Institute of Distance and Open Learning
Gauhati University

MA in English
Semester 2

Paper X
Drama I

Block 1
Shakespeare's Contemporaries

Contents:

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Block Introduction:

This block is entitled "Shakespeare's Contemporaries" which refers you clearly to the Elizabethan period in English literary history. In this block you are invited to read two highly interesting dramatists, Christopher Marlowe and Ben Jonson, with whose names you must already be familiar.

The block is designed to give you a thorough knowledge not merely of the historical situation which generated Elizabethan theatre but also of how we, in our time, can read this past cultural milieu. So the present block begins by giving you a comprehensive survey of the conventions which combined to give us something which can be named as "Renaissance Drama". In your undergraduate course of study you probably focused more on understanding the words on the page, the multiple meanings of words, the characters' motivations and personalities, and the narrative itself. Here, we try to help you to get a better grasp of how the play with its attendant stagecraft, the predilections of both writer and audience, and the methods of production and enactment of the play all together shaped the final text.

These are aspects of the study of drama which test your knowledge of the text as well as its relations to its own world, in addition to your critical awareness of your own practices of reading. Each unit in this block therefore gives you a brief sketch of the dramatist's life and times, the conventions determining the play's final shape as well as its participation in the evolutionary process of the history of theatre, going on to critics' views of the play, and then a summary reading of the plot. This method is considered to ensure that you are going to invest in a good, authoritative text of the play as you study the material we provide you with.

Let us just remind you that the first unit in this block introduces you to Renaissance drama so that you can understand Marlowe's, Shakespeare's, and Ben Jonson's works more critically and more completely. From the point of view of examinations, you may not get a question asking you to write an answer only on Renaissance drama as a whole. Again, this does not rule out the possibility that in your Paper I you may be asked to write on Renaissance drama from a historical point of view. But in this course, Paper 10, the 'Introduction' to Renaissance drama is meant as reference section for you to keep in mind as you study the plays themselves. From this standpoint, this 'Introduction' is perhaps of the greatest importance in helping

you to re-construct in your mind's eye all that went into the theatre of Elizabethan audiences.

Contents of Block 1

Unit 1
General Introduction to English Renaissance Drama

Contents:

1.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit seeks to equip you with basic information about **English Renaissance Drama**. This general introduction should help you to understand and appreciate the plays in this unit and also to understand the importance of the context in the writing and production of plays.

With the help of this unit you should be able to

- *recognize* the value of the intellectual climate in which the plays were written
- *evaluate* the importance of the theatres and the acting companies in the actual production of the plays prescribed for you.
- *identify* themes and contemporary issues that are repeated in several plays.
- *relate* the information in this section to the plays more profitably, effectively and creatively.

1.2 INTRODUCTION - ORIGINS OF DRAMA IN ENGLAND

The early history of English drama is important because you will see how the drama of the Renaissance had its roots in Christian ritual, and learn a great deal about the workings of the popular imagination as it evolved through history. This history also throws some light on the themes and conventions of later drama, and shows how drama was an important part of the religious and daily life of the people, right from the medieval age. Finally, the development of drama shows how this particular genre is closely interwoven with the life of the spectators.

1.2.1 Tropes to Liturgical Drama

Drama and religious ritual seem to have been bound up with one another in the earlier stages of all civilizations, while folk celebrations, ritual miming of such elemental themes as death and resurrection and seasonal festivals and folk activities like the maypole dance with appropriate symbolic actions can all be seen as the base on which drama developed.

With its two great festivals of Christmas and Easter, and its celebration of the significant points of Christ's life and career from birth to resurrection, the Christian Church itself was inherently dramatic. The beginning of drama can be seen in the

- Simple chanting between priest and the congregation or the choir which represented it.
- More elaborate acting out of a scene between two characters or sets of characters.
- The processions, the ritual of movement and the gesture of church ceremonies.

What do Tropes mean in Drama?

The ceremonies designed to commemorate special Christian events like Christmas and Easter naturally lent themselves to dramatization. These ceremonial dramatizations were known as tropes - simple but dramatic elaborations of parts of the liturgy - and they represent the beginnings of medieval drama.

The Quem Quaeritis? Trope is one of the earliest recorded tropes performed at Easter in the 10th century. It depicts a dialogue between the three Marys and the angel at Christ's tomb, and it is known as the "Quem Quaeritis?" Trope because it asks the question "Whom do ye seek?"

"Whom do you seek?

"Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified."

"He is not here. He is risen."

The "Quem Quaeritis?" trope is often identified as the earliest instance of medieval drama.

The simple trope eventually grew into **liturgical drama**, which was drama arising from or developed in connection with church rites or services. Liturgical drama was fully developed in the 12th century. At first these dramatic renderings were presented in Latin and were played within the church. Liturgical dramas represented dimensions of the life of Christ. The first **Passion Play** developed in the 13th century.

What is a Passion Play?

The passion play began in the Middle Ages and was originally a work depicting Christ's passion or crucifixion. It was performed from about the 13th century onward. In its later manifestations, it came to include both Passion and Resurrection. The form gradually died in popularity after the 16th and 17th centuries, but it remains locally popular.

These dialogues developed into small plays and the staging of the plays became more elaborate making it difficult to confine them to their traditional area: the choir portion of the church. The performances left the confines of the church and moved to the porch and as they increased in popularity, they were presented in the vernacular. Eventually, dramatic representations moved out of the church altogether - and this simple move brought massive changes to the face of drama. First, they were produced in the churchyard itself and then later they moved into an even larger space, traditionally the marketplace of the town or even a convenient meadow.

SAQ:

1. What can we infer regarding the interplay of the roles of priest and congregation in the origins of English drama ? (30 words)

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2. How does drama get linked to the Church ? (30 words)

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1.2.2 Miracle and Mystery Plays

Dramatic progress is connected with the development of the fairs, the increase of wealth, the rise of the burgher class and the development of the English language. Slowly drama severed its links with the church and the clergy who had initially provided all the actors. These changes became more apparent by the second half of the thirteenth century. The first plays in English were presented under Henry III.

Once outside the church, English ousted Latin and drama began to present the entire range of religious history. The Easter and Nativity cycles were united and performed together on **Corpus Christi Day**, which was less crowded with other events than Christmas and Easter, and which fell in summer (May or June).

Corpus Christi

The establishment of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264 provided a suitable day for play presentation because plays were now presented outdoors and had become dependent upon on the weather and could no longer be acted on all of the different church festivals.

Corpus Christi also involved a professional observance with the Host carried about and displayed at various stations. Plays were generally presented on wagons or **pageant carts**, which were in effect moving stages. Each pageant cart presented a different scene of the cycle and the wagons followed each other, repeating their scenes at successive stations. Carts were often very elaborate, equipped with a changing room, a stage proper, and two areas which represented hell (usually a painted dragon's head) and heaven (a balcony). Stage machinery and sound effects became integral parts of the plotting. The duration of the performances varied with the number of plays in a cycle, but always extended over several days. In Chester for example where there were only twenty-four plays the performances continued for three days while at York where forty-eight plays were enacted, performances continued for a longer period.

When the plays moved outdoors trade or craft guilds - important in many ways to social and economic life in the Middle Ages - took over in sponsoring the plays, making them more secular. In fact, each pageant became the province of a particular guild.

Liturgical drama, confined to the church and designed to embellish the ecclesiastical ritual, thus gave way to plays in English, performed in the open and separated from the liturgy though still religious in subject matter. Such early plays are known as **miracle** or **mystery** plays.

It is at this stage that elements from minstrel performances and older folk festivals began to be incorporated into what was originally Christian drama. These new elements provided vitality for a drama whose primary function was fast beginning to be entertainment.

Stop to Consider

Religious drama had literary value because of its simple grandeur and the language that was employed. However the poets effaced themselves before their subjects. They had no freedom of invention or composition, and were debarred from discovering motives for action except within strict limits. Since the stories were known to everyone, the principal interest was in the spectacles. The intervention of the author was, therefore very limited.

You may note how the drama that was slowly developing was a part of the everyday life of the people. Since the guilds financed different plays, it ensured the whole-hearted participation of its members. This involvement can be seen in the drama of the Renaissance and the vitality of this form has its roots in the Middle Ages.

One cannot say that drama was fully developed in the fifteenth century, but this was the period during which most of the cycles of the Christian theatre were compiled and in which Miracle plays reached their climax. The transition from simple liturgical drama to miracle and mystery play can't be accurately dated or documented. It is believed that miracle plays developed rapidly in the 13th century; there are records of cycles of miracle plays in many regions of England during the 14th-15th centuries, even into the 16th.

The development of the dialogue and the action in these early dramas is relatively naive, simple, as is the story presented. As time passed, however, touches of realistic comedy were introduced.

Stop to Consider

It is in the comic scenes that English playwrights show most originality. Comedy in the Middle Ages often mingled with solemn themes. Authors were fully independent only in the comic parts of the play, in passages which owed nothing to Holy Writ. Sometimes the playwright enlivened secondary Biblical characters and sometimes he invented characters in order to provide comic relief. Authors often used the manners and speech of the common people for their characters. In later Renaissance drama Shakespeare and his contemporaries often did exactly the same thing - kept the tragic central pattern of their source intact and added to it a comic border of their own.

SAQ

1. Which elements become important once drama moves out of the precincts of the church ? (25 words)

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2. In what way does patronage or sponsorship affect drama ? (30 words)

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1.2.3 Moralities and Interludes

While the miracle plays were still going strong, another medieval dramatic form - the **morality play** - emerged in the 14th century and flourished in the 15th-16th centuries. The morality plays seem less alive and more artificially constructed than the miracle plays, but they mark a necessary stage, and in a sense, a considerable advance in the progress towards the Elizabethan drama. The morality play differs from the miracle play in that it does not deal with a biblical or pseudo-biblical story but with personified abstractions of virtues and vices who struggle for man's soul. Simply put, morality plays deal with man's search for salvation. They are at their origin as much imbued with Christian teaching as the miracle plays but have a more intellectual character.

The differences between miracle and morality plays

A miracle play was essentially a spectacle while the morality plays demanded greater attention to the written word.

The author of a morality play had more freedom to arrange his subject. He could analyze human qualities and defects and his character could be psychologically more believable.

Instead of the multiple moveable pageants of the miracle plays the moralities used a single unchanging stage.

The moralities had one plot.

Morality plays were dramatized **allegories** of the life of man, his temptation and sinning, his quest for salvation, and his confrontation by death. The morality play, which developed most fully in the 15th century, handled the subjects that were most popular among medieval preachers and drew considerably on contemporary homiletic (sermon, preaching) techniques.

