himself points out that:

> The hero of the poem ought not to be a character of perfect virtue, for then he could not without injustice, be made unhappy; nor yet altogether wicked, because he could not then be pitied. I have therefore steered the middle course; and have drawn the character of Antony as favourable as Plutarch, Appian, and Dion Cassius would give me leave.

Thus, Dryden's handling of the age-old tale of love, passion, betrayal, conflict between duty and love, in case of Antony and Cleopatra seems to be a blend of a free creative imitation of various source materials. Dryden freely alters, recasts, imitates, and recreates history and literary handling of historical facts before him, and the same stands as a representative of his creative genius and unique artistic temperament.

4.14.5 The Sub-Title of *All for Love*

All for Love has a subtitle——'The World Well Lost'——which makes it clear that the play does not deal with the high moral assumptions where heroism and honour depend primarily on virtue and responsible action on the part of the heroes and heroines by sacrificing their personal peace and pleasures. The subtitle rather shows that Dryden here is not interesting to portray the illicit love between Antony and Cleopatra as wrong and immoral. Though the outcome of such a love affair is bound to be tragic, Dryden does not dismiss the same, and appears to celebrate how Antony and Cleopatra lost everything that they possessed for the sake of their love. However, this very approach appears contradictory to the high

moral claims made by Dryden in the Preface. This can also be seen as a deliberate way of ignoring morality on the part of the dramatist.

4.14.6 Synopsis and Act-wise Summary

➢ Synopsis

The play is set in Alexandria in Egypt, and deals with the last hours of Antony and Cleopatra. The play opens with Serapion describing mysterious happenings like storms and supernatural scenes which are omens for the future doom of Egypt. Alexas, Cleopatra's eunuch, dismisses the claims and seems critical of Cleopatra's affection towards Antony who is secretly hated by the Egyptians. Ventidius appears and knowing from another gentleman regarding Antony's despondent state, blames Cleopatra for such a downfall. On the other hand he prepares to help Antony and manages to pull out Antony from his despondency when Antony appears first on stage. By the end of the first act Antony regains his warlike spirits and decides to leave Cleopatra. In the second act, Cleopatra appears mourning. Charmion, Cleopatra's waiting woman, tries to arrange a meeting between Antony and Cleopatra in vain. Cleopatra tries to win back the love of Antony by gifts and jewels, including a bracelet. Alexas suggests that the Egyptian queen should tie the bracelet in Antony's wrist herself. In a meeting between Antony and Cleopatra, Ventidius reappears to proclaim that Cleopatra is not the right partner of Antony as she can use guile and is going to abandon Antony to find her own safety. Cleopatra proves this argument wrong by showing a letter from the Roman authorities asking her to surrender Antony to them as a prisoner of war and lets Antony know that in spite of such an invitation, she did not betray Antony. Antony is overjoyed and proclaims his love for Cleopatra. In the third act, Antony is seen returning from battle overwhelmed with love for Cleopatra. Ventidius appears to speak with Antony, who attempts to flee unsuccessfully. Antony shows signs of having no desire to resume the war but doesn't know how to stop it. He believes Dolabella can assist him and Ventidius brings Dolabella out. Dolabella, Antony's friend, appears after Antony succeeds in the battle. Dolabella was earlier banished since he loved Cleopatra, but he returns to a warm welcome from Antony. Dolabella appears with a solution by which Antony must reunite with his rightful wife Octavia (Octavius Caesar's sister) by which there will be an end in the villainy shared between Antony and Octavius. Cleopatra learns how this turn of event has defeated her, and appears to be defeated by the political scenario. Alexas advises Cleopatra to ignore the presence of Octavia. Cleopatra, however, faces Octavia in an argument as a rival in Antony's love where it becomes clear that though Antony does not

wholeheartedly love Octavia, it is she and not Cleopatra to whom Antony rightfully belongs. In act four, Antony appears to be convinced by Octavia's persuasion that his rightful place is in Rome with his children. Even then Antony does not find the emotional courage to tell Cleopatra himself. Antony asks Dolabella to inform her. Ventidius overhears that Dolabella will be going to Cleopatra to bid her farewell. He also sees her working out a strategy with Alexas to make Antony jealous by way of Dolabella. Ventidius and Octavia see Dolabella taking Cleopatra's hand, but when the time comes to make a move romantically, both of them fall apart from the guilt of their betrayal. Ventidius tells Antony that Dolabella and Cleopatra have turned lovers and with this piece of information Antony turns infuriated. This makes Octavia leave Antony permanently since she is not believed by Antony. However, Antony even refuses to believe Cleopatra and Dolabella when they try to explain the actual strategy. In the final act, Antony is seen taking Cleopatra's fleet and going to Caesar by whom he is greeted graciously. Then they come back to Alexandria. When Cleopatra is informed this, Alexas advises her to flee and assures her that he will attempt to make amends with Caesar. Cleopatra considers this as a way in which he will look like a traitor and he must not go to Caesar. Cleopatra escapes and Alexas is left behind. Antony and Ventidius get together and prepare to fight. Alexas informs Antony that Cleopatra is dead. Antony turns grief-stricken and tells Ventidus to end his life, but Ventidius refuses and kills himself. With Ventidius dead, Antony tries and fails to commit suicide. Cleopatra appears to see Antony living on the verge of death. Cleopatra commits suicide. Serapion conveys their tribute.

➢ Chief Historical Figures Mentioned in *All for Love*:

- ✓ **Mark Antony**: Marcus Antonius, commonly known in English as Mark Antony, was a Roman politician and general who formed an official alliance between himself, Octavian, and Lepidus, which broke up in 33 BC. Antony was defeated by Octavian in the Battle of Actium (31 BC), and committed suicide with his beloved Cleopatra shortly after the defeat.
- ✓ **Cleopatra**: Cleopatra was the last pharaoh of Ancient Egypt. After the defeat of Antony whom she supported against the legal heir of Caesar, Octavian, she committed suicide by means of an asp bite on August 12, 30 BC and thereafter Egypt became part of the Roman Empire.
- ✓ **Octavius**: More popularly known as Augustus, Octavius (Octavian) was the founder of the Roman Empire and its first Emperor, ruling from 27 BC until his death in 14 AD.

➢ Detailed Act-Wise Critical Summary:

Act I

The first act of Dryden's play serves the expository function of identifying the ominous situation involving Egypt with Serapion, the priest of Isis describing unnatural events in the world of Egypt's nature. River Nile has flooded suddenly, ebbing abruptly leaving various creatures trapped on the land. The tombs of ancient kings are routed by a sudden whirlwind. Such references to the calamities in nature parallel the threat looming large in the political existence of Egypt with Octavius Caesar's army surrounding Egypt. The section provides choric commentary on the Egyptian state of affairs and throws light on the protagonists, Antony and Cleopatra. Alexas, serving the choric function narrates the precarious condition of Egypt. As narrated by Alexas, Antony has now withdrawn himself from Cleopatra and lives in Isis's temple. While Serapion thinks that Antony's defeat at the hand of Octavius will lead Egypt to turn into a province of Roman Empire, Alexas is in favour of a conflict where all the tyrants are going to be destroyed. Serapion also provides information regarding the current mood of the Egyptians who would want Antony to lose, and Alexas laments over the fact that Cleopatra has shown lack of political maturity in not wanting to surrender Antony to Octavius. Ventidius, the Roman general and Antony's friend arrives and to him Cleopatra is the actual reason behind Antony's state of despondency. While memory of the defeat in the battle of Actium continues to provide Antony enough injury, Ventidius tries to cheer him up by providing counsel and military support. However, his disparaging remarks regarding Cleopatra makes Antony irritated. Finally, Antony, under the guidance of Ventidius decides to leave Cleopatra and concentrate on the military affairs.

Act II

Act II opens with Cleopatra in a grief-stricken mood, and the same is caused by Antony's absence. As the queen she is fully aware of the threats available, and understands the political implications of being caught by the Roman army. However, she is more saddened by Antony's decision of leaving her. She is consoled by Alexas who suggests that Cleopatra should leave so that Alexas can work upon Antony's mind. On the other hand Antony and Ventidius arrive talking about military plans to defeat Octavius. In Antony's words Octavius is shrewd and coward, who has only become emperor by chance. Ventidius reminds how Antony foolishly helped

Octavius to win Philippi, and urges Antony to move out of Alexandria to fight Octavius. In the meantime, ALexas comes and offers Antony and Roman generals gifts, and in order to arouse sympathy in Antony Alexas says that Cleopatra has chosen not to restrict Antony from going away from Alexandria since she has lost her beauty and youth that were influential on Antony in the past. Alexas informs that Cleopatra is saddened, and presents Antony with a bracelet from her. Ventidius is certainly aware of the dangers of any meeting taking place between Antony and Cleopatra, since that would be detrimental to the military cause. However, Antony decides to meet Cleopatra only to bid farewell. Under the influence of Ventidius, Antony blames Cleopatra for his downfall. Cleopatra on the other hand shows her love for Antony as a constant phenomenon. She later shows evidence of her innocence and loyalty. She places Octavius's letter that offered Cleopatra suzerainty if she chose to submit Antony. She acted against such temptations, and while she is blamed as the reason behind Antony's downfall, his defeat in the battle of Actium, Ceopatra finally manages to portray that she is not treacherous. Antony is finally moved and decides to stay in Alexandria, and is reunited with Cleopatra. Antony decides to wage a surprise attack, and yet is again inclined to have pleasures with Cleopatra.

Act III

Act III opens with Antony intending to engage in sensual pleasures with Cleopatra after the successful completion of the surprise attack. Antony claims that it was his urge to quickly get reunited with Cleopatra that has prompted such a quick victory. When Ventidius appears Alexas taunts him, while Antony remains grateful towards his old companion. Ventidius suggests that a peace treaty with Octavius by taking an advantage of the recent victory is politically necessary, since with a grave shortage of Egyptian army a victory over Octavius seems unachievable. According to him, Antony must look for mutual friends of Octavius and himself to solve the issue, and while Antony is reminded of his old trusted friend Dolabella, Dolabella surprisingly appears and he and Ventidius help Antony to regain his spirits. Since a truce with Octavius is politically necessary, they both advocate in favour of a peaceful reconciliation, and to do the same they produce Octavia, Antony's wife. At her approach, Antony refuses initially to identify her as a loyal company, and states that her only identity in his eyes is that of the sister of Octavius. However, Octavia

ensures that her priority as a wife is safeguard Antony, finally under the guidance of both Dolabella and Ventidius Antony is reconciled with Octavia. Cleopatra, having learnt about the current state of affairs faces Octavia. They both insult each other. Both stand their ground. Cleopatra is in Octavia's eyes the robber, while Cleopatra says that she is actually the victim since she does not have the status of a wife, but only that of a mistress. However, after Octavia's exit, we find Cleopatra gradually breaking down, and her distress only breeds suicidal tendencies.

Act IV

The act opens in the middle of a conversation between Dolabella and Antony, where Antony asks Dolabella to inform Cleopatra that he is leaving Alexandria. On the other hand Dolabella in a soliloquy unravels his secret desire for Cleopatra, and Ventidius, having overheard his statements made in the soliloquy and havind had introspection regarding the same concludes that there is not much disturbance created if Cleopatra, already rejected by Antony, is taken by Dolabella. On the other hand, under the guidance of Alexas, Cleopatra makes pretentious amorous advances before Dolabella, and later Dolabella, who is gulled by Cleopatra, lies to the extent of saying that Antony has said a lot of unkind words regarding Cleopatra, only to put his claim stronger. Cleopatra is deeply hurt and faints, and later tells Dolabella that she has been pretending love towards Antony and wishes now to have a final meeting with Antony. Ventidius has overheard only a part of this conversation and thinks that Cleopatra has already chosen her next lover. Ventidius reports the conclusions he has drawn before Antony, and the same so deeply enrages him that Octavia, deeply moved by Antony's passion for Cleopatra even after his leaving her, decides to leave Antony. Dolabella appears before Antony, and being heavily enraged, Antony banishes both Dolabella and Cleopatra for their disloyalty. Cleopatra tries her best to convince Antony that she only feigned love to Dolabella, but remains a failure, since Antony is not ready to believe her sice the charges against them were confirmed by Alexas. Cleopatra goes away dejected, only further addind that in spite of the distrust and unkind words, she continues to love Cleopatra.

Act V

Cleopatra is in acute despair and blames Alexas for misguiding her. In the meantime, Serapion brings the fateful news of Antony's defeat which was caused by

the Egyptian galleys joining Roman navy against Antony. Serapion further informs that Antony smells this as Cleopatra's conspiracy and wishes to kill her. Alexas prescribes a plan according to which Cleopatra must hide herself in the monument temporarily, and Serapion too consels in the same manner, stating that Alexas must face Antony since he is the cause of the confusion and conflict. After Cleopatra's departure Alexas exposes his cowardice. Antony and Ventidius appear and decide to fight till their death. Alexas lies before Antony and presents concocted news of Cleopatra's suicidal death caused by Antony's suspicion. In an aside it is revealed that Alexas has only done this to save his own life and to test whether Antony still loves Cleopatra. However, this seems to be a death blow to Antony who is so guilt-stricken that he asks Ventidius to kill him. Ventidius commits a suicidal death, and Antony follows, and at his hour of death Cleopatra and Antony are reunited. After having seen her lover die, Cleopatra decides to die, and though counselled by Iras to appeal before Octavius, Cleopatra only decides to die in honourable terms and reunite herself with her lover. She and her maids apply asp-bites and they die. Cleopatra leaves in like a queen who refused to live like a slave of Octavius and to be paraded through Roman streets as prisoner. Serapion, with whom the play started, only has finally praise for the dead lovers and states that no other lovers have died for each other in the manner that Antony and Cleopatra have died.

4.14.7 Glossary (Aid to the full text)

Glossary:

- Portends: Omens.
- Prodigies: Strange uncanny happenings.
- Sea horses: Hippopotami
- Long race of Ptolemies: The Greek Kings from Alexander's times to Cleopatra's son are known in history as Ptolemy.
- Maecenas and Agrippa: Roman generals.
- Isis' Temple: The Goddess of Moon, worshipped in Egypt.
- Parthia: Ancient Persia.
- Cilicia: A district in Asia-minor.

- Progeny: Descendant.
- Perdition: Ruin.
- Egyptian timbrels: One faced drum played with hand.
- Roman trumpets: A wind instrument of powerful tone which was used by Roman army for signalling.
- Glutton: An over-eater.
- Octavia: Octavius Caesar's sister whom Antony married.
- Sylvan: Something from the woods, or the woodlands.
- Mistletoe: A parasitic plant used in Christmas for decoration.
- Tully: Marcus Tullius Cicero.
- Lictors: Officers who attend magistrates bearing fasces.
- Minion: subordinate, favourite.
- Hercules: An exclamation.
- Posterity: oncoming generation.
- Blasphemer: One who engages in profane talk.
- Gewgaw: showy and valueless.
- Fasces: the bundle of rods carried in front of a Roman Magistrate
- Minion: a favourite
- Mouldering: breaking to dust
- Sap: vital juice
- Dotage: unchecked passion or love
- Hollowing: shouting/ screaming
- Lucrece: a Roman lady, raped by Sextus. Now symbolised as a personification of chastity.
- Coxcomb: a dandy.

4.14.8 Dryden's Treatment of Themes

In the 'Preface' to *All for Love*, Dryden clearly states that the love between Antony and Cleopatra is 'illegal love' caused by 'vice' and based on strict moral

grounds any glorification of the kind of love that the two share for each other must remain unacceptable. The love between Antony and Cleopatra is unjust, unfair, and illicit on various grounds. Firstly, both of them have neglected their political vow as rulers to safeguard the citizen and have evidently violated the norms of state. Their passion stands in unacceptable binary opposition to the national commitment. As queen, Cleopatra must have heard the voice of the people who were not ready to acknowledge the love between Antony and Cleopatra as legitimate. As a Roman general, Antony's duty was to spread the empire and do justice to his national commitments. Both of them have transgressed. They have taken their political commitments and liabilities lightly. On the other hand, judging from the perspective of social norms, Antony has violated the duties as a father and a husband, having abandoned Octavius and his children in order to live a life of pleasure-seeking and sensuality. Cleopatra has participated in Antony's crime and sin. Quite evidently, judged by high moral standards that are placed by Dryden himself, these activities of Antony and Cleopatra are unpardonable offences. If retributive justice has to prevail and order has to be reinforced into the polluted system of state and familial affairs, then the transgressors like Antony and Cleopatra must be punished adequately. Their downfall and tragedy is not caused by fate or any external agencies other than their free will. They have been adequately counselled against their violations by characters like Ventidius, Alexas, and Iras, severally, but the path that they have taken has only pushed them towards their inevitable doom. Unnatural deeds have indeed brought unnatural troubles.

However, Dryden, though has provided ample dramatic space for the elocution on the sins of Antony and Cleopatra, he has maintained a thematic centrality in the portrayal of mutual passion between the two. The disorder that illicit love has unleashed is highlighted right from the beginning of the play with Serapion opening the drama with omens and delineation of the natural disorders and disasters that have taken place. While leaving Cleopatra and Alexandria has remained the best option for Antony, Antony has continually neglected the political rationale put forward by Ventidius. He does not wish to hear anything critical about his bonds with Cleopatra. On the other hand, caught in the middle of a military emergency, when her state and people are threatened by Octavius' approach, Cleopatra does not wish to surrender Antony to Octavius. These are offences and cannot be approved within the moral realm. And yet in Dryden's play there is glorification of the immortal bond between Antony and Cleopatra. They happen to be celebrated as cult figures personifying love. They are glorified as manifestations of pure love, self-sacrifice, and honourable bond, while the nature of their bond is never socially acceptable.

Dryden's play centralizes the passion and love of the protagonists. It also highlights the conflict between morality and passion, political duty and personal loyalty.

4.14.9 The Tragic Protagonists: Antony and Cleopatra

Antony and Cleopatra serve as the tragic hero and heroine respectively in *All for Love*. Antony adequately fits in as the proper tragic hero following Aristotalian norms. He is noble, born high, and of a great social stature, and is not absolutely bad or absolutely good, and has a grand sense of personal loyalty as his chief virtue, and a reckless and voluntary disloyalty towards his political and familial commitments. After all, Antony is a blend of military supremacy and moral weakness. He is a great warrior and yet adequately vulnerable. He is passionate, and yet often dejected due to his political misfortune. He is often self-critical, and yet he cannot accept any criticism against Cleopatra. In his indomitable passion for Cleopatra, which is illicit and politically unjust, lies his hubris, while his hamartia occurs in his disability to leave Cleopatra in spite of good counsel and absolute understanding of the precarious condition he is in.

While Aristotle does not mention anything about tragic heroines, and while women according to Aristotle cannot be granted the position of tragic protagonists, like Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, Dryden's *All for Love* provides enough space for Cleopatra as a tragic heroine. She too, like Antony, is of a higher social stature, and above the ordinary, and has vices and virtues blended brilliantly in her portrait. She too has her hubris lying in excessive passion, and has her hamartia in not surrendering Antony for her and her state's benefit. Cleopatra is often dejected when declined by Antony, often confused regarding her duties, jealous towards Octavia, and zealous to hold on to Antony knowing well that the same can only lead her and her state to dust.

It is their choice that scripts their tragedies and nemesis. Their downfall is not caused by any blind inscrutable agency like Fate as in many Greek tragedies. They sketch their own chaos and, in the process, drown. However, they have both managed to arouse the chief emotions of pity and fear as highlighted by Aristotle by their mutual love, self-sacrificial love, loyalty, and commitment.

4.14.10 Conflict between Reason and Passion

In *All for Love* Dryden intended to put moral order as the central celebrated motif. However, though he might have had appeared to have glorified 'illicit love'

and 'vice' by celebrating the self-sacrificial love and commitment of the lovers, it would be thoroughly unjust to state that Dryden advocates in favour of illicit passion. In *All for Love* the conflict between reason and passion is a central motif. Cleopatra and Antony are personifications of unjust uncontrollable and unchecked passion. Their downfall, though evocative of pity and fear, is the justice they meet for transgression. On the other hand, characters like Ventidius stand as epitomes of wisdom and rationality, while in Dolabella we find a fine and often uncanny blend of reason and passion. In Alexas there is reason, and occasionally a streak of opportunism. In Serapion and Iras, political wisdom and rationality find suitable abode. Dryden places various shades of passion and reason, and it would not be just to state that he is in favour of passion over reason, though at the same time the dynamics of passion that Antony and Cleopatra display becomes the chief treasure of *All for Love*.

4.14.11 Sample Passage (From Ending) Analysed

See how the lovers sit in state together,
As they were giving laws to half mankind!
The impression of a smile, left in her face,
Shows she died pleased with him for whom she lived,
And went to charm him in another world.
Caesar's just entering: grief has now no leisure.
Secure that villain, as our pledge of safety,
To grace the imperial triumph.—Sleep, blest pair,
Secure from human chance, long ages out,
While all the storms of fate fly o'er your tomb;
And fame to late posterity shall tell,
No lovers lived so great, or died so well.

This section occurring at the end of *All for Love* is part of Serapion's commentary on the death of Antony and Cleopatra. Serapion witnesses the sad end of Cleopatra and learns how she died in full queenly dignity and honour, living and dying loyal to her lover who sacrificed his own life being committed to Cleopatra. The uncertainties of war and chaotic political life can no longer touch

the lovers, and in their death, they lie glorious in harmony. The lines truly celebrate their mutual passion and glorify their bond. The celebration of their 'illicit' love might turn out to be an advocacy in favour of immorality and lack of propriety. However, the celebrated story of Antony and Cleopatra told and retold in classics and popular culture is deified by Serapion's assessment of the 'blest pair'. The lines heighten the pity and admiration for the lovers, and provide a sense of catharsis as desirable in tragedy with the note of calm of mind and all passions spent.

4.14.12 Summing Up

In this Unit, you have been introduced to one of the best specimens of Heroic Tragedy, which has been an important step in the long evolution of English drama. The links with Shakespearean dramaturgy have been carefully explored, so as to explain this evolutionary trend. Notice that in his appropriation both of the historicity of the characters and the fabular elements, Dryden almost foreshadows modernist dramatic techniques. All the same, you have also been acquainted with the contemporary milieu and how the playwright suits the text in that context.

4.14.13 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. What features of the Heroic Tragedy do you find in *All for Love*?
2. Analyse Dryden's treatment of historical figures in *All for Love*.
3. How does *All for Love* problematise the themes of love, morality and duty?

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. What is the relevance of the sub-title of Dryden's *All for Love*?
2. Analyse Dryden's Antony and Cleopatra as tragic protagonists.
3. What is significant about Dryden's handling of his source materials in *All for Love*?

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. How does Dryden handle the idea of retributive justice in *All for Love*?
2. Comment on Ventidius as an epitome of wisdom and rationality.
3. What is the significance of the 'Preface' to Dryden's *All for Love*?

4.14.14 Suggested Reading

Garnett, Dr Richard.*The Age of Dryden*. Kessinger Publishing, 2010.
King, Bruce. *Dryden's Major* Plays. Oliver and Boyd, 1966.
—.*Twentieth Century Interpretations of All for Love*. Prentice Hall, 1968.
Winn, James Anderson.*John Dryden and His World*. Yale UP, 1987.

Unit-15 □ William Congreve: *The Way of the World*

Structure

4.15.1 Objectives

Upon the completion of this unit, the learners are expected to:

- Understand *The Way of the World* as a Restoration Comedy of Manners, correlating its several features to the play
- Be able to discuss and analyse the central themes and key issues by going through the extended summary of the play.
- Write long, medium and short length answers from this unit.

4.15.2 Introduction

You are by now well aware of the fact that the Restoration, as a period, takes its name from the Restoration of the monarchy, with Charles II assuming the throne in 1660. You are also aware of the seminal importance of Restoration drama, which to many cultural historians, virtually epitomises the era. This was

basically because, with the reopening of Theatres in 1662, play-going became a very significant part of the reaction against the Puritanism of the previous decades. In a variety of forms that included adaptations of Shakespeare and also new drama, the entire culture seemed to see itself as a kind of play on community life, as commentators repeatedly emphasized the ways everyone seemed to be playing roles as they negotiated new mores and social conditions. This Unit will acquaint you with William Congreve's *The Way of the World,* a play that exemplifies many of the key features of what became popular as the **Restoration Comedy of Manners**. The major feature to look out for in this and such other plays are the complex, multi-faceted characters who combine urbanity and wit in treating love and wealth as a game they play through concealment, artifice, and plotting. This Unit will also show how unlike some of the plays from the first decade of the Restoration, Congreve's play does not end up embracing all out cynicism. Instead, you will see that true love, devoid of sentimentality, even wins out and lives with wealth. Congreve's intent was not on writing the sentimental comedies that were later to become so popular on the eighteenth-century stage. His works stood unique as it showcased the subtle balance that he achieved between the cool disenchantment of the Restoration and the emotional warmth of the 18th century. His characters have their moral failings and they more than handle themselves in a world of false appearances, banter, and sexual double-dealings, but they are redeemed in the end. As you go along with this Unit, you are therefore advised to look upon Congreve's play as a bridge between earlier Shakespearean drama and evolutions in dramaturgy that follow him.

4.15.3 The Restoration Comedy of Manners

On this, let us just take the threads of what you have already learnt on Restoration Comedy, and stretch that a bit further and try understanding the basic features of what came to be known as the **Restoration Comedy of Manners**. We shall then try reading Congreve's play in that light.