Key Elements & Themes of Morality Plays

Morality plays held several elements in common:

- The hero represents Mankind or Everyman.
- Among the other characters are personifications of virtues, vices and Death, as well as angels and demons who battle for the possession of the soul of man.

- The psychomachia, the battle for the soul, was a common medieval theme and bound up with the whole idea of medieval allegory, and it found its way into medieval drama - and even into some Renaissance drama, as Dr. Faustus indicates.
- A character known as the Vice often played the role of the tempter in a fashion both sinister and comic.

The earliest complete extant morality play is *The Castle of Perseverance*, which was written circa 1425. This was an elaborate play with 3650 lines and 34 characters, and its theme is the fight between Mankind's Good Angel and his supporters and his Bad Angel, who is supported by the Seven Deadly Sins. The action takes Man from his birth to the Day of Judgment. *Everyman* (ca. 1500) is perhaps the best known morality play. It depicts Everyman's journey in the face of Death. The hero is capably assisted to his end by Good Deeds.

Toward the end of the 15th century, there developed a type of morality play which dealt in the same allegorical way with general moral problems, although with more pronounced realistic and comic elements. This kind of play is known as the **interlude**.

The term might originally have denoted a short play actually performed between the courses of a banquet. It can be applied to a variety of short entertainments including secular farces and witty dialogues with a religious or political point.

SAQ:

1. Attempt to enumerate the different forms of drama from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. (30 words)

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2. In what sense does the morality play mark a stage in the progress of English drama ? (20 words)

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1. Interludes marked the transition from medieval religious drama to the secular drama of the Renaissance, although the transition can't be documented adequately because so many texts haven't survived.

2. After the fifteenth century, while miracle plays were still performed, their form did not change. Morality plays, on the other hand, were adapted and used by the dramatists of the renaissance.

Henry Medwall's Fulgens and Lucres written at the end of the 15th century is the earliest extant purely secular play in English. He had already written a morality play entitled Nature. Medwall was one of a group of early Tudor playwrights that included **John Rastell** and **John Heywood**, who ended up being the most important dramatist of them all. Heywood's interludes were often written as part of the evening's entertainment at a nobleman's house and their emphasis is more on amusement than instruction. Heywood's art resembles the modern music-hall or vaudeville sketch. The plots are very basic.

SAQ:

What makes the interlude a distinctively important form of drama? (25 words)

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1.2.4 Classical Influences on Comedies and Tragedies

At the same time, classical influences were being felt, providing for a developing national drama new themes and new structures, first in comedy and then later in tragedy.

Taking its theme from the *Milos Gloriosus* of Roman playwright Plautus, about 1553, **Nicholas Udall** wrote the comic ***Ralph Roister Doister***. This play brings the braggart soldier for the first time into English drama. Udall's characters function both as traditional vices/virtues and as traditional

characters in Latin comedy (for example, the Parasite, who also shows up in the plays of Ben Jonson). The plot is simple, but it does include a complication and a resolution, which shows a firmer grasp on structure.

Another comedy, ***Gammer Gurton's Needle***, by "Mr. S.," probably William Stevenson of Christ's College, was written a few years later and produced at the college. Here, the themes and characters of Plautus combine with the comedy of English rural life. The plot is crude and comic: "Gammer" Gurton loses her needle and it is found sticking in the pants of her servant. However, the construction in five acts is effective.

It was not until **George Gascoigne** produced his comic play Supposes at Gray's Inn in 1566 that **prose made its first appearance in English drama**. Gascoigne's play is another comedy adapted from a foreign source, from the Italian of Ariosto. Gascoigne's play is far more sophisticated and subtle than *Ralph Roister Doister* or *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. In fact, it is the first of many witty Italianate comedies in English which includes Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Although we rarely read any of these early works, they are important because they bring to English drama elements that would be further developed by its master playwrights. Moreover, Gascoigne's work indicates that the popular tradition of the English drama could be modified and enhanced by classical influences and by the needs of a more sophisticated audience.

At the same time that these changes were occurring in English comedy, the Humanist interest in Latin and Greek classics helped produce a new kind of English tragedy.

Stop to Consider

It is important to remember that there were no tragedies among the miracle or morality plays; in fact, there was nothing that could be called tragedy in English drama before the classical influence began.

SAQ:

1. How does 'reality' begin to make its appearance in drama ? (30 words)

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2. How did classical influences affect the shaping of drama ? (30 words)

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3. Try to outline the different categories of characters who appeared in the early plays till the 15th century. (40 words)

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The favorite classical writer of tragedies among English Humanists was not Sophocles or Euripides but Seneca, the Stoic Roman. Seneca's nine tragedies provided Renaissance playwrights with volatile materials: they adapted Greek myths to produce violent and somber treatments of murder, cruelty, and lust. Seneca's works were translated into English by Jasper Heywood and others in the mid-16th century, and they greatly influenced the direction of drama on the English stage.

Senecan Tragedy

Seneca's tragedies are bloody and bombastic, combining powerful rhetoric, Stoic moralizing and elements of sheer horror. There are numerous emotional crises, and characters are not subtly drawn but are ruled by their passions, being mixtures of sophistication and crudeness.

Seneca's plays were discovered in Italy in the mid-16th century and translated into English, where they greatly influenced the developing English tragedy.

Although Seneca's writing style did not provide a good model for developing English playwrights - it was polished yet monotonous - his methodology did. Like the sonnet, the typical Senecan tragedy was ordered and concentrated. It was a good proving ground for would-be dramatists.

Gorboduc - also known as *Ferrex and Porrex*– written by **Thomas Sackville** and **Thomas Norton** and produced around 1561-2 is considered the **first successful English tragedy** in the Senecan style:

- It is divided into 5 acts,
- It follows the classical manner in avoiding violence on the stage (instead, it presents it offstage), and
- It is written in blank verse, the first English play to be so.

1.3 DRAMA AND SOCIETY

It is no longer possible or desirable to read 'texts' as expressions of 'the point of view' of the author, or as a simple expression of the author's intention.

The works of new historicist critics like Stephen Greenblatt have made it impossible to believe that the author is the source of all meaning. Dramatic discourse is composed out of a language that comes to the author deeply imprinted with ideology. You can refer to Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.]

The work done by scholars like Greenblatt and other new historicists show that we must be aware that the social milieu, cultural forms of genre and characterization as well as the collective endeavours and material realities of the companies and theatres shaped a dramatist's representation of the world in plays. These factors are as important as any point of view that he may have wished to express. As you read this section you will also have to be aware that 'history' does not guarantee 'truth' but can even be viewed as one kind of 'fiction' since we also acknowledge that no value-free, literal, or scientific historical narrative or account is humanly possible. This is not to deny that there is a real material history with which historians engage as they arrange their material into historical narratives. 'History' does not depend only on ascertainable facts but on the ideological premises of the writer as well as the questions that are asked and the categories that are constructed.

As we turn to dramatic texts we must remind ourselves that they are usually structured around debates. Dramatic texts also offer a record, mediated through the dramatist, producers and actors, of the period's perception of itself, of events or series of events.

Having said this, we must now relate drama to a complex period that spans almost a hundred years. This was an age of radical change and you will find it extremely useful to consult a standard book on history so that you become familiar with actual historical events that took place.

SAQ:

After reading the above, what can we say of plays which are based on history ? (30 words)

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1.3.1 The Condition of England

Earlier accounts of the cultural history of the period celebrated the myth of Merry England ruled not by a mortal woman but by Gloriana. This myth was a creation of writers of the period. Dramatists like Dekker in his *Old Fortunatus* (1599) celebrated this idea and scholars very often went along with the model of an England that was an orderly and well-governed society.

The model is of **'the Elizabethan World Picture'** - a picture of a stratified, hierarchical society, which stemmed from the desires of the Renaissance elite to legitimize inequality by calling it **'order'**. It was assumed that most men and women were happy about their place in it. The reality as presented in many plays of the period was different.

In many of the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries the reader will come across encounters between characters belonging to the nobility - those in power, and characters from the marginalized sections of societies. *The Jew of Malta, Measure for Measure, Henry IV Part I, King Lear, As you Like It, Hamlet* and many other plays provide such examples. These

encounters become crucial because they show that although English society of that time was based on a system of institutionalized social inequality, it was being challenged and dismantled by other forces.

The hierarchical structure of Elizabethan and Jacobean England was based partly on wealth and partly on nebulous concepts of status. As the century progressed it became increasingly possible for men to buy status with new-found wealth. In 1611 James I institutionalized the practice by creating a new hereditary title, the order of baronets, and then the selling of these baronetcies for £1,095 each. Social change had diminished the prominence of the nobility.

Long before this, however, the apparently static social hierarchy of England had been undergoing changes. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw a transition from an economy which was predominantly feudal in 1500 to one which was predominantly capitalist in 1700. The rapid development of capitalist enterprise was accompanied by an increase in the population. The rampant economic individualism (like Jonson's *Volpone*) brushed aside the regulations of craft guilds and the feudal order was threatened by the speculators.

Stop to Consider

How would you link the discovery of the New World, the growth of towns and the Protestant emphasis on the primacy of the individual to the shift from a feudal to a capitalist economy during this period?

Look at the plays of this period and see how playwrights deal with the new acquisitive spirit that is predominant in this age. Do they point out that the new mercantile capitalism tends to shatter an older tradition which emphasized the importance of human relationships and duties?

Do the plays satirize the personal excesses and selfish behaviour of characters who no longer believe in fulfilling traditional obligations or do they see this as an inevitable fall out of a changing society?

Until the sixteenth century, the national government was relatively weak in England and the important centers of trade and commerce were regional: York, Coventry, etc. In consequence English intellectual and artistic life

tended to be dispersed. Actors travelled from town to town performing in great houses and inns. In the sixteenth century, things began to change. The Tudor monarchs - Henry VII, Henry VIII and Elizabeth - consolidated power in the hands of the central government at the expense of local or regional authorities. The effect of this was to concentrate power and wealth in London, England's commercial and shipping hub, and in Westminster, the seat of government, which adjoined London. During the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries there was large-scale migration of people from the provinces to London seeking economic opportunity. The theatre companies still went on tour but they began to concentrate their activities to London because that was where the paying audiences were.