- Comedy: Very broadly a light and humorous drama with a happy ending.
- From your reading of Shakespearean comedy, you already know that the genre also provides an ample view of contemporary life and times by way of motivations and actions of characters.
- The Comedy of Manners, in the same vein satirises the manners and affectations of a social class, often represented by stock characters. The plot of the comedy, often concerned with an illicit love affair or some

other scandal, is generally less important than its witty and often bawdy dialogue. You will realize that this can be related to the volatile socio-cultural formations of the times. And the stage for one, in any era, is a dynamic representation of social life.

- Restoration Comedy is a kind of English comedy, usually in the form of the comedy of manners that flourished during the restoration period in England (i.e. from 1660 to about 1700), when actresses were first employed on the London stage. Appealing to a fairly narrow audience of aristocrats in the recently reopened theatres, Restoration comedy relied upon sophisticated repartee and knowledge of the exclusive code of manners in high society. Plots were based on the complex intrigues of the marriage market. The frequently cynical approach to marriage and sexual infidelity in Restoration comedy invited accusations of immorality. Significant examples are George Etherege's *The Man of Mode* (1676), William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), and William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700).

4.15.4 William Congreve: A Short Bio-Note

"Heaven has no rage, like love to hatred turned,
Nor hell a fury, like a woman scorned…
Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast"
The Mourning Bride

William Congreve was born in 1670 in the village of Bardsey, in Yorkshire. When his father was commissioned a garrison four years later, the family moved to Ireland, and Congreve went to school at Kilkenny College, and then, at the age of 16, to Trinity College, Dublin. Congreve was lucky enough to have Jonathan Swift as schoolmate.

The family returned to England in 1688, and in 1691 Congreve began to study law at Middle Temple in London, although he employed much of his time writing. While writing poetry and working on translations of Latin Poetry, he became known to other writers in London. He published an essay, Incognita under the pseudonym "Cleophil" in 1692. He wrote *The Old Bachelour*, his first play during an illness. It was performed in 1693. Although the play was derivative, with no characters or plots, it was witty, the dialogue was clever and the play was widely acceptable

by the audience. Dryden, the venerable playwright and poet, commented it to be the best first play he had ever seen, and Congreve became a celebrity overnight. We can see with this first play the seeds of Congreve's later work: The Cambridge History of English and American Literature writes, "Congreve is playing supremely well the tune of the time."

Congreve wrote four more plays between 1693 and 1700:

- The comedy, *The Double Dealer*, which earned the approval of the queen. Influential 17th century man of letters John Dryden compared Congreve to Shakespeare;
- The comedy, *Love for Love*, which triumphantly opened Betterton's new theatre, only the third in London, in Lincoln's Inn Field in 1695;
- The poetic tragedy, *The Mourning Bride*, which was a historical curiosity to us but in 1697 is hailed as a masterpiece and appeared on the stage for many years;
- And the comedy, *The Way of the World*, which appears in 1700, and was considered his masterpiece, although it was a critical failure at the time,

The poor reception given to *The Way of the World* may be the reason that Congreve stopped writing plays. He maintained his connection with the stage-managing Lincoln's Inn Fields and collaborating in writing *Squire Trelooby* in 1704. He studied music, and won a prize for the libretto he wrote for *The Judgement of Paris*. He wrote the opera *Semele*, about a woman in love with Jupiter.

Congreve belonged to the Kit Cat Club whose members are amongst the most illustrious men of the age. They include eight Dukes, Earl, famous soldiers like Marlborough, and fellow writers, Sir John Vanbrugh and Richard Steele. William Congreve was interred in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey, near the grave of Aphra Behn (the famous Restoration woman writer).

4.15.5 Historical Context of the Play

In 1700, the world of London theatre-going had changed significantly from the days of, for example, *The Country Wife*. Charles II was no longer on the throne, and the jubilant court that revelled in its licentiousness and opulence had been replaced by the far dourer and utilitarian Dutch-inspired court of William of Orange. His wife, Mary II, was, long before her death, a retiring person who did not appear much in public. William himself was a military king who was reported

to be hostile to drama. The political instabilities that had been beneath the surface of many Restoration comedies were still present, but with a different side seeming victorious.

One of the features of a Restoration comedy is the opposition of the witty and courtly (and Cavalier) rake and the dull-witted man of business or the country bumpkin, who is understood to be not only unsophisticated but often (as, for instance, in the very popular plays of Aphra Behn in the 1670s) either Puritan or another form of dissenter. In 1685, the courtly and Cavalier side was in power, and Restoration comedies belittled the bland and foolish losers of the Restoration. However, by 1700, the other side was ascendant. Therefore, *The Way of the World*'s recreation of the older Restoration comedy's patterns is only one of the things that made the play unusual.

The 1688 revolution concerning the overthrow of James II created a new set of social codes primarily amongst the bourgeoisie. The new capitalist system meant an increasing emphasis on property and property law. Thus, the play is packed with legal jargon and financial and marital contracts. These new legal aspects allow characters like Mrs. Fainall to secure her freedom through an equitable trust and for Mirabell and Millamant's marriage to be equal though a prenuptial agreement. This shift in social perspectives is perhaps best shown in the characters of Fainall and Mirabell, who represent respectively the old form and new form of marital relations: sexual power at first and then developing into material power.

4.15.6 Synopsis of the Play

A ribald tangle of deceit among upper-class English households is revealed as Mirabell, a philanderer, cynically comforts Mrs. Fainall, his mistress. Mrs. Fainall is complaining that she completely detests her husband, and asks why Mirabell compelled her to marry him.

Observing that it is well to "have just so much disgust for your husband as may be sufficient to relish your lover," Mirabell reminds her: "If the familiarities of our loves had proved that consequence of which you were apprehensive, where could you have fixed a father's name with credit but on a husband?" As for his choice of Fainall, he says: "A better person ought not to have been sacrificed to the occasion; a worse had not answered the purpose."

Mrs. Fainall's passion for Mirabell, nevertheless, leads her to help him in his next scheme, even though it involves her own mother, Lady Wishfort, also infatuated

with Mirabell. Mirabell wants to marry the beautiful and wealthy Millamant, niece of Lady Wishfort, but her aunt—who is also her guardian—is jealously withholding her consent. With Mrs. Fainall's connivance, Mirabell arranges to have his servant, Waitwell, in the guise of an uncle called Sir Rowland, pay court to Lady Wishfort. Then, since he already has accomplished a secret marriage between Waitwell and Lady Wishfort's maid, Foible, he proposes to expose the scandal. His prize for silence is to be Millamant and her fortune.

The scheme perfected, Foible tells Lady Wishfort that Sir Rowland has seen her picture and is infatuated by her loveliness. A meeting is arranged, but the plot is overheard by a woman named Marwood, another of Mirabell's conquests and herself no mean schemer. Desiring Mirabell for herself, she promptly influences Lady Wishfort to agree that Millamant shall be married to Sir Wilfull, a rich and amiable dunce. Then Marwood, to make sure of success, enlists the help of Fainall who is infatuated with her and jealous of Mirabell. Fainall is a willing tool, complaining: "My wife is an errant wife, and I am a cuckold....'Sdeath! To be out-witted, out-jilted, out-matrimoney'd!... 'Tis scurvy wedlock!"

Deceived by her caresses and angered by her reminder that Mirabell, his foe, may otherwise get Millamant's fortune, Fainall agrees to Marwood's plan: she will write a letter to be delivered to Lady Wishfort when Waitwell, as Sir Rowland, is with her. The letter will expose the fraud and Mirabell, she says, will be ruined. Marwood in the while, neglects to tell Fainall of her scheme to save Mirabell for herself.

Lady Wishfort is all gaga as she awaits the bogus Sir Rowland. She is informed by Foible that candles are ready, that the footmen are lined up in the hall in their best liveries, and that the coachman and postilion, well perfumed, are on hand for a good showing. Assured by Foible that she looks "most killing well," Lady Wishfort ponders on how best to appear before her beaux.

Sir Rowland arrives. He and Lady Wishfort get along famously at once, and Sir Rowland begs for an early marriage, declaring that his nephew, Mirabell, will poison him for his money if he learns of the romance. The jealous Lady Wishfort promptly agrees, suggesting that Sir Rowland starve Mirabell "gradually, inch by inch." Then Mrs. Marwood's letter, denouncing Sir Rowland as Waitwell, arrives, but Sir Rowland deftly declares the letter to be the work of his nephew, and he hies himself off "to fight him a duel."

Lady Wishfort learns of the deception that is being practiced, and turns on Foible: "Out of my house! To marry me to a serving-man! To make me the laughing-stock of the whole town! I'll have you locked up in Bridewell Jail, that's what I'll do!"

The frightened Foible confesses that it is Mirabell who has conceived the whole plot, and Lady Wishfort is planning a dire revenge when more trouble comes: Fainall, her son-in-law, demands that his wife turn over her whole fortune to him, else he and Mrs. Marwood will reveal to the world that Mrs. Fainall was Mirabell's mistress before her marriage and that she still is. Lady Wishfort is dazedly reflecting upon this new humiliation when Mirabell comes to her with another plan.

"If," he says, "a deep sense of the many injuries I have offered to so good a lady, with a sincere remorse and a hearty contrition, can but obtain the least glance of compassion, I am too happy.... Consider, madam, in reality it was an innocent device, though I confess it had a face of guiltiness. It was at most an artifice which love contrived—and errors which love produces have ever been accounted pardonable."

The susceptible Lady Wishfort offers to forgive Mirabell if he will renounce his idea of marrying Mrs. Millamant. Mirabell offers a compromise: if she will permit her niece to marry him, he will contrive to save Mrs. Fainall's reputation and fortune. If he can do this, Lady Wishfort agrees, she will forgive anything and consent to anything. Mirabell then tells her: "Well, then, as regards your daughter's reputation, she has nothing to fear from Fainall. For his own reputation is at stake. He and Mrs. Marwood—we have proof of it—have been and still are lovers.... And as regards your daughter's fortune, she need have no fear on that score, either: acting upon my advice, and relying upon my honesty, she has made me the trustee of her entire estate.

In a closing observation to the audience, he adds:

"From hence let those be warned, who mean to wed,
Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed;
For each deceiver to his cost may find,
That marriage frauds too oft are paid in kind."

4.15.7 The Major Characters in the Play

Mirabell: A young man-about-town, in love with Millamant.

Millamant: A young, very charming lady, in love with, and loved by, Mirabell. She is the ward of Lady Wishfort because she is the niece of Lady Wishfort's long-dead husband. She is a first cousin of Mrs. Fainall.

Fainall: A man-about-town. He and Mirabell know each other well. Fainall married his wife for her money.

Mrs. Fainall: Wife of Fainall and daughter of Lady Wishfort. She is Millamant's cousin and was Mirabell's mistress, presumably after her first husband died.

Mrs. Marwood: Fainall's mistress. It does appear, however, that she was, and perhaps still is, in love with Mirabell. This love is not returned.

Young Witwoud: A fop. He courts Millamant, but not seriously; she is merely the fashionable belle of the moment.

Petulant: A young fop, a friend of Witwoud's. His name is indicative of his character.

Lady Wishfort: A vain woman, the mother of Mrs. Fainall and the guardian of Millamant. She is herself in love with Mirabell.

Sir Wilfull Witwoud: The elder brother of Young Witwoud. He is Lady Wishfort's nephew, a distant, non-blood relative of Millamant's, and Lady Wishfort's choice as a suitor for Millamant's hand.

Waitwell: Mirabell's valet. At the beginning of the play, he has just been married to Foible, Lady Wishfort's maid.

Foible Lady Wishfort's maid, married to Waitwell.

The following list describes the characters by their type, since members of the same type often are either allies or opponents in the plot.

- **Rakes:** Fainall (the antagonist, now married to Mirabell's ex-mistress, though Fainall doesn't know it); Mirabell (the co-protagonist [with Millamant], now scheming with his ex-mistress to wed Millamant). Though their manners usually conceal it, they are both dangerous men, and like all competent non-servant males, armed with rapiers with which they can "demand satisfaction" for insults, real or imagined.
- **Would-be Rakes and Wits:** Witwoud and Petulant are nearly rendered asexual by drink and affectation, they live for wit—neither of the rakes

can really be insulted by them though Petulant comes close). Their faulty manners give them away as not being real contenders for the role of "rake," but they do set themselves up to be "wits." As Witwoud's name suggests, he's a pretender to the title (compare "Sir Politic Would-Be" in *Volpone*, the play to which this play openly alludes in Act II). Petulant's name sums up his entire stock and trade, though he's a wonderfully useful "flat character" who satirizes any normal social convention he tries to imitate.