"The University Wits"

There was a substantial increase in the number of university-educated younger or dispossessed sons of the ruling elite who were not members of the clergy. This led in the 16th century to a new literary phenomenon, the secular professional playwright. The first to exploit this situation was a group of writers known as the University Wits, young men who had graduated from Oxford or Cambridge with no patrons to sponsor their literary efforts and no desire to enter the Church. They turned to playwriting to make a living. In doing so they made Elizabethan drama more literary and more dramatic--and they also had an important influence on both private and public theaters because they worked for both. They set the course for later Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

SAQ:

Attempt a broad description of English society at this time. (30 words)

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Some of the University wits were:

- **John Lyly** (1554 - 1606) is best known for court comedies, generally for private theatres, but also wrote mythological and pastoral plays. *Endymion & Euphues.*
- **George Peele** (1558 - 98) wrote *The Arraignment of Paris* he began writing courtly mythological pastoral plays like Lyly's, and also wrote histories and biblical plays.
- **Robert Greene** (1558 - 92), who is said to have **founded romantic comedy**, wrote plays that combined realistic native backgrounds with an atmosphere of romance, as well as comedies. He is also well known for *The Honourable History of Friar Bacon & Friar Bungay*.
- **Thomas Lodge** (1557 - 1625) tended toward eupheustic prose romances. His *Rosalynde* provided Shakespeare with the basis for *As You Like It*. His most important work is his picaresque tale *The Unfortunate Traveller*, an early novel.
- **Thomas Kyd** (1558 - 94), founded romantic tragedy. He wrote plays mingling the themes of love, conspiracy, murder and revenge. He adapted elements of Senecan drama to melodrama. His *The Spanish Tragedy* (1580s) is the first of the series of revenge plays which captured the Elizabethan and Jacobean imaginations.
- **Christopher Marlowe** (1564 - 93) was the most impressive dramatist among the University Wits. His first play was the two-part *Tamburlaine the Great* (1587-88), which was important because it introduced his style of blank verse. He also wrote *The Tragical History of Dr Faustus*, *Edward II* and *The Jew of Malta*.

To sum up, Elizabethan and Jacobean society may be seen as a period in which a sense of permanence and stability was constantly being challenged by emerging forces of capitalism, which encouraged mobility. The interplay between these forces was complex, they sometimes appeared to be antagonistic, and at other times the old hierarchical structures came to terms with the new capitalism, internalized and used it for its own ends.

1.4 PLAYHOUSES AND PLAYERS

Conditions of staging, acting and production underwent tremendous changes during this period; you will have to be aware of this as you study the plays. The period from 1558 to the end of the reign of Charles I was a period during which theatre in England was transformed beyond recognition. It would be unrealistic to look for a uniform dramatic tradition for such a long period of time. This account of the playhouses and players of this period will deal briefly with the changes and developments that took place in the theatres during the passage of nearly a century.

Stop to Consider

The only constant feature of the theatres up to 1642 was that all the actors were male. The professional companies in London had no actresses in them until after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660.

SAQ:

1. How do conditions of staging a play affect its mode of representation? (30 words)

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2. Try to sum up the major social and political events between 1558 - 1649. (40 words)

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1.4.1 The Arena Theatres

A tradition of playing by adult groups of players and companies of boys was already established by the time Queen Elizabeth came to the throne.

There was a tradition of acting plays in the Grammar schools and this led to boy companies providing entertainment at court during Christmas and Shrovetide. Plays had been staged in court from the time of Henry IV and Queen Elizabeth continued this tradition.

During the early years of Elizabeth's reign groups of players provided entertainment at court as well as in great houses. They performed more frequently in public in the square or rectangular courtyards of a number of inns in the city of London, as the galleries around the courtyards provided space for the spectators. The companies were all licensed by the patronage of some great lord to travel and perform, for if they were unlicensed they were, according to a statute of 1598, termed "Rogues, Vagabond and Sturdy Beggars". The civic authorities of London were hostile to the players because they saw them as responsible for promoting disorder and distracting people from their proper occupations. The common Council of London in December 1574 banned performances in taverns in the city unless innkeepers were licensed and the plays first subjected to strict supervision and censorship.

These restrictions stimulated entrepreneurs to borrow money and set up **the first professional playhouse** outside the jurisdiction of the city authorities. The earliest was the Red Lion, built in 1567 in Stepney to the east of London. This was followed by The Theatre (1576), The Curtain (1577) and The Rose (1587), the Swan (1595).The Theatre was dismantled and the Globe was set up in 1599. The Red Bull (1605) was the last open air theatre to be built apart from the Hope (1614) which also functioned as a bear-baiting arena. By this time performances were being offered daily and the new playhouses offered spectators more comfort than the inn yards. The city's attempt to restrain playing in inn yards actually had the opposite effect; it contributed to the development of professional companies playing regularly on most days.

These playhouses were all similar in their basic conception; they were all large open air arena theatres accommodating up to three thousand spectators. However, they did differ from each other in many ways and over the years many structural changes were introduced as spectators became more demanding.

Philip Henslowe plastered and put ceilings into the Gentlemen's rooms at the Rose in 1592 and in 1595 he had a 'throne' made in 'heavens', probably a machine made to lower a throne and other properties on to the stage. The later theatres like the Swan, the Fortune and the Globe were more elaborately furnished than the earlier playhouses. The cover over the stage, which was perhaps initially a simple canopy, painted on the underside with a sun, moon and stars and designed to protect actors, properties and hangings from the worst of the weather later evolved into more permanent structures. In the Globe and Fortune the canopy was probably more substantial, and it may have been possible to use the space between the sloping roof and the ceiling for windlasses and machinery for lowering people and properties on to the stage. In the Fortune the area under the stage was known as 'hell'. The use of trapdoors made it possible for various startling appearances, like the devil that rises from the stage in scene 3 of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. Some idea of these stage effects can be gathered from the prologue to George Chapman's *All Fools* (1599) written for performance by the Admiral's Men at the Fortune. It draws the attention of the spectators to the startling stage effects:

> The fortune of a Stage (like Fortune's self)
> Amazeth greatest judgements; and none knows
> The hidden cause of those strange effects
> That rise from this Hell, or fall from this Heaven.

By the end of the sixteenth century, then Elizabethan theatre offered lavish and brilliant spectacles that were created with the use of elaborate costumes, hangings and stage properties.

SAQ:

Comment on the 'commercialisation' of theatre in this period. (40 words)

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Stop to Consider

The essential point is not that the stage was bare, but that no attempt at scenic illusion was made; the stage location was whatever the dramatist made the actor say it was. This made it possible for dramatists to provide spectators with romances, histories and tragedies that ranged freely over the known world or to imaginary locations, like Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, or Thomas Heywood's *The Four Prentices of London*, with *The Siege of Jerusalem*, or Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

The reference to Philip Henslowe is indispensable for our knowledge of English Renaissance theatre. You can judge for yourself the significance of his name from what the following passage tells us:

"Although contemporary evidence for the structure and organization of the Elizabethan theatre continues to be discovered, it is still fragmentary and not entirely consistent in its implications. This information consists of incidental references in letters, diaries, pamphlets, and so on, of the implications of the action and stage directions of plays themselves, and of documents such as the decrees of the Privy Council . . . . .

The diary of Philip Henslowe, the theatre owner and manager, who kept an account of the daily takings at the Rose theatre from February 1592 to November 1597, is a unique and invaluable source, not only of information about the theatres themselves, but also for the lives of the playwrights and actors who furnished their business. . .

The archaeological excavations on the site of the Rose theatre show it to have been a polygonal structure, originally with about fourteen sides, of roughly 72 feet in diameter. . . Major alterations were carried out in 1592, giving the building a bulging tulip-shape. Henslowe's diary includes a list of costs for the alterations, and shows that the walls were made of lath and plaster, and that some of the ceilings were plastered, and the roof thatched."

[From *The Penguin Shakespeare Dictionary*, (1999) pp.18 -20]

By 1599 the free-ranging spectaculars of the public theatres were drawing the scorn of dramatists like Ben Jonson who preferred to observe the neo-classical unities of time place and action. In *Every Man out of His Humour* (Globe, 1599), Jonson's commentators on the action pun on the playwright's 'travel':

MITIS…How comes it then that in some one play we see so many seas, countries, and kingdoms passed over with such admirable dexterity?

CORADATUS Oh, that but shows how well the authors can travail in their vocation, and outrun the apprehension of authority.

(Induction, 267-72)

The arena playhouses of the period 1576-1642 were radically different from modern theatres in which actors usually appear behind a proscenium arch, under spotlights, in front of an audience sitting in a darkened auditorium.

In the arena playhouses "the actor and audience shared the same lighting and effectively the same space, since the stage projected into the middle of the building, and the actors spent much of their time in close contact with the spectators who surrounded them. One reason these theatres stayed in business was that they provided an especially close relationship between actors and audience, with no visual barrier between them, allowing the actor to identify as intimately as he pleased with spectators, or to distance himself within the action." Dramatists continually exploited this awareness, *in prologues, inductions, jokes, metaphors and plays within the play,* reminding the audiences of the fictive nature of what they were watching, and of the uncertain boundary between illusion and reality.

Two devices, which were used brilliantly by most dramatists of this time, were the ***aside*** and the ***soliloquy***. In the aside the actor could step out of his role to comment on the action and take the audience into his confidence, and the soliloquy in which the character was allowed to reveal to the audience aspects of himself that were hidden from other characters.

SAQ:

To what extent does historical information regarding literary conventions (like 'prologues', or 'soliloquy') change your reading of Elizabethan plays ? (35 words)

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1.4.2 The Early Private Playhouses

In the early years of Queen Elizabeth's reign she had relied on the boys of the choir and grammar schools of St Paul's cathedral and the choir boys of the Chapel Royal at Windsor to provide entertainment at court during Christmas and Shrovetide. Richard Farrant, an enterprising master of the choirboys at Windsor had become well known in court circles as a presenter of plays. He leased rooms at the Blackfriars Monastery in the city of London to establish the first private playhouse. After his death the lease passed on to the dramatist John Lyly and performances continued to be put up till 1584. This was the first roofed, indoor playhouse in London. The space available was quite small and the audiences were too. The establishment of the first Blackfriars playhouse between 1576 and 1584 marked a major innovation in offering to a select audience a sophisticated alternative to the dramatic fare provided at the adult public theatres. The repertory of the boys' companies of this period included morality plays, classical pastorals like Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris* and the graceful court comedies of Lyly, usually based on classical themes, but laced with topical allegory, as in *Endymion and Midas*.

The dramatic activities of the boy players took on a quasi- professional status with the establishment of a hall within St Paul's Cathedral and the establishment of the second Blackfriars theatre in 1600. The boys staged plays by Marston, Chapman and Middleton. From about 1600 the indoor playhouses at Blackfriars and St Paul's came to be known as 'private' theatres in contrast to the 'public' theatres. The private theatres staged plays less frequently and they began plays at a later time, 3 or 4 in the afternoon as against 2 o'clock the customary time at the public theatres. The private playhouses also charged much higher prices than the public ones. All the audiences were seated in the private theatres, and higher prices meant that these theatres attracted gallants and gentlewomen. The boys acted by candlelight and provided music between acts of a play.

This was an innovation, for act divisions were not observed as intervals in the public theatres, and music was not played. At Blackfriars music was played before performance began, and sometimes there was dancing and

singing between acts. Music was a feature of small enclosed theatres, where soft sounds could be heard, and a range of instruments used. Another innovation that became a feature of private theatres was the practice of allowing members of the audience, who paid extra for the privilege, to have a stool and sit on the stage during the show.

The characteristic style of playing of the boys' companies has been described as anti-mimetic. The boys playing and mimicking adults invited their audiences to be continuously critical and detached. They deliberately catered to a more select audience. The development of the indoor playhouses points to an increasing concern for refinement, comfort and sophistication, and to a kind of naturalism. In these theatres the relation of the audience to the stage was fundamentally changed, since the audience was seated close to the stage, a more low-keyed and intimate style of acting was possible. The boys companies at the private theatres flourished for a relatively short period but they established the desirability of enclosed theatres and they showed that small theatres charging higher prices was economically viable proposition.

Players & Theatres: Facts to Remember

- In 1583 Queen Elizabeth's Master of the Revels formed a company of players for the Queen.
- In 1576, James Burbage, leader of the Earl of Leicester's men, built the first permanent theater, called "The Theatre," in a field near Shoreditch, out of the city and thus out of the control of the Lord Mayor, who was the official "censor" of plays.
- Other permanent, public theatres soon followed: the Curtain, in 1577; the Rose, in 1588; the Swan, in 1595.
- Shakespeare's theatre, the Globe, was built in 1599.
- In addition to the public theatres, there were private ones, chief among them the Blackfriars (1576). They were different from public theatres because they:
    - o were roofed,
    - o had more elaborate interior arrangements, and presented plays originally acted by child players.

SAQ:

1. As you read this section try and see how the plays prescribed for you were influenced by the stage practices of the time they were written in. Can you relate the different kinds of plays that were written in this period to the development of the 'private' and 'public' theatres? (30 words)

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2. Study the asides and soliloquies and see what use the playwright is making of these devices (40 words)

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1.5 PLAYWRIGHTS AND THE CONDITIONS OF PRODUCTION

The stage conditions for which Shakespeare and his contemporaries wrote were ideally suited to reflecting issues of importance in the society. The Elizabethans reaped the advantages of **Burbage's first public commercial theatre**, which was built in London in 1576. Its significance was twofold. In the first place the building of a permanent public theatre in London guaranteed the professional status of both the playwright and the acting companies. The strolling players of the sixteenth century had been outlawed as vagabonds. The companies, which played in the new theatres, were normally associated with a noble household, but in practice they were independent of patronage because they were financed on a commercial basis by their own earnings in the theatres. The willingness of the new theatre companies to pay for the plays created, for the first time in England a paying market for literature. The playwrights instead of being wholly dependent on patronage and on command performances in the court were now employed by the acting companies, as Shakespeare was for the Chamberlain's Men, and then the King's Men, and as Heywood was for the Red Bull. This gave

them security, for they were not dependent on personal favours to make a living.Early plays were written for the Children's companies attached to the Chapel Royal and St Paul's. In the period before 1600 these companies were strictly amateur; their performances were given at court about twice a year; even at Blackfriars theatre performances other than those specifically requested by the court were billed as rehearsals. When playwrights wrote with an eye to court performances their plays needed the court audiences for their completion, and they had to acknowledge the presence of the Queen. For the professional playwrights in the public theatre the situation was completely different. They were not indebted to a patron or monarch, and were answerable to the audience - an audience very different from the court audience.

- As you read this section try and remember what has been said about players and playhouses in the section before this.
- Try and recollect what you have already learnt about boy actors and public theatres.
- Now read the plays prescribed for you and see how these factors controlled the playwright.
- Plays cannot be fully appreciated in their complexity if modes of production are not taken into account. The form, as well as the theme a playwright chooses, is closely connected to the theatres and actors at his disposal.

The plays enacted in the public theatres had to appeal to an extremely diverse group of people - gallants and courtiers, as well as a large following of tradesmen, citizens, merchants, artisans and workers, and their wives and children. The theatre was no longer the preserve of the wealthy, the poorer sections of society could afford this entertainment because standing seats cost only a penny while seats in the gallery could be procured for two or three pence. The commercialization of the theatre in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period forced playwrights to leave academic school drama and elegant court interludes and get in touch with the concerns of the London world at a time when it was seething with new ideas and activities.

Playwrights writing for the public theatres were dealing with adult actors this enabled them to extend their range of interest. The child actor had special talents of precocity, wit and quickness in debate but he also had limitations. Children tire more quickly than adults and their light voices were not suitable for elaborate soliloquies involving complex psychological problems. Critics have pointed out that *Hamlet* could not have been written for a boy. Shakespeare's plays might have been very different if he did not have adult actors and the public theatre at his disposal.

1.6 Check Your Progress

1. What kind of social space does drama come to occupy in the thirteenth century ?
2. Evaluate the role of religion in the development of English drama.
3. Sketch the significant changes in dramatic development in terms of language, theme and the occasions of their presentation.
4. Show how drama begins to incorporate folk elements after moving out of the church.
5. What kind of connection can you draw between the themes in the plays and the different stages of English drama ?
6. How is increasing commercialisation an important part of English theatre?

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Unit 2
Christopher Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*

Contents:

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit should help you to read the play *The Jew of Malta* and relate it to the context in which it was written. With the information provided in this unit you should be able to

- *outline the reasons* behind having a villainous Jew as the protagonist of what is termed a 'tragedy'
- *make the necessary connections* between the different plots of the play
- *recognize* the importance of the world of Malta
- *judge whether* Marlowe was reflecting the prevalent views about the Jews or whether he was relating this to matters of Machiavellian policy
- *situate the play* within the mercantile and business enterprise that shaped the renaissance world
- *distinguish* between the various critical positions on the play at different historical junctures.

2.2 INTRODUCTION : LIFE OF MARLOWE

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury to a shoemaker John Marlowe and his wife Katherine in February 1564. He was the second of nine children and the only son who survived. Little is known about his life till he attended the King's School, Canterbury where he received a thorough grounding in Latin and Greek grammar, and some ancient literature. Canterbury was a busy city and Marlowe might have witnessed performances by traveling bands of players, records survive of visits by companies like Lord Strange's Men during the time that Marlowe was growing up in the city. Plays were also regularly performed at the King's School.

In 1580 he was awarded a scholarship from the foundation of Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury to study in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. Here Marlowe studied the Bible and the Reformation theologians as well as philosophy and history. In 1585 he took a degree of B.A. His student career at the university was marked by frequent absences during which he was believed to have been working for the English secret service in Europe. Records show that he was absent sometimes for periods of two months at a time, and the M.A. degree was awarded to him in 1587 only after the Privy Council intervened on his behalf. This intervention, contained in a letter to the university authorities, was based on the claim that Marlowe "had done her Majesty good service and deserved to be rewarded for his faithful dealing," a service which was "in matters touching the benefit of his country." The letter further informs the authorities that Marlowe had travelled to Rheims in France, where a seminary was founded to train young Englishmen for the Catholic ministry - the letter hinted that Marlowe had gone there to uncover and combat the forces of the Roman church which, from the time of Henry VIII's rebellion, had been seen as a threat to English Protestantism. Elizabeth I, in fact, during much of her reign, worked towards repelling and neutralizing Catholic threats from within and without.

Instead of taking holy orders, Marlowe went to London and became a dramatist. He made important friends, including Sir Walter Raleigh, who had started the first colony in Virginia, and who was contending with the Earl of Essex for the Queen's favours. Most likely, Marlowe began writing plays on leaving Cambridge. His first dramas were composed in blank verse.

It is assumed that the first part of his *Tamburlaine the Great* was acted in London in 1587. In the play Tamburlaine burns the Koran and after conquering the world wants to conquer the heavens. In 1589 he was charged with the murder of William Bradley and sent to Newgate Prison, but acquitted after two weeks. It was not the last time when the quick-tempered author was arrested and jailed. In 1592 an injunction was brought against him because of a street fight, in which a man was killed. Marlowe was also deported from Netherlands for counterfeiting gold coins.

Marlowe's mysterious death in the tavern, in Eleanor Bull's house - nominally about who should pay the bill - may have had a political cause. Accusations of atheism, blasphemy, subversion and homosexuality, also burdened his public image. When he died, he was under the shadow of charges of atheism on the evidence of his former roommate and fellow dramatist, Thomas Kyd, who declared under torture that a document denying the divinity of Christ belonged to Marlowe. Marlowe's connections saved him from imprisonment. The author might have worked as a government's secret agent according to Anthony Burgess. Possibly while still at university, he became an agent of Sir Francis Walsingham (c. 1530-90), a statesman and a Puritan sympathizer, in the secret service of Elizabeth I and a favorite of Walsingham's brother, Thomas.

Research suggests that he was murdered by an agent of Francis Walsingham, for reasons unknown. According to Charles Nicholl (*The Reckoning: The Murder of Christopher Marlowe*, 1994), supporters of the Earl of Essex could have been behind the death. Scholars are still attempting to reconstruct the events. In the common version it is concluded, that after eating and drinking together in a tavern in Deptford, on Wednesday, May 30, 1593, Marlowe and his friend Ingram Frizer began to wrangle over payment of the bill. Marlowe wrenched Frizer's dagger from its sheath, but in the struggle Frizer got the dagger and struck a blow in Marlowe's eye that was lethal. A week earlier a warrant had been issued for the author's arrest. Marlowe was buried two days later in an unmarked grave. His killer pleaded self-defense and received a pardon from the Queen.

Stop to Consider

Marlowe's active involvement in the religious debates and political intrigues of his day brought him into close contact with the actual world of intrigue and political wheeling and dealing.

In many respects, Marlowe is similar to his protagonist, Barabas, in that he was also decried as a Machiavellian schemer with little loyalty towards his country.

In Robert Greene's deathbed tract, *Greenes Groatsworth of Wit*, Marlowe is referred to as a "famous gracer of Tragedians" and is reproved for having said, like Greene himself, "There is no god" and for having studied "pestilent Machiavellian policy"(cited in MacLure, 30). Robert Greene's denunciation of Marlowe captures the anti-Machiavellian feeling that was rife in Elizabethan England.