- **Country Aristocrat:** Sir Wilfull Witwoud (an elderly outsider), who talks about people's pasts and money and other things "one doesn't mention" while remaining both astoundingly shy around Millamant and yet courageous in a crisis—a bit of "old England" from the provinces among these "new men" of the Town. His one failing, apart from his country manners, is a complete lack of literary, musical, or artistic learning. In short, he is no "courtier," but he has deep roots in the *comedia del arte*tradition with origins in Greek and Roman type-character comedy as a fusion of the "*miles gloriousis*" (braggart warrior) and "*senex*" ("out-of-it" old man).
- **Established (older & more powerful) City Woman:** Lady Wishfort is an old rich woman who controls the wealth of her young, rich, widowed daughter-in-law, Millamant. Before the play's action commences, she had discovered that Mirabell had only been pretending to love her in order to get closer to Millamant—she hates him fiercely for it. Nevertheless, she secretly believes that with the right make-up, dress, and seductive behavior, she can still compete with the younger women for sexual attractiveness.
- **Younger (marriagable or seducible) City Women:** Millamant's name means "loved by thousands." Congreve has made her well-educated, unlike Mrs. Fainall, but also so proud of her wit she nearly cannot accept any man's love lest he diminish her attractiveness. Mrs. Marwood is Fainall's mistress, but also a double agent torn between loyalty to Fainall and her secret love for Mirabell, the sadest creature in the play because she has no money of her own and must live on Fainall's ability

to fleece heiresses who are her friends. Mrs. Fainall, a widowed heiress who became Mirabelle's mistress before having to marry Fainall, is torn between her mother's power [Lady Wishfort], her past association with Mirabell, and her loveless marriage to Fainall. She tries to help Millamant escape a fate like her own but risks humiliating divorce if her scheming with Mirabell becomes public knowledge in court.

- **Servants:** Foible is Mrs. Wishfort's chief maid, but secretly an ally of Mirabell who offers her a chance to escape the tyrannically Lady Wishfort's household by marrying his servant, Waitwell, in return for helping Mirabell's scheme against Fainall and Wishfort. Peg, Mrs. Wishfort's underservant, subordinate to Foible, is an innocent foil to reveal Wishfort's vanity. Mincing, Millamant's maid, supports her mistress's vanity and helps her fend off suitors. Waitwell, Mirabell's servant and ally against Fainall and Wishfort, plays the part of "Sir Rowland," Mirabell's "uncle who hates him" in hopes that he will be rewarded by Mirabell with a farm and thereby escape being servant for the rest of his life. He is Mirabell's "Mosca" in the play's allusive relationship to Jonson's inheritance plot. Both Foible and Waitwell have deep roots in the *comedia del arte* tradition that arose from Greek and Roman type-character comedy as "the wily servant." Betty is a servant in the chocolate house, a good-hearted gal who keeps the boys happy, later a familiar type in the*film noir* tradition.

4.15.8 Act-wise Summaries

Act I

- Mirabell is not very happy to leave the company of Millamant.
- If Millamant marries against the will of her aunt she will lose half her fortune.
- Lady Wishfort plans to get Millamant married with Mirabell's uncle to avenge Mirabell's pretentious love affair with her.

Act 2

- Mrs. Marwood and Mrs. Fainall are trying to show false hatred for Mirabell.

- The embittered relationship between Mr and Mrs. Fainall is revealed.
- A strange situation advances as we see Mrs. Marwood coming to know about the intimate conversation between Foible and Mirabell.

Act 3

- Mrs. Marwood tells Lady Wishfort about the intimate conversation between Foible and Mirabell.
- Millamant expresses her anguish over Witwoud and Petulant because she doesn't like their company.
- Marwood talks about some strategy with her lover Mrs Fainall in order to acquire half of the fortune of Millamant.

Act 4

- Lady Wishfort looks well prepared to receive her so called admirer and suitor Sir Rowland (Dramatic irony when the reader knows the actual identity of Sir Rowland).
- Conversation between Mirabell and Millamant deals with conditions in marriage.
- Mr. Fainall threatens to divorce his wife Mrs. Fainall on the basis of infedility.
- Mr. Fainall puts condition in his relation with Lady Wishfort that her entire fortune will go to Mr. Fainall.

Act 5

- Last act of the play opening with an unpleasant scene–Lady Wishfort is aware of the identity of Sir Rowland, thanks to Mrs Marwood.
- Foible informs Mrs Fainall about the love affair of Mrs Marwood and Mr Fainall.
- Mr Fainall informs Lady Wishfort that he is thinking of a divorce from his wife.
- Mirabell emerges as the real hero–protects Lady Wishfort, saves the property of Millamant and foils the evil attempt of Mr Fainall and Mrs Marwood.
- Lady Wishfort forgives and allows the marriage of Mirabell and Millamant.

4.15.9 Discussion and Analysis of Significant Sections

➢ The Dedication

Congreve dedicates his play, *The Way of the World*, to Ralph, Earl of Montague, whose company and conversation have made it possible for Congreve to write this comedy. The dedication also constitutes a statement of purpose. Congreve writes that he is aware that the world may charge him with vanity for dedicating his play to the Earl. However, he is certain that the world cannot think "meanly" of a play that is meant for the earl's perusal. Conversely, if the play is attributed "too much sufficiency," it would be an extravagant claim, and merit the test of the earl's judgment. Congreve humbly states that the earl's favourable reception of the play will more than compensate for the play's deficiencies, and he praises the earl lavishly for his patronage.

Congreve does not expect the play to succeed on the stage, since he is aware that he is not catering to the current tastes of Restoration society. Congreve states his dissatisfaction with the kind of comedies being written. He points out that the characters meant to be ridiculed in these comedies are largely "gross fools" who can only disturb an audience, rather than stimulate their reflective judgment. Congreve asserts that instead of moving the audience to laughter, comic characters should excite compassion.

Congreve's dissatisfaction with the contemporary comic mode has led him to design comic characters who will do more than merely appear ridiculous. The "affected wit" of his characters shall be exposed and held up for the audience's ridicule. Congreve defines this as "a wit, which at the same time that it is affected, is also false." Congreve is aware of the difficulty involved in the creation of such complex characters. He is also aware that his play may not succeed on stage because many people come to the theatre prepared to criticize a play without understanding its purpose. Congreve then apologizes for his digression and entrusts his play to the earl's protection, claiming that only his patronage and the approval of like-minded people will provide recognition to writers of merit.

Congreve holds Terence, an ancient Roman author of comedies, as his model. He states that Terence benefited from the encouragement of Scipio and

Lelius. Congreve laments that the majority of Terence's audience was incapable of appreciating the purity of his style, his delicacy of plot construction, and the aptness of his characters. Congreve then sketches a brief history of classical comedy in which he mentions Terence's models and traces the source of his inspiration back to Aristotle. Congreve emphasizes the importance of patronage and claims that contact with such superior people is the only means of attaining perfection in dialogue.

Congreve proceeds to attribute all that is best in his style to the society of Ralph, Earl of Montague. He further praises the earl by stating that if this play suffers from any deficiency, it is his (Congreve's) fault, since he could not rise to the stature of Terence even though the earl was his patron. Congreve then mentions that although poetry is "the eldest sister of all arts and parent of most," the earl has never before given a poet his patronage. Poetry addresses itself to the good and great. This relationship is reciprocal: it is the privilege of poetry to address them, and it is their right alone to grant it patronage.

Many writers dedicate their works to the good and the great. But Congreve pleads that his address may be exempt from all the trappings of a typical dedication. He states that he is dedicating his play to the earl because he considers him to be the most deserving and is aware of his "extreme worthiness and humanity."

➢ Prologue

In the Prologue, or the introduction to the play, Congreve categorizes poets as those who fare the worst among Nature's fools, for Fortune first grants them fame and then "forsakes" them. Congreve laments this unfair treatment meted out to the poets, who are Fortune's own offspring. Poets have to risk the fame earned from their previous work when they write a new work. If his new endeavour fails, the poet must lose his seat in Parnassus. (Parnassus was a mountain near Delphi in Greece, sacred to Apollo and the Muses. Apollo was the sun-god and patron of the arts, while the Muses were the nine goddesses of the arts. Parnassus was regarded as the seat of learning, poetry and the arts.)

Congreve states that although he has worked hard to write this play, if the audience does not like it, they should not spare him for his trouble but damn him all the more. He tells the audience not to pity him for his stupidity. He promises that he will blame the audience if they heckle any scene. He proceeds to state that

his play has "some plot," "some new thought," "some humor"—but "no farce." This is regarded as a fault by some. He comments wryly that the audience should not expect satire since they have nothing for which to be reproached. Nobody can dare to correct them. His sole aim has been to "please" and not to "instruct," since this might offend the audience. He takes the role of a passive poet who has left everything to the judgment of the audience. He bids the audience to "save or damn" him according to their own discretion.

➢ Exposition

The title establishes the theme of the play straightaway and Congreve makes it clear that his play is concerned with the problem of social living. Act 1 gives us the exposition. It introduces practically all the male characters, informs us with others and supplies us with necessary background information. The opening scene between Fainall and Mirabellis echoed and paralleled by a similar duel of words between Mrs Fainall and Mrs Marwood at the beginning of Act II. With the progress of the play we get to know the love of Mirabell for Millamant. We then hear the practical obstacle to their marriage. Half of Mirabell's fortune is controlled by her aunt, Lady Wishfort whose prior consent to marriage is necessary if the money is to be claimed. This constitutes the main problem of the play and against this background the story begins.

➢ Proviso Scene

In the Proviso Scene of the play *The Way of the World*, we find Mirabell and Millament meeting together to arrange an agreement for their marriage. The scene is a pure comedy with brilliant display of wit by both of them, but, above all, provides instructions which have serious dimensions in the context of the society. Here, Congreve seems to come to realise the importance for providing an ideal pair of man and woman, ideal in the sense that the pair could be taken for models in the life-style of the period.

However, the Proviso Scene is one of the most remarkable aspects of Congreve's *The Way of the World* and this scene has been widely and simultaneously admired by the critics and the readers. In fact, it serves as an excellent medium through which Congreve conveys his message to his readers.

The most noteworthy aspect of the Proviso Scene is Millamant's witty style in which she puts her condition before her lover Mirabell. According to her first

condition, she wants equal amount of love and affection on the part of her would husband throughout her life. Behind her above mentioned condition we notice the pitiable condition of a wife after marriage. Just before marriage when men and women are lovers they declare full support and love for each other but things take a turn when they marry each other. So Millamant appears anxious because of this reason and that is why she puts this condition. Again, Millamant says that she hates those lovers who do not take proper care of their beloved. She further wants that her husband must be a loyal and good natured man.

She says to Mirabell that she wants her liberty after her marriage; she informs Mirabell that she can't forgo her independence, she says, "My dear liberty, shall I leave thee? My faithful solitude, my darling contemplation, must I bid you adiue?... My morning, thoughts, agreeable wakings, indolent slumbers, all ye douceurs,... Adieu—I can't do it, 'tis more than impossible." She also adds that "I will lie a bed in a morning as long as I please"

Millamant on her part makes it clear that a lover's (Mirabell's) appeals and entreaties should not stop with the marriage ceremony. Therefore, she would like to be 'solicited' even after marriage. She next puts that "My dear liberty" should be preserved:

"I'll lye abed in a morning as long as I please…" she wants that she will have liberty "to say and receive visits to and from who I please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or Wry faces on your part ; and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste.....come to dinner who I please, find in my dressing room who I'm out of humour, without giving reason. To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. And lastly whenever I am, you shall always knock at the door before you come in."

Millament then informs that she would not like to be addressed by such names as "wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweet-heart; and the rest of that nauseous can, in which men and their wives are so fulsomely familiar." Moreover, they will continue to present a decorous appearance in public, and she will have free communication with others. In other words, after marriage they maintain certain distance and reserve between them.

Mirabell listens to all the conditions of Millamant with patience. Although he was not very happy with some of the conditions, he did not raise any objection.

Now he informs Millamant about some of his own conditions. When we go through his conditions we observe that it is a witty satire on the affectations of women in that society. Mirabell wants that after their marriage Millamant should follow some guidelines. Millamant should not be in company of any woman who has a notorious background or who indulges in scandalous activities. He says that "you admit no sworn confidant or intimate of your own sex; no she friend to screen her affairs under your countenance, and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy. No decoy-duck to wheedle you a FOP-SCRAMBLING to the play in a mask."

The next condition is that she should not use the artificial things to cover her real appearance. If says that "I prohibit all masks for the night, made of oiled skins and I know not what—hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water, and the marrow of a roasted cat."

Mirabell's conditions are quite different: they are frankly sexual in content, directed to his not being cuckolded or to her bedroom manners. "Just as Millament's are developed femininely" as Norman N. Holland points out, "Mirabell's are developed in a typically masculine way." Each of Mirabell's provisos begin with its item: first, the general principle, "that your Acquaintance be general", then specific instructions, "no she-friend to screen her affairs", no fop to take her to the theatre secretly, and an illustration of the forbidden behaviour, "to wheedle you a fop-scrambling to the play in a mask". Nevertheless, Mirabell denounces the use of tight dresses during pregnancy by women, and he forbids the use of alcoholic drinks. The conditions are stated by both parties in a spirit of fun and gaiety, but the fact remained that both are striving to arrive at some kind of mutual understanding.