2.3 MARLOWE'S LITERARY CAREER

Marlowe had harboured literary ambitions from his days at Cambridge. His first play *Dido Queen of Carthage* was probably written in 1586 and was preceded by some poetry. *Dido* was first performed by the Children of Her Majesty's Chapel probably before 1587. It is generally accepted that by 1585 Marlowe had also translated the Roman poet Ovid's *Amores*. Marlowe also translated Lucan's *Bello Civili* ('Civil War' also known as *Pharsalia*) This history of Julius Caesar's career operates as a warning of the horrors of civil war. Lucan's work is important in the Elizabethan context for its contemporary relevance - the threat posed by Mary Queen of Scots as contender for the English throne was removed only in 1587.

Marlowe wrote at least part of his first major play *Tamburlaine* towards the end of his time at Cambridge. It was probably first staged by the Lord Admiral's Men in 1587 at the Theatre. There were numerous performances of the play after that at the Rose. The thundering rhetoric of its verse, the spectacular visual effects created by costumes, tents and banners and the graphic violence, all contributed to the popularity of the play. Marlowe in this play was breaking new ground; in the Prologue to the play he proclaimed himself as a theatrical pioneer:

From jigging veins of rhyming mother-wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We'll lead you to the stately tent of war… (Prologue. 1-3)

These lines show some typical Marlovian traits - scorn for the current standard of the drama, impatience with its unadventurous style and implied criticism of the way it panders to the audience's expectations. The play marks an important step in the development of English drama.

Marlowe had probably written *Dr Faustus* by 1589. The early stage history of the play is lost and even the text of the play is unstable - there are two radically different versions of the play. However, it was repeatedly revived and was a great success in the theatre.

The Jew of Malta was originally produced sometime between 1589 and1591. The first extant text is the 1633 quarto, printed by John Beale, with a dedication by Thomas Heywood. This play, like the earlier ones, was also extremely successful and played to full houses. The Jewish protagonist of the play, and its black humour appealed to the audiences of the time and helped to establish Marlowe's reputation as a leading dramatist of the time.

Marlowe's two final dramatic works *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris* were probably written in 1592. There is evidence to show that The Massacre at Paris was probably first staged at the Rose by Lord Strange's Men in 1593. Scholars conjectures place these two plays towards the end of Marlowe's career as a dramatist. It is likely that Marlowe wrote *Hero and Leander* during this time. He died before he could complete it and it was published in 1598, five years after his death.

Stop to Consider

Marlowe established himself as a dramatist during the time of the University Wits, himself being referred to as one. (Refer to Unit 1.3.1 of Block I) His classicism locates him within the humanist tradition. It is to be expected that a writer with a reputation as an atheist would choose to place himself within the more anthropocentric school of humanism, and steep his writings in the classics.

SAQ:

Attempt a comparison between Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus* and *The Jew of Malta* in terms of Marlowe's classical scholarship. (60 words)

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2.4 INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

Marlowe's tragedy *The Jew of Malta* gained considerable success (36 performances) when first produced at the Rose Theatre in London in 1592. The protagonist of *The Famous Tragedy of the Rich Jew of Malta* is Barabas, a wealthy Jew who lives on the Mediterranean Island of Malta with his beautiful daughter; from Malta he runs a world-encompassing trading empire. Once his possessions are confiscated by the corrupt Catholic governor of the Island (who demands that he convert to Christianity), in order to defend Malta from the Turks, the dispossessed Jew is swept into a whirlwind of revenge, and turns into a serial killer; he assists the Turkish army to conquer Malta, is appointed its governor, but ends up falling into his own trap, a boiling cauldron, where he dies, cursing his world and its creator.

Christopher Marlowe's play *The Jew of Malta* is positioned right at the beginning of a critical moment of world politics. The play reflects on the composite state of geo-political 'balances of power' in that time period as well as the accelerating momentum of extended global trade. These are 'chaotic' times, and constantly therefore, there is also the need for 'order', the search for 'the perfect balance' between the two on stage.

The 'New World' of the Renaissance is already taking shape, but a new world that also randomly assaults the humanist values that are linked with the Renaissance. On the one hand, the state's powers were greatly enhanced as on the other the Church lost control; new 'rituals' began to take shape. Spectatorship meanwhile had changed considerably with changes in material, economic and cultural life - as existing social hierarchies gave way to new ones - the new middle class was rising, and the rural / urban dichotomy began to disappear finally, to give way to a world that would be profoundly affected by the printing press and the momentum of rapidly changing cultural dynamics. This is the context in which we must situate the play.

SAQ:

1. How would you define the term 'Marlovian' in terms of theme and style? (30 words)

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2. Explore the associations which are brought in by the term, "New World". What could have been 'new' in this new world ? (40 words)

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The play apparently celebrates the will to power, ambition and the amassing of power and wealth as the legitimate aim of human energy. Harry Levin's formulation of Marlowe's Barabas is significant:

> His will to power is gratified less by possession than by control. In this he does not resemble the conqueror so much as he adumbrates the capitalist; and Marlowe has grasped what is truly imaginative, what in his time was almost heroic, about business enterprise. (Levin, 51)

The Jew of Malta is a dynamic play that establishes insight into different aspects of the renaissance:

1) The development of formal design and play writing
2) The state of international affairs and the acceleration of commercial enterprise
3) The use of Jewish people as 'the other'.

In the first category, *The Jew of Malta* can be viewed as a transitional work. It has connections with early Medieval play structures and the more extended structures (and 'nuances') of the Renaissance theatre. To experience *The Jew of Malta* is to witness the evolution of the English theater tradition and its dynamic techniques. There are a great many elements of the medieval

morality plays and symbolism in the play - The Vice figure of the morality play has often been seen as the precursor of Barabas - and at the same time Marlowe in *The Jew of Malta* makes use of techniques and ideas that were consistent with the changes that were transforming the theater of that time, including:

a) the close connection of the audience with the events of the stage - the use of asides allow the characters to address the audience directly

b) the use of repetition as a formal element and

c) the extended dimensions of the new Renaissance theater would see the fomalization of spheres of symbolic locations that would allow for the 'crossing of imaginary boundaries.

SAQ:

1. What kind of differences are proposed between the categories of 'conqueror' and 'capitalist' ? (30 words)

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2. What can be understood by the phrase "development of formal design"? (30 words)

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In the second category, *The Jew of Malta* gives the reader an opportunity to gain some sense of internationalism in the time-period of the dawning 1600's. The subject of business contracts and international politics in this environment is an integral part of the drama. It is because of international commerce and political dynamics that Barabas has made Malta his home.

It is important to remember that Marlowe's characters reflect the profound uncertainties of the greater world climate. Malta is strategically located at the point of access to the west, Africa and Asia and is at the center of business deals, transactions and contracts set amidst the high drama of international, inter-racial, and inter-religious politics. Barabas, a successful businessman, makes Malta his home for the profitable international enterprises. Commerce, internationalism and the exploration of racism determine the plot that unfolds.

Marlowe's geographical terrain has often been critically scrutinized - here is theatrical representation of the colony. Sometimes, such performances are also latently capable of reversing the inherent progression of this gaze - the 'alien' object stares right back. *The Jew of Malta* significantly illustrates this process - in the much-invaded island of Malta, it is hardly possible to identify the native. Barabas the Jew is an alien many times over: the radically demonized antipode to the Christians who comprise Marlowe's own spectators; as a Maltese, he is seen as situated on the periphery of their world, and tainted by his Turkish connections. To the natives of Malta he is thus a suspect alien. Therefore, he behaves according to these stereotypes: an egotistical and horrifically crazed mass slaughterer, driven by the desire for wealth and power. But the prologue has already established that Barabas has learnt his evil specifically from a European, Machiavelli - and his Turkish and his Christian rivals easily outdo his villainy. Marlowe's use of a strange location along with the alien protagonist throws into relief the internality rather than the externality of 'otherness'.

In the era of More, Machiavelli, Montaigne, and Castiglione, were writing prescriptions for the **New Individual** - who 'appear' civilized, vesting characters with identity authority, showing them how to behave, forcing upon them values and beliefs consistent with their 'act'. They are 'taught' behaviour - the use of 'masks' and 'disguises' that occasions require - sound lessons in self-dramatization.

SAQ:

1. How is 'Jewishness' represented in the play ? (40 words)

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2. In what way does a sense of 'alienation' mark Barabas's personality ? (30 words)

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3. Is Barabas more 'European' than 'Jew' ? (30 words)

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Irony is consistently generated in the dichotomy between the mask that appears civil and subversive reality and in the separation between the 'real' and 'illusion'. Few better examples of this are found than in the character of the Elizabethan 'Machiavelli' in plays like *The Jew of Malta*.

Stop to Consider

The Jew of Malta incorporates the changes that came into playwriting with the advent of the arena theatres.

The Jew of Malta's emphasis on business enterprise reflects the changes that had come into the world with the shift in emphasis from a feudal to a capitalist society.

The location of Malta as a choice of locale for the play is important in understanding the internationalism of the period. The play is not confined to Malta alone, Spaniards and Turks battle for control of the small island.

The Jew of Malta is a play that reflects on the value-systems and the aesthetics of the emerging secular middle-class social reality. The middle classes of the Renaissance period found themselves dealing with the subject of wealth and finances that had a direct bearing on the question of social status and cultural manipulation. The time-span of the 1600's would also be a 'point of definition' era for the emergence of new 'power families' that would later finance colonialism.

2.5 DATE AND TEXT

The Jew of Malta was originally produced around 1589-1591. The first extant text is the 1633 quarto, printed by John Beale, with a dedication by Thomas Heywood. It was first produced at the Rose Theatre in London in 1592.

2.6 SOURCES

The Jew of Malta has no known literary source. Marlowe fashions the Jew from elements of traditional folklore, drawing on the opprobrium traditionally attached to the Jew as usurer and murderer of Christ, and culturally opposed to everything a Christian would be expected to know and be. Marlowe relied upon popular perceptions of "The Jew". On the one hand, he counted on the "stage Jew" stock-character of those days: "Any actor could put on a 'jew's nose' to play Marlowe's Barabas or Shakespeare's Shylock".

On the other hand, since he lived in a relatively "Jew-free" England, he must have been inspired, partly, by the real-life figure of Doctor Rodrigo Lopez, a "New Christian" immigrant from Portugal, who was nonetheless considered a Jew, and had gained the prestigious position of Queen Elizabeth's personal physician. He was later tried for treason (for an attempt to poison the Queen) and was sentenced to death.

> Stephen Greenblatt, in his article "Shakespeare's Leap," interprets the Londoners' reaction to Lopez's execution as "a last act of a comedy": "These laughing spectators, in other words, thought they were watching a real-life version of The Jew of Malta". Marlowe's character and his plot may have also been inspired by the historical model of Don Yossef Nasi. The Jewish Duke of Naxos, Nasi, was a Marano Jew who fled the Catholic Iberian Peninsula and became a senior advisor to the Turkish Sultan. Thanks to his brilliance, the Ottoman Empire conquered a number of islands in the Mediterranean, and he himself was knighted, and has been remembered as a Jewish hero.