Through this scene appears very funny but it is a serious comment on the degradation of conjugal relations. The conditions as set down by the two lovers, confirm the sincerity of their motives and their wish to live a married life which was different from others. Both of them accept each other's conditions. It is a guideline or memorandum of understanding between a husband and a wife, which would enable them to spend a happy married life. After following these guidelines there will have no possibility of misunderstanding. Thus Congreve throws light on the vital aspects of married life. This is a parody on the social expectations of men and women upon becoming husband and wife. The requirements make the union far from romantic. Instead, the parties involved are expected to comply

with formalities that continuously remind them that their union is one based on networking and convenience, rather than love.

Another important significance is that they both discover each other's penchants with this behavior pact, and wonder about each other. Again, this is satirical. Millamant says that she wants to be free, and allowed basically to do as she pleases. Mirabell takes this sourly and says that his future bride better not be scandalous nor a "fashion victim". In turn, Millamant takes that personal and cannot believe he would think her to be that way. Even funnier is the fact that all this weird transaction has to be rushed as another character, Fainall, enters the scene.

Yet, it is possible that one of the most important parts of the bargaining scene is the underlying shallowness of the pact. Mirabell says that, upon marriage, he would be exalted to the rank of husband. Contrastingly, Millamant says that she will be demoted to the rank of wife. This is a clear indicator that Millamant is not marriage material, and that Mirabell may not be the dream husband that we assume he wants to be. Hence, the significance here is that Mirabell and Millamant are rushing through the very complex process of pre-nuptial planning with very little evidence of what they really want out of their marriage.

➢ Ending

We see in the fifth and the final act the climax of the drama. Lady Wishfort turns Foible out of the house. Fainall and Mrs Marwood are now totally in ascendant and they bear down upon Lady Wishfort's demanding, with threat and blackmail, the fortunes of both Millamant and Mrs Fainall. Mirabell has not however been idle, and the first hint of recovery appears in the person of Sir Willfull. He and Millamant appear before Lady Wishfort, and consent to her wish that they should marry. Millamant's share of money is thus retrieved. The play ends with these lines:

From hence let those be warn'd, who mean to wed;
Lest mutual Falsehood stain the Bridal Bed:
For each Deceiver to his cost may find,
That Marriage Frauds too oft are paid in kind.

This conclusion echoes the lines from Horace which Congreve quoted on the title page of the play–"Audire est Operae pretium… Metuat doti deprensa,"

through which Congreve expects his audience to remember that disasters wait on adulterers and that they are hampered on all sides.

➢ Epilogue

The Epilogue is spoken by Mrs Bracegirdle, an actress of great repute of that day. Congreve has created the role of Millamant for her. She speaks with the spectators expressing her concern about how the essential insufficiency of critics who criticise plays without knowledge, and how the present audience will criticise this play without showing any mercy.

4.15.10 Central Theme(s) and Key Issues in the Play

✓ Themes

- **Social Convention**

Congreve's "comedy of manners" takes the fashionable or conventional social behaviour of the time as the principal subject of satire. Conflicts that arise between and among characters are prompted by affected and artificial social mores, especially with respect to relationships between the sexes. Social pretences and plot complications abound in *The Way of the World*. Women are compelled to act coyly and to dissemble in courtship, couples deceive one another in marriage, friends are double-dealing, and conquests have more to do with dowries and convenience than love. All moral principle is risked for the sake of reputation and money. However, what makes the action comic is the subterfuge. What one says is hardly ever what one really thinks or means. To judge by appearances, for example, no one could be happier in his marriage than Fainall, who in reality disdains his wife and is carrying on an adulterous affair with his wife's close friend. Congreve intimates that, in fashionable society at the turn of the eighteenth century, it is crucial to preserve the outer trappings of beauty, wit, and sophistication no matter how egregious one's actions and words might prove.

- **Dowry, Marriage, and Adultery**

In the male-dominated, patriarchal society of Congreve's time, a woman was little more than property in a marriage transaction. Her dowry (money, property, and estate) was relinquished to her husband at marriage and she became, by law, his chattel. In the upper classes, women had little voice in their own fate, and marriages were usually arranged according to social status, size of fortune, and family name. In the play, Millamant's dowry is at the centre of the struggle that pits Mirabell,

her true lover, against Fainall and Mrs. Marwood, the two adulterers plotting to gain control of Millamant's fortune as well as Fainall's wife's. Cunningly, Mrs. Fainall has had a large part of her estate signed over in trust before her marriage to prevent her husband from acquiring it.

While marriages are important economic contracts, they are also convenient vehicles for protecting social reputations. Mrs. Fainall has made such a marriage, which is socially acceptable and even expected, as long as the pretense of civility is maintained. However, getting caught in an adulterous relationship puts both reputation and fortune at risk. Hence when the relationship between Fainall and Mrs. Marwood is discovered, the two become social outcasts. Fainall has staked his reputation on a plot to disinherit his wife. As punishment, he will have to bear the humiliating exposure, continuing to live with his wife and depend on her for his livelihood. Mrs. Marwood's reputation is ruined, her future hopes destroyed. Congreve's intent is to reflect the way of the world in all its manifest greed. The lesson is that those who cheat get their just desserts in the end.

- **Marriage**

After Charles II revived theatre in 1660, a new kind of comedy, the comedy of manners exploded onto the English drama scene and remained the preferred style of theatre for the rest of the century. The aim of these plays was to mock society, or rather to hold it up for scrutiny by those very people whose social world was being characterized on stage. *The Way of the World* reflects Congreve's personal view of Restoration society and city life, full of its artificiality, rigidity, and formality. As is typical of Restoration Theatre, this play's main themes are centred on that of marriage and the game of love. However, unlike the relationships depicted in earlier works, the couple at the heart of the play-Mirabell and Millamant, have the potential to become a true partnership even by modern standards. The love and trust shared between two intelligent and independent characters, set against the tableau of falsehoods, greed, and jealousy that was exemplified by the social world around them, was revolutionary for Restoration comedy. By comparing and contrasting Mirabell and Millamant with the characters and relationships surrounding them, Congreve reveals his view of the true meaning of marriage and how it should be seen by Restoration society.

The strength of character of our two protagonists is crucial to their status as an almost ideal couple. The stark contrasts set up between them and the secondary characters, especially the contrast between Fainall and Mirabell, allow Mirabell

and Millamant's individual characters and the ensuing relationship to hold that much more merit in the eyes of the audience. At first glance, Fainall and Mirabell appear to be similar, but even as their first conversation progresses at the beginning of Act I, their distinct personalities emerge. Both are witty and rakish. It is only by the gradual revelation of their inner natures that one is able to distinguish between our hero and the villain. Fainall's cynicism is contrasted with Mirabell's role as commentator on the society of which he is also a part. If Mirabell is to be seen as our representative as the ideal Restoration gentleman, Fainall is that of the antagonist and compilation of all that is wrong with the social scene at present. As the action progresses, he reveals himself to be only a manipulator and a fortune hunter. Throughout the play, his character is unredeemed by a single act of humanity. His cynicism is revealed in his very first remark to Mirabell, "I'd no more play with a man that slighted his ill fortune than I'd make love to a woman who undervalued the loss of her reputation". His attitude towards marriage is equally negative. He recommends marriage as a remedy for love, "be half as well acquainted with her charms as you are with her defects and my life on that, you are your own man again". Fainall is a backstabbing, money-grubbing man who admits to having married his wife for her fortune, and is eager to get his hands on funds intended for other characters within the play. Love doesn't exist for him, except for that of himself and money.

Fainall provides a perfect contrast for the chief male protagonist. At first glance, Mirabell appears to be the typical Restoration beau, envied by the other characters for his wit and attractiveness. But Mirabell is far from perfect, and is much more real and human than that description would imply. He has had his share of debauchery and indulgence, as seen with his affair with Mrs. Fainall. He is also a manipulator, controlling events to his advantage, often resorting to being devious or amoral. In spite of his weaknesses, Mirabell follows a gentleman's code of honor, never losing control of his emotions. He also balances his desires with consideration for the needs of others. When the play opens, the audience learns that Mirabell has already failed in his first attempt to obtain Millamant. His "sham addresses" to Lady Wishfort have earned him the matron's hatred. His vivid portrait of his courtship of Lady Wishfort seems to go against the very values that he apparently cherishes. He declares that he "proceeded to the very last act of flattery with her" and that "an old woman" cannot be "flattered further, unless a man should endeavor

downright personally to debauch her; and that my virtue forbade me". His wooing of Lady Wishfort clearly shows the shady side of Mirabell. Although Mirabell is not a saint, he shows himself to be a completely decent fellow at the end of the play, when he gives Mrs. Fainall back her money. He is aware of his own failings and has the ability to laugh at himself, which makes a more human and humane character.

Mirabell definitely loves Millamant, but his love for her is not that of the sentimental kind portrayed in many Restoration comedies. Instead of praising Millamant's virtues, he engages in an analysis of her faults. He tells Fainall that once, when he was angry with Millamant, he "took her to pieces, sifted and separated her failings; I studied 'em, and got 'em by rote. The catalogue was so large that I was not without hope one day or other to hate her heartily". He, therefore, is realistic about his true love, but loves her in spite of her faults, that her flaws make her even more appealing in the end. Mirabell claims, "her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her". At times, Millamant's weaknesses test his patience, and he comes close to losing his control; but Mirabell always reigns himself in, even when Millamant's wit outshines his own. It can be safely said that Mirabell's feelings for Millamant are more motivated by true love than by considerations of money, unlike any of the other relationships within the context of the play.

Mirabell's love interest, the formidable Millamant is the ideal comic heroine, ideal for both her time period and today. She has beauty, wit, intelligence, and vivaciousness, and is a perfect match for Mirabell. At first glance she appears to be a very coquettish woman, who plays the role of the belle effortlessly. But beneath the mask of the coquette, Millamant possesses a deep understanding of the seriousness of life and a depth of character that distinguishes her from her contemporaries both within this play and others. She dislikes superficiality and realizes that she needs both emotional and physical companionship in marriage; however, at the same time, she values her freedom and independence. It is evident that Millamant enjoys the power she has over Mirabell. She knows he loves her, she asks him what he would give that he "could help loving" her. During the battle of wits in the park, she laughs at his moralized tone and asserts her independence, declaring that she will not "endure to be reprimanded nor instructed; 'tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told one's faults-I can't bear it". It's of no wonder that Mirabell is so taken with her. An intelligent woman, Millamant

insists on choosing her own marriage partner instead of simply marrying whoever is chosen by her aunt, Lady Wishfort. Since she is capable of whole-hearted love, she wants to find the perfect match who can love her for who she is and allow her to retain her individualism after marriage. She believes Mirabell is such a man.

Both Millamant and Mirabell take marriage very seriously, rejecting the sentimental kind of union normally depicted in Restoration comedy. The infamous "proviso" scene characterizes their relationship. They love each other very dearly; however, fortunately, the lovers temper their romance with realism and rise above the typical sentimentality of plays of this time period. Mirabell does not propose to Millamant before discussing the conditions under which they will be able to live together. Millamant insists that she will not be "called names . . . as wife, spouse, my dear, jewel, love". She also requests that they shall not be "familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks". After Millamant has stated her conditions, Mirabell lays down some of his own. They decide in a business-like manner to retain their independence after marriage. But this entire scene is conducted in a witty, flirtatious tone, and Mirabell rounds it off by telling Millamant that "when you are dwindled into a wife, I may not be beyond measure enlarged into a husband" (p.367), relaying that he hopes he can grow to be a husband that matches the wife she will be to him. The two characters are presented as equals, and see themselves as such. They both enjoy the power they have over the other, particularly Millamant, and live for the flirtatious battle-of-the-wits banter that characterizes their conversation. Mirabell and Millamant seem to be an ideal match for each other.

In of itself the relationship between Millamant and Mirabell seems to be idyllic. They love each other, they respect each other, and they treat each other as equals. When placed in the context of the play, their relationship represents more than just a happy couple; it speaks to the progress of the view of marriage from being merely a contract, a way of gaining money or of saving one's honor, to a more modern conception. Now, in present times, marriage is seen as an affirmation of the mutual love and respect between two people. This is what the leading couple in *The Way of the World* seems to be aiming at, and what Congreve would claim should be a model for Restoration society. Though Mirabell and Millamant's relationship is not completely devoid of negative influence, for Millamant's six thousand pound fortune is repeatedly an issue, they are still honourable in contrast to the relationships surrounding them. Marriage is depicted as entirely centered

around greed for money, and protection of honor. Debauchery, greed, and deceit permeate this social world and all its interactions. It is exactly this "way of the world" that Congreve believes should be improved.

Congreve offers a critique of this whittled down and desensitized view of marriage by using the secondary characters to flesh out the negative aspects of society. He contrasts the situation those characters find themselves in at the conclusion of the play with that of Mirabell and Millamant. All of the characters who married with false intentions, or who stood in the way of the marriage of the two protagonists ended up unhappy or dissatisfied upon the closing of the play. In particular, the key antagonist of the play, Mr Fainall characterizes this obsession with money and as previously mentioned, he provides great contrast to Mirabell. Furthermore, all of his relationships are full of falsehood and deceit. He admits to never having loved his wife "wherefore did I marry but to make a lawful prize of a rich widow's wealth", and he has already squandered the wealth of his mistress, Mrs. Marwood. His jealousy and greed drive him to ruthlessly blackmail Mrs. Wishfort who only wants to protect the reputation of her daughter. However, his debauchery comes full circle in the end, when he finds his reputation preceded him in marrying his wife. Not only did he lose all moral standing with his social world, but lost all chances at acquiring any money from any of the women in his life and is finally left to fend for himself. The parasite finally got his due. Similarly all those who married under false pretenses, such as Mrs. Fainall, or who was an obstacle to the model couple, such as Mrs. Marwood, were punished in the end. Mrs. Fainall, even though she recovered her fortune from Mirabell, is left with an ambiguous and not entirely joyful future. She has officially lost the one love of her life. It is also unknown whether she will try to fix her disintegrating marriage or even if she wants to. This punishment is due to her marrying Fainall not because she loved him, but because she needed to cover up her affair with Mirabell, in case she was with child. Her receiving the money in the end is justified by her having benevolently supported Mirabell in his quest to win Millamant, even though she still loves him. Mrs. Marwood, on the other hand, never redeems herself, and has backstabbed all of her friends, and was a leading figure in the counter-plot to prevent the marriage of Mirabell and Millamant. She is rewarded for her efforts at the end of the play, when Foible and Mincing reveal her adulterous affair with Fainall. She loses her sole possession of value, her flawless reputation.

In contrast to their compatriots, Mirabell and Millimant, exemplifying the loving, realistic, and modern couple, are allowed happiness and each other. By allowing them to end up together, Congreve is claiming that this type of union should be favored and sought after by members of Restoration society. Rather than being boiled down to the mere desire for wealth, or looked at as a cover for some dishonorable affair, marriage should require the mutual love, respect, and appreciation that exist between Mirabell and Millamant. In addition, he seems to be claiming that this union can only take place between those who are equally matched in wit and appearance, and who are human in that they each have flaws of their own. Both lovers are just such characters, and each accept and love the other, complete with their faults. Mirabell elucidates Congreve's claim about marriage in the final four lines of the play,

> "From hence let those be warned who mean to wed, Lest mutual falsehood stain the bridal bed; For each deceiver to his cost may find That marriage-fraud too oft are paid in kind…"

- **Decorum and Wit**

Congreve invents several characters who, as fops, dandies, and fools, provide fitting foils to the romantic hero and heroine. He pits these purported "wits" against Mirabell and Millamant to comment on the social decline of manners. Since the play is a comedy, audiences are to take it both as serious social satire and also as an amusing romp. No one, of course, escapes Congreve's satirical pen entirely. All people are sometimes fools, Congreve suggests, or sometimes too earnest or too busy inventing counterfeit personas in order to hide their own moral turpitude. Petulant and Witwoud make good fools for they epitomize the shallowness and silliness of fashionable society, but they both also are capable of voicing through their wit the real motivations behind people's actions. They mistake fashionable behaviour for decorum and good manners, but they are basically harmless. The comic hero, Mirabell, unscrupulously uses blackmail and trickery to promote his own interests, yet he also represents what is wise and decent in society, and he protects and thoughtfully provides for his friends. Millament, while she acts capriciously and spends time with fops, is inherently thoughtful and able to distinguish between fashion and principles. Lady Wishfort is perhaps the most sympathetically comic character in that, for all her desperate attempts to preserve decorum and for all the power she wields as the wealthy matriarch of the family, she is at heart a lonely widow who will do anything for a husband.

4.15.11 *The Way of the World* and Restoration Drama

The Restoration, as a period, takes its name from the Restoration of the monarchy, with Charles II assuming the throne in 1660. The Restoration of the monarchy meant the end of the Puritan Parliament's rule, but it also meant the return of the theatre. Because of the theatre's long-standing connection with royalty and aristocracy and because of the Puritans' view of the theatre as licentious and blasphemous, theatrical performances were banned during parliament's rule. In 1662, the theatres re-opened, and play-going became an important part of the reaction against the Puritanism of the previous decades. Restoration theatre, for many cultural historians, epitomizes the era. While many plays from the Shakespearean era were reproduced, new plays commenting on the renewed monarchy and a new culture of performance, wealth, and more open sexuality flourished. In a variety of forms, the entire culture seemed to see itself as a kind of play, as commentators repeatedly emphasized the ways everyone seemed to be playing roles as they negotiated new mores and social conditions.

While the theatre of the Restoration era attempted to return to its earlier form, it innovated on the theatre of the first part of the 17th century in many ways. First, it became accessible and respectable, as the theatres themselves moved into better parts of London and started to attract a broader array of patrons. At the same time, playhouses opened up professionally for women, as they began to appear on stage in large numbers for the first number and several women, most famously, perhaps, Aphra Behn, became successful playwrights. The presence of women on the stage and in larger numbers in the audiences directly contributed to the intensive exploration of sexual themes in the theatre of the period. Actresses were often seen as little more than prostitutes, and many famous actresses were well-known consorts of the king and other nobles. Their performances on stage often played with their supposed sexual availability, while women in the audiences often similarly were seen or displayed themselves as performers as they traded witty conversation laced with double entendre with men about town. In many accounts, the flirtations in the audience mirrored or rivalled the performances on stage.

The Restoration comedy of manners reflected and commented on this culture of performance. These plays often featured rakes—men on the prowl for sexual

conquest—who elaborated complicated schemes for bedding as many women as possible. Over the course of the play, their attempts were often forwarded, rebuffed, and foiled by various women whose sexual knowledge and wit frequently equalled their male counterparts. These comedies usually featured incredibly complex plots and counterplots—emphasizing their characters' ability to manipulate others through their self-display, control of language, and psychological calculations as they attempted to win both sexual favours and wealth. Yet, even as the plays displayed the power of performance that their very audiences indulged in, they often critiqued that culture for its duplicity and depravity. With the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the return to power of parliament, a reaction against the excesses of the Restoration set in, with much of the focus on the theatre and the culture of performance and display and, in particular, its sexual licentiousness.

Appearing in 1700, Congreve's play represents a late version of the Restoration comedy of manners, one that consolidates many of the features of earlier plays even as it responds to increasing critique of the theatre (the play mentions one of the most famous critiques in Act 3. Implicitly describing the way of the world as one of cynical self-interest, the play follows the reformed rake Mirabell as he attempts to win the hand of Millamant, the woman he actually loves. Before the play begins, Mirabell, we later learn, has had an affair with Mrs. Fainall, whose husband married her only for her wealth and is having an affair with Mrs. Marwood; we only learn most of this in the second act. Millamant is the niece and ward of Lady Wishfort, who is Mrs. Fainall's mother, and stands to inherit a great deal of money, but only if Lady Wishfort approves of her suitor. Mirabell has offended Lady Wishfort, so he needs not only to win Millamant's hand but also to win over Lady Wishfort. As with most Restoration comedies, Mirabell creates a complicated scheme involving impersonation and artifice to get both wealth and love. He has his valet, Waitwell, pretend to be his uncle and woo Lady Wishfort. His plan is to then rescue Lady Wishfort from being seduced by a servant and thus gain her approval. While Millamant knows of the plot and does love Mirabell, she takes pleasure in teasing him about the uncertainty of their eventual union.

However, things go awry for Mirabell when Mrs. Marwood learns of the plot and of Mirabell's former affair with Mrs. Fainall. Mrs. Marwood informs Mr. Fainall, and they begin a plot against Mirabell. Millamant has accepted Mirabell's proposal, turning down Sir Witful Witwoud (Lady Wishfort's choice). Fainall uncovers the

plot to Lady Wishfort and attempts to blackmail her by threatening to reveal her daughter's (Mrs. Fainall's) adultery. He wants all of Millamant's fortune as well as complete control of Mrs. Fainall's potential inheritance. Millamant then decides she will marry Sir Witwoud in order to save her fortune, and Mirabell appears with two servants to prove Mr. Fainall's adultery with Mrs. Marwood. Fainall, however, is not cowed and continues to threaten Mrs. Fainall's reputation. Then, Mirabell plays his last card. Before she married Mr. Fainall, Mrs. Fainall, out of fear of Mr. Fainall's character, had made Mirabell the trustee of her fortune. Without control of that money, Mr. Fainall is left without any resources, and the play ends with Mirabell and Millamant engaged.

The Way of the World exemplifies many of the key features of the Restoration comedy of manners—complex, multi-faceted characters who combine urbanity and wit in treating love and wealth as a game they play through concealment, artifice, and plotting. Unlike some of the plays from the first decade of the Restoration, however, Congreve's play does not end up embracing the cynicism of some of its characters; instead, true love—while far from sentimentalized—wins out and leaves with wealth. His characters have their moral failings and they more than handle themselves in a world of false appearances, banter, and sexual double-dealings, but they are redeemed in the end.

4.15.12 Summing Up

So as we reach to the end of the play we learn quite much about William Congreve's *The Way of the World,* a play that exemplifies many of the key features of what became popular as the **Restoration Comedy of Manners**.

- Congreve's intent was not on writing the sentimental comedies that were later to become so popular on the eighteenth-century stage. His works stood unique as it showcased the subtle balance that he achieved between the cool disenchantment of the Restoration and the emotional warmth of the 18th century.
- The representations of the old form and new form of marital relations we see sexual power at first and then developing into material power.
- Congreve's "comedy of manners" takes the fashionable or conventional social behavior of the time as the principal subject of satire.

- While marriages are important economic contracts, they are also convenient vehicles for protecting social reputations.
- Congreve invents several characters who, as fops, dandies, and fools, provide fitting foils to the romantic hero and heroine.

4.15.13 Activity for the Learner

Make an extensive reading of the text and try to answer the following multiple-choice questions:

- Act I Scene I of the play The Way of the Word takes place in–
  1. St. James Park
  2. A Chocolate House
  3. A Room in Lady Wishfort's House
  4. In a tavern
- The dedicatory preface to the first edition of The Way of the World is a–
  1. Letter to Oliver Goldsmith
  2. Letter to Jacob Tonson
  3. Letter to the Earl of Montagu
  4. Letter to Dryden
- The Restoration form owes much to the brilliant dramas of the French writer–
  1. Jean Racine
  2. Moliere
  3. Oliver Goldsmith
  4. Sheridan

The Way of the World exemplifies many of the key features of the Restoration comedy of manners—complex, multi-faceted characters who combine urbanity and wit in treating love and wealth as a game they play through concealment, artifice, and plotting.

4.15.14 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. How would you apply the main features of 'Comedies of Manners to *The Way of the World*?

2. 'The Proviso scene between Millamant and Mirabell is a significant event which strengthens the plot of the play'. Illustrate.
3. Highlight the vices and follies of contemporary society that Congreve hints at through his play *The Way of the World*.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. Comment on the minor characters of the play, bringing out the significance of any two of them.
2. Give a comparison between Comedy of Manners and Comedy of Humours.
3. Show how verbal wit contributes to the overall humorous intent in *The Way of the World*.

Short answer Type questions:

1. Comment on the character of Lady Wishfort.
2. Comment on the Dowry, Marriage and Adultery as a theme in *The Way of the World*.
3. Bring out the significance of the Prologue of the play.

4.15.15 Suggested Reading

Dobree, Bonamy. *Restoration Comedy 1660–1720*. Franklin Classics, 2018.

Sengupta, Kajal (Ed.) *The Way of The* World. OUP India, 1997.

Chakrabarti, Shirshendu (Ed.). *The Way of The* World. Orient Blackswan, 2007.

Hill, Howard Erskine and Alexander Lindsay *William Congreve: The Critical Heritage. Eds. Howard Erskine Hill and Alexander Lindsay. Routledge, 1995.*

Unit-16 □ Nineteenth-Century British Drama: An Overview

Structure

4.16.1 Objectives

In this Unit you are going to learn:

- Introduction: Socio-political Background
- Decline of drama
- Poetry versus drama
- The Culture of Theatre in Nineteenth Century
- Theatre After 1843
- Conclusion: Rise of Realism

4.16.2 Introduction: The Socio-political Background

The nineteenth century is interestingly spread over two literary periods which are quite different in their aesthetic ideologies. The first half is the continuation of the Romantic movement which started in the last decade of the eighteenth century, and it occasioned a definite and holistic change in art and literature. The second half saw the beginnings of the Victorian period, which, despite the continuation of certain literary stylistics, showed a distinct breakaway from the Romantic standardisations and its approach to art. You must have noticed this confluence in 5CC-EG-01. Such

alteration in literature is occasioned by the change in public appreciation about art and its purposes, which in turn is caused by social, economic, and political changes, with the economic change playing the most decisive role. Thus, as you read through literary periods you must also be aware of these social aspects that though seem unrelated, play an important role in literary outputs, appreciation, and periodisation.