Though hardly any Jews had lived in England since the thirteenth century, Marlowe may have had a good chance to meet authentic, proud Jews in person. Having been employed as a spy in Her Majesty's secret service,

the playwright wrote *The Jew of Malta* shortly after his return from a long stay in Holland, where, in those very years, a liberated, autonomous congregation of Jews (fleeing from the tortures of the Iberian Inquisition) was beginning to flourish.

For some of the background and 'local colour' which informs his portrait of Malta under siege, Marlowe may have been indebted to a contemporary account of a visit paid to the island in the course of a journey to Constantinople, undertaken in 1551 by the Lord of Aramont, French Ambassador to the Porte. Among those lords and knights accompanying him was the young French nobleman Nicolas de Nicolay, geographer to King Charles IX; in 1568 Nicolay published at Lyon a narrative of his journey in four books, which appeared in Thomas Washington's translation of 1585 as *The Navigations, Peregrinations and Voyages, Made Into Turkey...* . Passages in *Tamburlaine* suggest that Marlowe knew this work, and while composing *The Jew* he might well have recalled from Nicolay the exotic delights of Malta (which included a plethora of courtesans), the abortive Turkish assault on the island in 1551, and the subsequent siege of Tripoli at which Nicolay was present (an event which involved a stratagem to infiltrate the citadel by effecting an underground entry, a device to which Barabas has recourse in Act V Scene 1).

Marlowe was, however, in a position to have obtained information from other sources beside this. Public interest in Malta ran high in sixteenth-century England, particularly during and immediately after its heroic stand in the Great Siege.

Michael Brennan has recently established the existence of at least two English-language newsletter accounts of the siege, though they survive in so fragmentary a state that little can be deduced about their contents or Marlowe's possible awareness of them. The news of the Turks' withdrawal in September 1565 prompted Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, to lay down a Form of Thanksgiving for six weeks, and Marlowe, who was later to be a Parker Scholar at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, could perhaps have known of that.

The history of Malta was in one sense already intimately interconnected with the very location of Marlowe's profession, for the Master of the Revels, whose job it was to censor plays, had his office in the palace of Clerkenwell,

historic home of the Order of St John in England. The Knights Hospitallers of Saint John, formerly of Jerusalem, had settled in Malta when Rhodes fell to the Turks in 1522, and successfully held out when besieged in 1565. This is an event that Marlowe dramatized. Viewed as an outpost of Christendom and a citadel against Islam, the spirit of the crusaders had however yielded to the emergent interests of the merchant adventurers. Marlowe uses the struggle for Malta among the Turks, the Spaniards and the besieged knights of Malta (all impelled as much by economic as by political interests) as a backdrop for both Barabas's and Ferneze's Machiavellian schemes.

Stop to Consider

Note how closely the sources Marlowe uses in the play are connected to his life. This can also be linked to Elizabethan theatre in general where the issues that playwrights raise and explore in the plays are closely connected to the life of the spectators.

Check Your Progress

1. Explore the idea that Marlowe's play reflects upon a moment of social transformation.

2. Marlowe's reflections upon his society as seen in the play, *The Jew of Malta*, are centred on the notion of 'alienness' as much as on the issue of outward expansion. Substantiate your answer with readings from the text.

3. *The Jew of Malta* is as much formed by 'Renaissance' thought as by late medieval traditions. Express your views with references to the text.

2.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Marlowe's plays were extremely well received when they were first staged but in the years that followed his death contemporary poets and dramatists remembered him more for his poetry than for his plays. Ben Jonson praised Marlowe's "mighty line" and Michael Drayton said, "his raptures were all

air and fire". Puritan writers, who were intent on attacking the corrupting influences of the theatres, shifted the emphasis to Marlowe's death. They felt that his unnatural death was a punishment for his atheism and his flamboyant writing. The interest in Marlowe's life and death continues and researchers are constantly trying to unravel the circumstances that led to his death, the focus has, however, changed - critics are more interested in seeing how Marlowe's life and contemporary events shaped his plays rather than in castigating him for his profligacy.

After the theatres were closed in 1642, Marlowe's plays were no longer performed and he was virtually forgotten until well into the eighteenth century. In 1744 Robert Dodsley included *Edward II* in his *Select Collection of Old Plays*. This was the first publication of work by Marlowe since the publication of *Hero and Leander* in 1637. Dodsley went on to publish the *Jew of Malta* in 1780; *Dr Faustus* was published in 1814; *Hero and Leander* in 1815 and *Tamburlaine* in 1818. **This was also the year that Edmund Kean revived *The Jew of Malta* - the first performance of any of Marlowe's plays in 155 years**. From this point onwards there was an increasing interest in Marlowe. William Hazlitt's enthusiastic response to Marlowe paved the way for much romantic criticism. Hazlitt saw in Marlowe the daring imaginative and unshackled genius of the renaissance. This romantic view was the dominant strain of Marlowe criticism for the entire nineteenth century. Una Ellis-Fermor's *Christopher Marlowe* (1927) marked the furthest extreme of this line of criticism.

The critical reception of Marlowe has taken a number of different directions in the twentieth century; Eugene M. Waith (1952) considered Marlowe as a writer concerned with drama as a means of exploring greatness and viewed Tamburlaine as a tragic hero. L. C. Knights [*Further Explorations* (1965)] claimed that Marlowe's creative fantasy did not meet the resistance necessary for affirmation, growth and understanding.

Harry Levin's approach was different in that he saw Marlowe as a restless skeptic and independent thinker [*The Overreacher* (1952)], who was concerned with atheism, Machiavellianism and Epicureanism as alternative ways of life to scholastic Christianity, and who was a "fellow traveler with the subversive currents of his age." Stephen Greenblatt takes this claim further with the assertion that Marlowe was typical of his age in that he

questioned all ideas and above all his own identity.("Marlowe and the Will to Absolute Play")

R.W. Battenhouse [*Marlowe's Tamburlaine* (1941)] and Douglas Cole [*Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (1962)] both saw Marlowe as an orthodox Christian who wrote exemplary plays about the wages of sin. M. M. Mahood [*Poetry and Humanism* (1950)] felt that Marlowe's heroes dwindle from the titanic to the puny as Marlowe becomes increasingly disillusioned with the Renaissance glorification of man.

T.S. Eliot in *Selected Essays*, [new edition, 1960] introduced the idea that the play was to be read as a farce and not a tragedy: "If one takes *The Jew of Malta* not as a tragedy, or as a "tragedy of blood," but as a farce, the concluding act becomes intelligible; and if we attend with a careful ear to the versification, we find that Marlowe develops a tone to suit this farce, and even perhaps that this tone is his most powerful and mature tone." For the first time in the play's critical history critics began to pay attention to the comic aspect of the play. Fred B. Tromly's *Playing With Desire: Christopher Marlowe and the Art of Tantalization* [1998] continues this strain of criticism. He is interested in the ways that Marlowe frustrates the expectations of his audience. His reading of the plays accommodates their burlesque qualities and explores the comic effects of Marlowe's tonal juxtapositions.

A fourth group of critics study Marlowe's dramaturgy as an invention that provides both a large-scale show and an intense prolonged focus on a single mind. David M. Bevington [*From 'Mankind' to Marlowe: Growth of Structure in the Popular Drama of Tudor England* (1962)], and David H. Zucker [*Stage and Image in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe* (1972)] both take this approach.

More recent studies, particularly under the influence of New Historicism, have looked at the political, social and cultural context of the plays, at Renaissance voyages to East and West, the beginnings of colonization and the Renaissance individual as consciously fashioning himself out of this varied and complex material condition. Stephen Greenblatt's pioneering new historicist studies of the Renaissance have offered radically different perspectives.

SAQ:

1. How do readings and interpretations of the play change from time to time? (30 words)

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2. Would you link the revival of Marlowe's plays during the Romantic Age to the abundant vitality of his characters ? (50 words)

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Sources: (1) Clifford Leech, ed. Marlowe. *A Collection of Critical Essays.* New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc, 1964. (2) Judith O'Neill, ed. *Critics on Marlowe. Readings in Literary Criticism*. 1968 rpt. New Delhi: Universal Book Stall, 1994. (3) Nandana Dutta, ed. *The Jew of Malta*. Guwahati: Kitab Bhawan, 2003

2.8 THE CENTRALITY OF THE JEW IN THE PLAY

When *The Jew of Malta* was written, Jews had already been banished from Britain for 300 years, expelled in 1290 by Edward I. The few who remained practised their religion in secret. In the rest of Europe, they were a much reviled group, compelled to live in ghettoes and were heavily taxed.

Why, then, did Marlowe introduce Barabas as the central protagonist of his play? Frank Kermode provides a convincing answer:

> The Jew in the time of Marlowe and Shakespeare comes centre-stage as the mouthpiece of a larger social critique. He becomes the criticizer of the stage, of the city and the ruling classes, while also being, at the same time, the target of the audience's preconceived judgment against his race - both on the stage and off it. He is hardly unbiased or impartial but simply the

> critic-figure who is able to engage the audience effectively in order that they may 'see' what he sees, guiding the spectators through the stage world. This is exactly what Barabas is able to do (Kermode 2).

Marlowe establishes in the Jew of Malta a character who can kill his own daughter, commit many heinous crimes in his megalomaniac need for revenge; and bring to light the generalizations pertaining to the Jewish community - tracing the historical links between Jews and commerce - and their untrustworthiness, despite their wealth. Hence, the audience is primed to experience the Jew as 'other' until, somehow, something turns this agenda awry during performance, and by the time the play ends, the spectator is left utterly bemused. Unlike Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, Barabas (to the Christian audience, he is the loathsome thief whose place Christ took on the cross) is not to be pitied.

This is a new way of assessing the character of Barabas. Earlier critics had recognized the importance Marlowe gave to the Jew, but they had seen the Jew as a character that the audience could sympathize with only in the first two acts of *The Jew of Malta*. They felt that **the play had inexplicably and drastically altered its stance vis-à-vis the Jew in the acts that followed**– often leading scholars to speculate on the question of dual (or multiple) authorship where Barabas, after his initial exposition in the first two acts as the familiar Marlovian superman is comically transformed in the last three acts into a farcical avenger. Critics often expressed unhappiness with the way Barabas was portrayed: Charles Lamb compared Barabas to Shakespeare's Shylock and found that whereas Shylock could be accepted as a man "Barabas is a mere monster, brought in with a large painted nose to please the rabble…"

The centrality of Barabas in the play can be gauged from the fact that Marlowe gives him the maximum number of lines to speak. Harry Levin, in one of the appendices to *The Overreacher: A Study of Christopher Marlowe*, provides statistics on the percentage of lines given to protagonists in Marlowe's plays. Barabas was endowed with a record number of lines, that take up 49 percent of the total lines in *Jew of Malta* (exceeding even Doctor Faustus' 47%), compared to Hamlet's less than 38% of the total lines in the Shakespearian revenge tragedy. This, plus the fact that Barabas is the only character in the play who is allowed to interact

and directly address the audience, should give a fair idea of the importance that Marlowe placed on his protagonist.