The nineteenth century begins with a sense of desperation in Europe, as the French Revolution, the single largest incident of the time, failed to meet its promised outcomes. The Jacobean tyranny and the tumultuous career of Napoleon had changed power configurations of Europe. However,following his fall in the Battle of Waterloo, the old political powers consolidated their control, and monarchy was restored. In fact, the milieu of democratic brotherhood and high ideals suffered as states became more powerful aided by the growth of the capitalist economy. The slave trade, colonial expansion, rapid mechanical progress, and industrialisation created a solid bedrock upon which the whole capitalist economy hinged and in turn aided the development of the modern nation-state. While the closing of the eighteenth century saw the emergence of radicalism in the writings of Thomas Paine, William Godwin, Jeremy Bentham, it is also true that in 1812 Daniel Isaac Eaton was tried for reprinting Paine's *Age of Reason*. The Luddite Riots of 1811 in which the workers opposed the introduction of machines in mills was severely repressed and the Frame-Breaking Bill was brought in 1812which made it a capital offense to destroy manufacturing machinery. The restrictions upon civil liberties which were employed during the war time continued after Waterloo, and came to be associated with sedition. The conservatives retained their control in politics till the 1830s.

The expansion of territory and colonisation was aided by the voyages. Captain James Cook's three voyages not only fuelled the public imagination, it also helped to charter the coast-lines and aided the commercial interactions. Colonies were set up and the competition with other European powers, particularly the French, became an important aspect of national policy making. As the expansion proceeded, the roads and connectivity within the country improved and the inland provinces were opened to new industrial ventures, resulting into three major changes: first, the destruction of the earlier rural economy and the crowding of the people to the cities, secondly, growth of population in the cities and industrial towns and thirdly, a greater rich-poor divide. Such a paradigmatic shift in the life of the common people usually occasions for the rise of polemical literature, a reason why you would notice a growing interest among the intellectuals to address the issueslike wealth distribution, national responsibility towards the workers, humanitarian policies

assuring equality and welfare mechanisms. Edgell Rickword, a renowned English poet, critic and editor, writes in his introduction to the fifth volume of *The Pelican Guide to English Literature*: "From the daily newspaper to the book-size quarterlies, every publication had its political bias, for or against the Government…." (20).

There is no reason to think that the condition was particular to England; the political situation in Europe was becoming more volatile as anti-Government protests and rebellions were gathering momentum, and the rising middle class was being embroiled in nationalism and the identity politics that led to a remapping of the territories. The latter is significantly observed in the unification of Germany and Italy, whereas the former can be traced in the rebellions of 1848 that began in Sicily and spread to France, Germany, Italy, and the Austrian Empire. The revolution met with various results, mostly was suppressed, and led to the re-establishment of absolute monarchy in Germany, Austria and Italy, but in France it led to the universal manhood suffrage. A terror of the socialist proposals was rampant among the ruling class, which led to the strengthening of the repressive apparatuses of the state and censorship of press. However, the nationalist agenda was gaining momentum, but the new nation states did not alter the basic economic structure of the capitalist governments. Thus, the Victorian period in England that coincides with this later development, was considered both as a period of optimism and moral downfall, depending on the political position of the writer. Though 1848 did not make much impact on England, apart from a Chartist demonstration and a republican agitation in Ireland, the growing political dilemma in Europe made a definite cultural impact on the British Isles.

4.16.3 The Decline of Drama

It is interesting to note that such a politically volatile period did not lead to the growth of drama, for it is quite certain that the nineteenth century, which saw the spectacular rise of novels and growth of poetry, was unrewarding as far as drama is concerned. Apart from verse plays, melodrama, farces and extravaganzas there were very few good or theatrically successful plays written. Both the Romantic and Victorian poets tried their hands in writing plays but none succeeded. Before we discuss their plays, a brief discussion of the reason of this debility can be investigated, though the opinions are varied, if not conjectural.

One of the most important reasons of the decline is attributed to the British laws on theatre production. Between 1660 (opening of theatre after the period

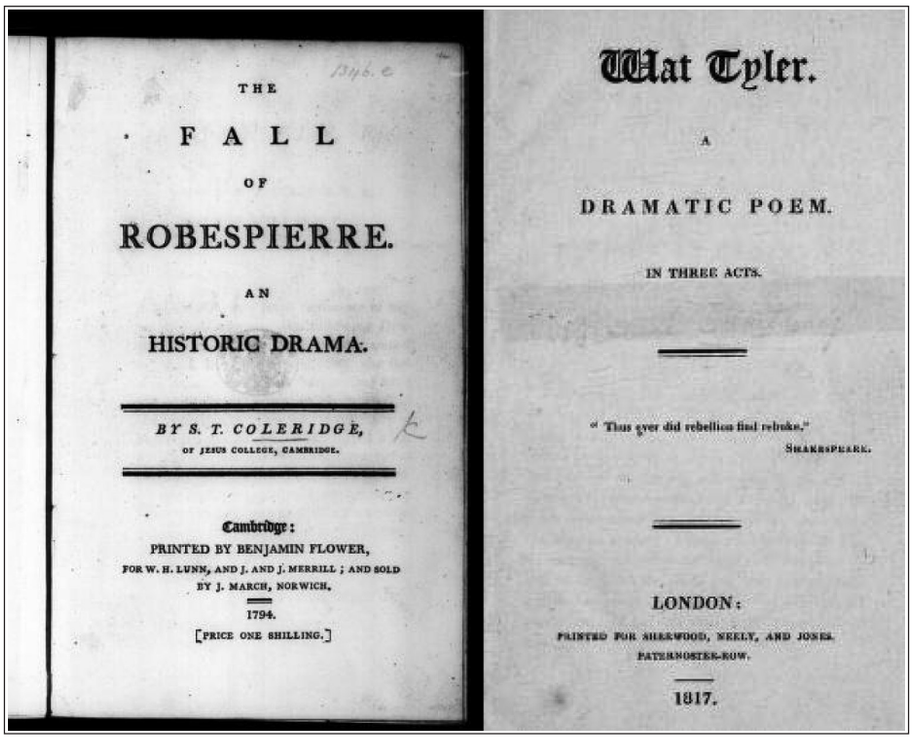
of Puritan rule) and 1843, only the patents theatre had the monopoly to produce 'legitimate' plays. The earliest Letters Patent or licenses were issued by King Charles II to Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant giving them exclusive right to form two acting companies. Killigrew established The King's Servants at Drury Lane, while Davenant established The Duke of York's Servants at Lincoln's Inn Fields, which finally settled at Covent Garden in 1732. These two theatres were further legitimised by the Act of the Parliament in1737. From 1768, few more theatres were authorised as 'theatre royals' and they were all outside London, and in 1788 a bill was passed permitting local magistrates to license theatres outside a 20-mile radius of London. In 1766 a third London theatre patent was issued to Samuel Foote for operation of the Haymarket Theatre during the summer months, and from 1807 the Earl of Dartmouth, as Lord Chamberlain, began licensing other theatres in London. The problem with the patent theatres were their size, which were so huge that natural acting was not possible and hence the companies had to resort to spectacles and thus increased the cost of production. The non-licensed or illegitimate theatres were there but they would mostly produce undefined 'public entertainments' and pantomime. Moreover, the playwrights were also a part of the production team, hence their financial gains were dependent on the success of the individual play. The huge production cost, lack of good managers and the star system, reduced the financial share of the author. On the contrary, novelists gotalump sum amount from the royalty of their books; thus, writing novels was preferred to writing plays purely on commercial grounds.

The lack of good authors and managers, the importance given to the 'star system' and spectacle, and the overarching importance given to the French companies and opera thus hindered the growth of the native dramatic productions. The star system led to the rise in salaries of both the chief and minor actors, which added to the capital expenditure of the companies. Ticket prices were raised which led to riots or lowered which resulted in bankruptcy and thus patents theatre became a costly enterprise. The Theatre Regulation Act of 1843 finally abolished the exclusive rights of the patent theatres to present legitimate drama and paved way for a more vibrant theatrical culture.You can read more about this Act on https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1843/aug/04/regulation-of-theatres

Towards the end of the nineteenth century the condition of drama improved which paved way for mature playwrights like John Galsworthy and Bernard Shaw.

4.16.4 Poetry against Drama

The several technical problems of patent theatre can be understood but the dearth of good writers is a problem that requires some more attention. Almost all the Romantic poets tried their hands in writing plays and few found success. Robert Southey and Coleridge collaborated in 1794 to explore revolutionary theme in *The Fall of Robespierre*, a three-act play that Coleridge had described as 'verse drama'. In 1813 Southey was appointed poet laureate but the unauthorised publication (1817) of *Wat Tyler,* an early verse drama reflected his youthful political opinions, enabled his enemies to remind the public of his youthful republicanism. Lord Byron accused him of hypocrisy. But, notice both the plays were marked as verse drama or dramatic poem, which show that for these writers, poetry was more important than the drama.



THE

FALL

OF

ROBESPIERRE.

AN

HISTORIC DRAMA.

BY S. T. COLERIDGE,

OF JESUS COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

Cambridge:

PRINTED BY BENJAMIN FLOWER,

FOR W. H. LUNN, AND J. AND J. MERRILL; AND SOLD BY J. MARCH, NORWICH.

1794.

[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

Wat Tyler.

A

DRAMATIC POEM.

IN THREE ACTS.

"Thus ever did rebellion find rebuke."

SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR SHERWOOD, NEELY, AND JONES.

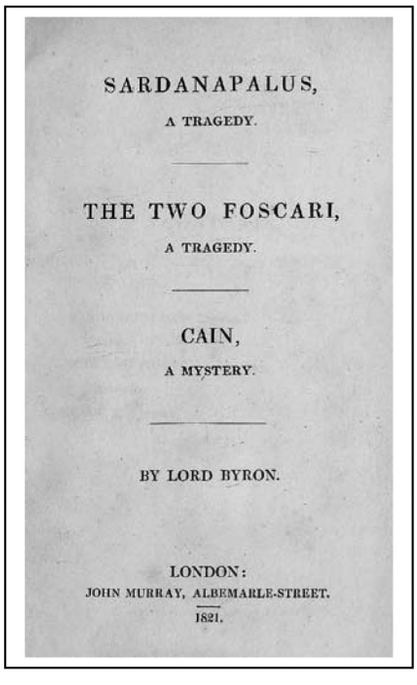
PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1817.

The tradition continues with Coleridge's *Remorse* that was one of the few plays by poets that met with considerable success. Written originally in 1797 and rejected by The Drury Lane Theatre, the poet re-wrote it in 1813. It is a tragedy in

five acts, written in blank verse, set in Granada at the time of the Spanish Inquisition and presents the slow corruption of the character of Osorio, a man who is gradually led by temptations into guilt and evil. The gothic and supernatural elements were used in the play. The first production of the play ran for twenty nights and it was performed till 1823, in more than forty occasions, and was favourably reviewed in both English and American newspapers. In his letter to a friend in 1813, Coleridge also spoke about the financial success of the play: "I shall get more than all my literary labours put together, nay thrice as much" (Wyn 13) and it would cover for his losses for the periodicals *The Watchman* and *The Friend*, but why he never wrote for the stage again is a matter of more scholarship that we cannot engage in in this short discussion.

Wordsworth, influenced by Schiller, wrote *The Borderers*, a five-act tragedy in blank verse in 1795-96 and re-worked and published it in 1842, with his collection of poems, titled, *Poems, Chiefly of Early and Late Years; including the Borderers, A Tragedy*. The play, written after the experience of the French Revolution is a deep psychological probe into human mind and its capacity to conceive evil. This was once again the only play written by him. Shelley was more experimental with theatre. His *Cenci* appeared in 1819, a tragedy in five acts based on the themes of cruelty and incest surrounding the Cenci family of Rome. In spite its popularity, for a second edition of the play appeared in 1821, it was not staged because of its theme. It was staged privately by the Shelley Society in 1886 and publicly in 1922. His other play, *Prometheus Unbound*, based on the legend of Prometheus, was a four-act lyrical drama and was not meant for performance.


SARDANAPALUS,

A TRAGEDY.

THE TWO FOSCARI,

A TRAGEDY.

CAIN,

A MYSTERY.

BY LORD BYRON.

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.
1821.

Byron also experimented with drama. He was associated with patent theatre. His play*Manfred*, a closet drama, came out in 1817 and the protagonist reflected the brooding sense of guilt and melancholy that was the hallmark of the Romantic spirit. The haunting supernaturalism of the play made it popular among the musical composers of the Romantic period, it was adapted musically by Robert Schumann in 1852, and by Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky in his *Manfred Symphony* in 1885. His *MarinoFaliero*(1821), a five-act historical

tragedy was based on the conspiracy that unfolded in Venice in 1355. The play was meant to be read but was performed at Drury Lane but did not see much success. His other plays include *Cain* (1821) which retells the story of Cain and Abel from Cain's perspective, *Sardanapalus* (1821), a historical tragedy in blank verse, set in ancient Nineveh and recounting the fall of the Assyrian monarchy and its supposed last king; and *The Two Foscari*(1821), a verse play in five acts. Like *Marino Faliero*, the plot of the last play,set in the mid-15th centuryVenice, is based on the true story of the downfall of Doge Francesco Foscari and his son. The youngest member of the Romantic group, John Keats collaborated with his friend Charles Armitage Brown to write a play titled, *Otho, the Great*, a tragedy in five acts in 1819. The play was intended to be performed at Drury Lane, but was not produced in Keats' lifetime. The Victorian poets also tried their hands in drama without much success. Browning came up with*Stafford* (1837), *King Victor and King Charles* (1842) *The Return of the Druses* (1843). However, in spite of his talent in dramatic monologues his plays showed little promise. Tennyson's *Queen Mary* (1876), *Harold* (1877) and *Becket* (1879), which together formed the historical tragedy were accepted on stage but received lukewarm response.

The question remains as to why such celebrated poets failed as dramatists. Allardyce Nicoll, the famous Scottish scholar of English drama finds that the egotistical nature of the poets was the major deterrent to their writing successful plays. He writes:

The lyric mood may exist alongside the dramatic, as Shakespeare and Webster testify, but the dramatic mood depends ultimately on a sense of humour. A sense of humour springs from the power of seeing two sides to a question, or, in other words, from the power of seeing beyond oneself. Both tragedy and comedy depend upon the ability of the author to forget for a moment his own petty loves and woes…. This the romantic poets, because they were always thinking of themselves, failed to do. (61)

The other reason worth considering is the choice of theme. As you must have noticed most of the plays written by these poets/ playwrights had medieval and gothic plots. Such themes in times so politically turbulent could not establish connection with the audience. The poets blindly followed their Elizabethan masters but lacked their loyalty to political cause thus sounded artificial, sentimental, and decorous. But in spite of such arguments against the poets the fact remains that the economic condition was perhaps the most important reason why Dickens in spite of writing two farces, or Browning being closely associated with patents theatre, refrained from experimenting with plays. The Elizabethans had no other option,

but the nineteenth century talents moved to other kinds of writings that were more handsomely paid.

4.16.5 The Culture of Theatre in the Nineteenth Century

There were three kinds of plays that commanded public attention, the verse plays that were not meant for production but enjoyed popularity, the verse plays that were enacted in the patent theatre and the third were the melodrama and other popular entertainments. As you have seen in the plays written by the romantic poets, the verse dramas were not always financially rewarding, thus the stage was dominated by the popular genres of melodrama and Elizabethan plays. The penchant for the contemporary dramatists for the themes related to romance, macabre and gothic draws mostly from the French and German influence. Between 1800 and 1850, playwrights followed the Parisian plays and adapted them for the English stage. René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt(1773—1844) was a major influence. On the other hand, Schiller and Goethe inspired the romantic imagination of most of the writers. The operas of Händel and the symphonies of Mozart and Beethoven were performed at Drury Lane. The influence of indigenous literature should not be forgotten. Shakespeare was performed regularly and extensively with much experimentation in the stagecraft and performance technique. Minor Elizabethan dramatists were also performed on stage. Dramatization of novels was a popular source of entertainment. Walter Scott's novels like *The Lady of the Lake*, *Marmion*, *The Bridal of Triermain* appeared on the English stage in the first decades of nineteenth century. Dickens was no less popular among the producers.

However, the discussion of nineteenth century drama would remain incomplete if we miss the importance of the popular genres like melodramas or farces. These plays may not be considered 'classic' but their academic worth can hardly go unnoticed. In fact the divide between the popular and classic is much debated for they both are products of the same time and ideological considerations.

Melodrama is the most important genre that develops during this time. It is marked by sensationalism, exaggerated characters, and action-packed dramatic moments. Allardyce Nicoll divides the melodrama of this period into three types: the romantic, the supernatural, and the domestic. (101) The use of music is the common factor in all the types. The use of stock characters is mandatory; hence

the hero and the heroine, the humorous confidant of the hero and the confidante of the heroine, villain and villainess, would remain almost unchanged in their nature in all the plays. The most important aspect is the action, particularly in the historical plays. Thomas Holcroft (1745—1809) was the earliest exponent of this genre in England and was succeeded by Isaac Pocock (1782—1835), William Brough (1826–70), William Thomas Moncrieff (1794-1857) and Bartley T. Cambell (1843—88) to mention a few.

The other popular genre was the farces. They were like foils to the melodrama in their temperament, underscoring laughter over the sentimental action. Along with

comic operas, pantomimes and burlesques, these farces were the most revenue generating genre of the period. In many cases they were also called burlettas or farcetta. Another such genre was extravaganzas which came from an Italian origin. They were quite popular in the thirties and forties, using allegorical themes, and plot-less realistic scenes. The success of these plays was major reason as to why their'serious' or intellectually demanding counterparts could not develop during this period. Their spectacular display, constant action and immediate emotional connect with the audience made it an imperative that the next generation of dramatists should be able to attract the audience to survive on the stage.

4.16.6 Theatre After 1843

As you have already read that in 1843, by the Theatre Act of the Parliament, the patent theatre came to an end. However, the theatre took some time to revive and rebound. In the sixties and seventies, new theatre houses were built. The quality of audience improved as the educated class frequented these places. Queen Victoria herself was a theatre enthusiast. More authors started to write for the stage, as the profit-sharing basis was substituted by the lump payment during the sixties—writing plays became as profitable as writing fiction. Social problems were reflected in the plays paving way for the later-day realism.

The first most important dramatist of the period was T. W. Robertson (1829—71) who salvaged British theatre from the melodrama and farces. He introduced realistic plots, and employed modern methods of production. His career as a

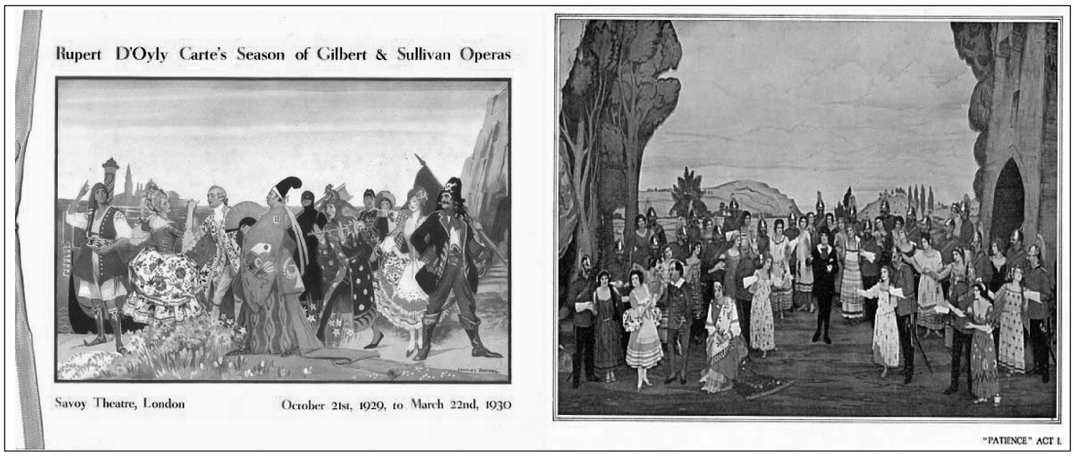
playwright began earlier with the writing of farces, *The Cantab* (1861) being the most well-known one, but his first notable comedy*David Garrick*, appeared in 1864. The play was a huge commercial success and was later developed into a film in the silent era. The other plays include *Society* (1865), *Caste* (1867) and so on. Though marred by sentimentality, Robertson was able to introduce a naturalist treatment of the plot and characters to improve the existing condition of British theatre.

The next reformer who commands serious attention was Henry Arthur Jones (1851—1929). He won fame in London with his play *The Silver King* (first performed 1882; written in collaboration with Henry Herman). This was a sentimental melodrama featuring the story of a man who falls on evil days, then moves to America and does well there, and finally comes back to avenge his position in the society. In *Michael and His Lost Angel* (1896), his treatment of the clergy falling in love is given quite a sentimental rendering. These plays were followed by more sophisticated comedies like *The Case of Rebellious Susan* (1894) and *The Liars* (1897). He was a controversial figure as his staunch Victorian moral code dissatisfied the liberal camp. However, the brilliant individual scenes like the interrogation scene in *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900) show his promise as a dramatist who revives the humour on the English stage.

The most inspiring writer of this time is Arthur Wing Pinero (1855—1934). He popularised the 'social' drama that brought more realistic themes to the English stage. He began his career as an actor and worked in the company of Henry Irving. He has a long career of fifty-five years in which he wrote fifty-four plays of various types. His earlier farces like *The Magistrate* (1885), *The Schoolmistress* (1886), and *Dandy Dick* (1887), were written for the Royal Court Theatre in London. His first serious plays like *The Iron Master* (1884), and *Mayfair* (1885) were adaptations from French plays. His wide range also included sentimental compositions like *The Squire* (1881) and *Sweet Lavender* (1888). He followed Ibsen closely and studied his treatment of characters and theme, and thus was able to bring in more socially relevant themes for discussion. Seriousness and sentiment fused in *The Profligate* (1889) and—most sensationally—in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) where he spoke about a woman's battle against the social norms and expectations. In a less serious vein, *Trelawny of the "Wells"* (written for the Royal Court Theatre and produced in 1898) and *The Gay Lord Quex* (1899) spoke about the theatrical life of London of earlier days. Pinero's wide range of writings and his introduction of realism paved way for Bernard Shaw.

Along with Jones and Pinero, William Schwenk Gilbert (1836—1911) brought a fresh lease of life to the British stage. Beginning his career with farces, he moved

to comic satires with his play, titled, *The Place of Truth* (1870). In 1875 he wrote *Trial by Jury* after which he moved onto writing comic operas. He collaborated with Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900) and their plays were produced in the Savoy Opera which was built in 1881 by English theatrical agent and composer, Richard D'Oyly Carte, specifically to produce their plays. Important plays include *H. M.S. Pinafore*, *Patience*, *Princess Ida*, *Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado*, *The Gondoliers*, and so on. The hilarious plot construction and verbal dexterity of these comic operas with the visual extravaganza turned drama into a whole-hearted entertainment. One such farcical comedy titled *Engaged* (1877), influenced Shaw's *Arms and the Man*.



The Century comes to a close with a more promising scene in theatre with the advent of the genius of Oscar Wilde (1856—1900). A follower of the French dramatic style, he merged the rules of the well-made plays with his characteristic wit and epigrammatic style to produce society drama. His *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892) altered the British theatre scene. His next play *Salomé*, (published 1893; first performed 1896) was translated by Hedwig Lachmann as the libretto for Richard Strauss's one-act opera of the same name (first produced 1905). The play was written in French (translated to English in 1894) and was never performed on English stage due to censorship issue. His next group of comedies were all successful. *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), *An Ideal Husband* (1895) and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) exposed the hypocrisy of the Victorian society with the crisp epigrammatic dialogues of society comedies. However, his controversial private life and early death robbed the English stage of one of its most brilliant writers.

4.16.7 Summing Up: The Rise of Realism

It is a fact that nineteenth century was not the best time for the growth of English drama but from the second half of the century the British stage saw distinct traces of reformation. The penchant for Elizabethan masterpieces, or French or German Romanticism were being substituted by sparkling comedies and new experiments in realistic themes and plots.In this regard, influence of Henrik Ibsen must be acknowledged. Though a Norwegian playwright, Ibsen's genius was acknowledged throughout Europe. He was able to bring the social controversies and middle-class crises into drama, exploring their anguish with an in-depth analysis. Ibsen's plays were read by the British playwrights and thus Bernard Shaw, who would dominate the Edwardian stage, begins his career with his monograph *Quintessence of Ibsenism* published in 1891. Shaw spoke not only about Ibsen's plays and his critical reception in England but also about the hypocrisy of the English society—a theme that he would continue to expose in his plays.

4.16.8 Comprehension Exercises

Long Answer Type Questions:

1. What are the kinds of drama popular in the nineteenth century England?
2. Write a short note on the verse plays written by the Romantic poets.
3. Write a short essay on nineteenth century British theatre with special reference to two major playwrights.

Medium Length Answer Type Questions:

1. What is the significance of patent theatre in England?
2. What is a melodrama?
3. What is a verse play? Give examples.

Short Answer Type Questions:

1. What is Savoy Opera?
2. What is a farce?
3. Name two plays by Oscar Wilde.

4.16.9 Suggested Reading

Evans, Ifor. *A Short History of English Drama*. Macgibbon and Kee, 1965.

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