SAQ:

1. Try and connect the use of the figure of the Jew with the business and mercantile enterprise of the renaissance. (30 words)

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2. Read the introductory sections on the renaissance drama and see how you can connect the Jew with these ideas. (40 words)

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3. Can you connect Machiavelli's practical philosophy (dealt with in the next section) with the beliefs of Barabas? (30 words)

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2.9 ACT-WISE READING OF THE PLAY

The Prologue :

More than sixty years after Niccolo Machiavelli (1498-1527) died Christopher Marlowe resurrected him to deliver the Prologue to the *Jew of Malta*. This is no stage villain but Machiavelli himself -

> "Albeit the world thinks Machiavel is dead,
> Yet was his soul but flown beyond the Alps …
> To view this land and frolic with his friends." (Prologue, 1-2)

We must recall here that Machiavelli's most influential work was *Principe* [*The Prince*], a treatise written to guide a ruler. This book fascinated or horrified generations of readers and became, along with Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, the intellectual property of every well-read European during the sixteenth century.

With this prologue Marlowe made it clear to the audience of his time that the play was going to deal with issues of governance, political strategy and power which were synonymous with the name of Machiavelli, a well-known 16th-century Italian, political theorist, philosopher, historian, humanist, statesman and playwright.

Stop to Consider

The 'Prologue' was a popular dramatic device used by most dramatists of the period. The dramatist addressed the audience directly through the prologue; it served to introduce the events and issues that were to unfold as the play progressed. Traditionally the presenter's role was associated with truthfulness and reliability. Marlowe upsets this equation by having the figure of Machiavel deliver the Prologue.

If Marlowe actually wanted to garner support for the Jew, an introduction by Machiavel would scarcely serve the purpose. In late sixteenth-century England both Catholic Machiavelli and Jew Barabas were 'outsiders'. By clubbing them together was Marlowe actually playing to the galleries? An Elizabethan audience (even if to view the Elizabethan audience as single homogenized whole could be misleading) would probably have no doubts about what to expect from an accursed Jew, while Machiavel's intercession on his behalf would then seem to seal the fate of the Jew. What actually happens is something totally unexpected - the audience is fascinated with the 'Machiavellian villain', even while Barabas kills the friars Bellamira, Ithamore, Pilia-Borza and outwits Ferneze. Barabas's vivacity and wit initially overshadow Ferneze and all the other characters in the play whether they be Christian, Jew, Spaniard or Turk. Marlowe achieves this remarkable feat by transferring to Barabas the characteristics of Machiavel.

Marlowe was acquainted with Machiavelli's writing. Like other intellectuals of his time, he found Machiavelli useful in understanding the important changes that were taking place in Elizabethan society.

The Elizabethans were confronted by a world in which the central reality was not reason or morality but power and the manifestation of power. Machiavelli was seen as one of the clearest symptoms of that change.

Marlowe's active involvement in the religious debates and political intrigues of his day brought him into close contact with the actual world of intrigue and political wheeling and dealing.

In the prologue Marlowe's Machiavel proudly proclaims that only his followers will succeed in garnering power. He asserts that even those people who pretend to hate him actually admire him. He makes no excuses and does not try to justify his beliefs. Marlowe makes his presenter repeat popular ideas associated with the teachings of Machiavelli a) "I count religion but as a childish toy…" b) "…there is no sin but ignorance" c) "Might first made kings…" The prologue ends with Machiavel asking the audience to judge Barabas,

> "… as he deserves,
> And let him not be entertained the worse
> Because he favours me."

These concluding lines connect Barabas with Machiavelli but one should not forget that

(1) Machiavel has said that he has come to England to "frolic with his friends" , implying thus that the *members of the audience are also his followers,*

(2) through the prologue, he has also succeeded in pointing out that power can only be achieved by those that follow his teachings - **Ferneze and the Turks then are equally Machiavellian**.

Stop to Consider

Machiavelli and Machiavellianism

Part of the fame of Machiavelli's *The Prince* was due to its unsavoury reputation as an immoral or amoral work, a handbook for rulers that advocated the doctrine that "the ends justified the means". A distinction between what Machiavelli

advocated and what Machiavellianism came to signify can, however, be made. A self-serving, opportunistic form of Machiavellianism can be read into *The Prince* because the means of achieving the end of a strong, expansionist state is often through the energy and intelligence of calculating and manipulative individuals.

Another kind of Machiavellianism with which Machiavelli can be associated is an atomistic form of individualism. This is perhaps most evident in Machiavelli's famous advice, in the chapter on "How a Prince should keep his Word", that rulers should become versatile users of masks and strategies the better to manipulate others (Machiavelli, 133-136).

Public identity - the self shown to others - is theatricalised (which might explain why Machiavelli lent himself well to the stage. Several English Renaissance plays, besides *The Jew of Malta*, featured Machiavellian characters, such as Shakespeare's Iago, Richard III and Prince Hal, and they contributed to the construction of Machiavelli's scandalous reputation) while the "real" self, the self that exploits and manipulates, remains hidden.

Check Your Progress

1.To what extent do the ideas of Machiavelli permeate the entire world of Malta ?

2.Consider who is the better Machiavellian - Barabas or Ferneze ?

3.Are there any characters in the play not influenced by the spirit of Machiavellianism?

4.Is Marlowe critiquing the ideas of Machiavelli?

Act I

But now how stands the wind?
Into what corner peers my halcyon's bill?
Ha, to the east? Yes: see how stand the vanes!
East and by south; why then, I hope my ships
I sent for Egypt and the bordering isles
Are gotten up by Nilus' winding banks:
Mine argosy from Alexandria,
Loaden with spice and silks, now under sail,
Are smoothly gliding down by Candy shore
To Malta, through our Mediterranean sea. (JM I:1)

In Marlowe's play, these are the opening lines of the Jew Barabas, a tycoon and a fearless entrepreneur in renaissance terms. *The Jew of Malta* opens with Barabas in his counting house, busily counting his most recent earnings and hoping that his vessels will do well on their current journey. Soon, several merchants enter to tell Barabas that his ships are in the port, each laden with wealth. Barabas is pleased that his ships have arrived safely, in spite of the many risks that his wealth-laden ships face on the sea. When he is alone, he credits God with making him rich, saying that Abraham and his descendants were promised much happiness. He would rather be an envied and hated Jew than a poor Christian.

As Barabas gloats over his wealth three Jews come in with the disturbing tidings that the Turks have arrived with a fleet of ships and that all the Jews in Malta have been told to be present at a meeting in the Senate House.

In the ***first scene*** itself Marlowe succeeds in establishing the power and attraction that is connected with the world of renaissance business. Barabas's first speech is brilliant. The Jew in his counting house discarding silver because it is "trifling", surrounded by gold and sparkling gems, is a figure that is not easy to forget. With this Marlowe also brings in the connection of power with wealth - one precious stone, according to Barabas, is enough to "ransom great kings from captivity". This is a direct reference to the rise of the merchant classes and to the fact that merchants often financed wars that were undertaken by the kings during this time.

This scene also establishes the fact that **Barabas does not automatically align himself with the other Jews in the play**. He is only concerned with safeguarding his own wealth. Marlowe, from the first scene of the play makes use of **asides** - this device allows Barabas to take the audience into his confidence. The audience, from the beginning, knows that Barabas is only going to look after himself. The scene ends with an interesting soliloquy where Barabas shows that he is aware that the Turks have come to demand tribute and since all the wealth of Malta will not be enough it is more than likely that the Jews will have to make up the deficit. He, therefore, decides to do whatever is needful to guard his wealth.

Stop to Consider

Have you been able to connect the mercantile enterprise of Barabas with the politics of power?

Can you see how the island of Malta is at the center of all major trade routes and how Barabas sitting in a small room connected to the world outside?

Have you been able to see how the reference to the Turks is actually bringing another plot often referred to as the "overplot" into the play?

Can you see how the use of asides and soliloquies makes the audience sympathise with a villainous Jew?

In ***Scene 2*** the Turks enter and demand tribute from Ferneze, the governor of Malta, the governor asks for time to collect the sum. The Jews have already been ordered to appear at the senate house, they arrive just as the Turks leave. Ferneze at first appears to be requesting the Jews for 'aid' but it becomes apparent that the Jews will have to provide the entire amount (this kind of excessive taxation was common practice). The Jews are told that they will have to pay "one half of his estate" if they refuse to do so they will have to convert to Christianity, and if they don't agree to this their entire wealth will be confiscated. The other Jews agree tamely to give up half their wealth, only Barabas holds out and as a result he loses everything - even his house is converted into a nunnery. Barabas, prepared for such an eventuality, has hidden his wealth in the house and when he finds he cannot enter his house he persuades his daughter Abigail to pretend to enter the nunnery so that she can retrieve his wealth. The scene closes with the entry of Mathias and Ludowick who extol the beauty of Abigail and decide to go and visit her.

In this scene Marlowe succeeds in showing how the desire for wealth is not confined to the Jews. Ferneze and the Friars are equally driven by the desire for gold. Marlowe allows Barabas to expose Ferneze's hypocrisy - when the second knight tells Barabas that they will have to contribute to save Malta, Barabas asks, "How! equally?" Ferneze's reply rips off the mask of the benevolent ruler:

> No, Jew, like infidels;
> For through our sufferance of your hateful lives,
> Who stand accursed in the sight of heaven,
> These taxes and afflictions are befall'n,

This scene is also interesting because it highlights Barabas's intelligence, his sly remarks completely undermining the pretence the Christians make of being charitable and truthful. Ferneze stands completely exposed when Barabas asks him, "Is theft the ground of your religion?" All Ferneze's blustering about acting for the good of the people sound hollow. One of the central themes in *The Jew of Malta* is the difference between what is real and what only appears real. For instance, Ferneze suggests that in taking all of Barabas' wealth, he is not at fault, but only fulfilling the curse of the Jews' inherited sin (Matthew 27:25). But Ferneze uses religion when it is convenient. He ignores the Christian admonition of kindness toward all men, and he lacks any compassion for the Jews. When he needs money, the Jews are suddenly outsiders, although there is every evidence that the governor has made use of them earlier.

Stop to Consider

Note that the treatment meted out to Barabas by the Christians is unfair and this becomes the reason for his taking revenge on Ferneze and Malta. The play has been seen as belonging to the revenge tragedy tradition and the treatment of Barabas in this and the following scenes provides the impetus for the future course of action.

Barabas's deft use of language articulates the way the power of language is ingrained within the concept of power itself - to exude power through the characters' gift of language is shown in the conversation between Barabas and Ferneze in this scene and all through the play.

SAQ:

1. What does revenge tragedy conventionally deal with ? (20 words)

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2. Do you think that Barabas has adequate reasons for taking revenge? Or do his actions far outweigh the wrongs done to him? (20 + 20 words)

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Is Marlowe critiquing the anti-Semitic sentiments of his audience by exposing Catholic Ferneze?

Can you locate the prevalent attitudes towards the Jews and Catholics in the play?

Stop to Consider

After you read the play come back to this Act to see how Marlowe has linked the main plot i.e the plot involving Barabas's revenge, with the over-plot of the Turks/Spaniards.

Try and see how Marlowe, by highlighting the unfair treatment meted out to Barabas in the first Act, manages to retain the sympathy of the audience even as he becomes more and more villainous.

Note how Barabas, like the Christians, is not above using religion for his own ends. Both Barabas and Ferneze are followers of Machiavelli. See how they behave in a similar fashion as the play progresses.

Act II

The act opens with Abigail throwing jewels and gold out of a window to her father, waiting below.

In the next scene, Martin Del Bosco, a vice-admiral from Spain, arrives in Malta to conduct a sale of slaves that were rescued after the sinking of some Turkish ships. Ferneze, though, is frightened of the Turks, who will oppose the sale. However, Del Bosco convinces the governor not to pay the tribute previously assessed by the Turks, claiming instead that Spain will become Malta's protector.

Scene 3 opens in the market place at the slave sale, Barabas buys Ithamore, a Moor. He also meets Ludowick and later Mathias both of whom want to meet Abigail. Barabas decides on a strategy to set the two friends against each other. He sends a letter through Ithamore to Mathias supposedly written by Ludowick challenging him to a fight. Barabas hopes that the two friends will kill each other and the death of the Governor's son would be the first step in his revenge.

In this Act, as in Act 1, it is the **acquisition of wealth that underlies the action**. With the arrival of Martin Del Bosco, Ferneze refuses to pay tribute to the Turks, but it is business, not religion that prompts Del Bosco to help his fellow Christians. Marlowe uses the struggle for Malta among the Turks, the Spaniards and the besieged knights of Malta (all impelled as much by economic as by political interests) as a backdrop for both Barabas's and Ferneze's Machiavellian schemes. Martin Del Bosco offers to help Ferneze because Malta will provide him a lucrative market for his captured slaves. The conversations between Barabas and Ludowick, and Barabas and Mathias also play on this same theme. Abigail is constantly referred to as a diamond and Barabas has no compunctions about using his daughter as a commodity to be offered to first one bidder, then to another.

In the first two acts as well as in the ones that follow, Marlowe plays on the **theatrical aspects of Barabas's character**. Elizabethan audiences were aware of the artificial nature of the theatre and Marlowe and his contemporaries exploited that awareness. Barabas is aware of his part in the drama as a performer, he is aware that he is playing a role (the term *play* is an apt description of his behaviour). It is this capacity that allows him to step in and out of the frame of the action, while the other characters remain trapped in their roles. Barabas *plays* his roles while the other characters act them. The asides and soliloquies spoken by Barabas allow him to turn to the audience to share some vital piece of information that those on the stage are unaware of, or else present one face - polite respect, or shame, or sorrow - to the characters he is addressing, while letting the audience see his true attitude and his scorn for those he is tricking. Marlowe introduces the figure of Ithamore to act as Barabas's confidant but more often than not he allows Barabas to share his thoughts directly with the audience thus implicating it in his plots. This aspect of the play is illustrated in the interactions between Barabas, Ludowick and Mathias.

Stop to Consider

Try and see how all the plots - over-plot, main-plot and sub-plot (involving Ithamare and Bellamira) all revolve around the acquisition of wealth.

See how Marlowe makes use of asides and soliloquies.

Barabas's ingenuity at outwitting all the other characters in the play.

SAQ:

1. How much do other characters in the play share the 'Machiavellianism' of Barabas ? (30 words)

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2. What is the "policy" that Barabas often refers to? (25 words)

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3. Can Abigail be seen as the only 'good' character in the play? Or, does she allow Barabas to use her and does she then become an accomplice like Ithamore? (15 + 30 words)

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Some questions that should arouse your curiosity relates to whether Marlowe is here playing to the audience when he has Barabas gleefully list his crimes against Christians. This is obviously in line with the very central preoccupation in the play of the 'other'. 'Jewishness' brings in ideas not only of how English society was organised but also how the playwright is using the concept of the 'other' or the 'outsider'. This might urge you to consider whether Marlowe is trying to expose the anti-semitic sentiments of the

audience by making Barabas list actions that were obviously impossible. It is not just a cultural difference that comes with Barabas but perhaps Marlowe was slipping behind the very concept of an 'alien' to discover the hidden mainsprings of his times and his society.

Act III

The act opens with a brief scene, in which Ithamore sees a courtesan, Bellamira, and desires her. The action then shifts to Lodowick and Mathias who meet near Barabas' house, fight a duel, each man killing the other. Ferneze and Katherine arrive, and each one mourns the death of a beloved son.

The scene next shifts to Ithamore who is laughing at the cleverness of Barabas' revenge. Abigail soon enters, and Ithamore explains the simple plot that resulted in the deaths of Lodowick and Mathias. Abigail is shaken by her father's treachery and by the deliberate pain that he has caused her, and in a fit of remorse she converts and becomes a nun. Barabas is furious and he decides to kill all the nuns in the nunnery. He sends some poisoned rice porridge to the nunnery with Ithamore.

In the next scene the Turks arrive in Malta to collect the tribute but Ferneze refuses to pay them; they leave, threatening to raze Malta to the ground. In the last scene of the act we learn that all the nuns are dying and that Abigail has sent for Friar Jacomo. She meets Friar Barnadine and confesses that her father was responsible for the deaths of Mathias and Ludowick. The scene ends with the Friars going to meet Barabas to confront him with his misdeeds.

The Act introduces characters from **the sub-plot** - Pilia Borza and Bellamira to the audience - the appearance of Ithamore who is enamoured of the courtesan and the information that Pilia Borza has stolen a bag of Barabas's money links the sub-plot with the main plot. Critics have often felt that the play takes on a farcical note from this point onwards; Barabas's actions according to them are not consistent with his actions in the first two acts. You will, however, note that Marlowe carefully knits together different strands of the play, events from the over plot, main plot and sub-plot all come together in this act. The action is building up; Abigail's confession and the

introduction of Bellamira and Ithamore's infatuation with her, pave the way for Barabas's downfall.

The introduction of the courtesan in the scene immediately following the scene where Abigail is being used by Barabas for his own ends undercuts the image of the pure Abigail. That is why the audience might sense a kind of duplicity in her confession to the Friars. She knows that she is going to die and her confession will save her soul according to Christian belief, but at same time she is making sure that she safeguards her father's interests - she is aware that the information she divulges cannot be used against him as she tells the Friar when he says that:

FRIAR BARNARDINE. Know that confession must not be reveal'd;
The canon-law forbids it, and the priest
That makes it known, being degraded first,
Shall be condemn'd, and then sent to the fire.

ABIGAIL. So I have heard; pray, therefore, keep it close

If Abigail's actions are suspect, we must agree that Marlowe has succeeded in creating a world where no one is above suspicion.

Marlowe uses every opportunity presented in the play to indulge in anti-Catholic satire - he hints at the possibility of sexual relationships between the friars and the nuns, and this helps to deflect the Protestant audience's attention from the heinous crime that has been committed. The Friar's reaction to Abigail's death:

ABIGAIL….and witness that I die a Christian! (dies)
FRIAR BARNARDINE. Ay, and a virgin too; that grieves me most …

shows how Marlowe is adept at this kind of manoeuvring; the audience is never allowed to dwell on Barabas's machinations.

The act opens with Bellamira bemoaning the fact that business is suffering in Malta. Later, when in response to Ferneze's question about what brings him to Malta, Basso replies that it is "The wind that bloweth all the world besides: Desire of gold", Marlowe succeeds in painting a world where it is gold and gold alone that matters in all the different sections of society in Malta. The Jews are not an exception.

Stop to Consider

What tactics does Marlowe use to link all the plots in the play?

Commercialism lies at the core of even personal relationships. This shows how gold permeates the entire society.

How does Marlowe use the geographical location of Malta to emphasize the commercial aspect of the Renaissance?

Try to connect the different plots in the play and see how Marlowe skillfully works the strands together.

Act IV

As the act opens, Barabas and Ithamore celebrate their success at poisoning the nuns. Barabas only grieves that his daughter lived long enough to become a Christian. When the friars arrive to convert Barabas, he is angry that Abigail has betrayed him and promises to be converted. However, his promise sets the two friars to fight over which one will have the privilege of claiming the conversion and Barabas' wealth, which will go to the winning friar. Barabas is able to send Friar Barnardine off with Ithamore; later, Barabas and Ithamore strangle him. The two conspirators prop the dead Friar up against his staff, conceal themselves and wait for Friar Jacomo to return. Jacomo strikes the dead Barnardine thinking that Barnardine is blocking his way. Just as the Friar's body topples over, Barabas and Ithamore appear and accuse Jacomo of killing him. They then drag him off to the authorities who hang him. The last scenes of the Act are taken up with the sub-plot - Bellamira sends a letter to Ithamore inviting him to come to her house because she loves him. Bellamira wants to use him to extract money from Barabas. Ithamore falls into the trap and he begins to blackmail Barabas he threatens to "confess all' if Barabas does not comply with his demands. Barabas not so easily undone, disguises himself as a French musician and poisons all the three conspirators with the help of a poisoned bunch of flowers.

In the course of this Act the dramatist provides a negative depiction of two major religious groups, the Roman Catholics and the Jews. In both cases, these depictions reflect the general attitude of his English audience toward these two religions. Much of the religious rhetoric in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* reflects the real-life tensions between the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. He makes the two Friars vie with each other to

convert Barabas, because they are interested in the Jew's wealth, which he promises to give to the order he decides to join. The behaviour of the Friars emphasizes the corruption and hypocrisy of the church.

Stop to Consider

Henry VII, who established Protestantism as the official religion, established the Anglican Church in England in 1534. In effect, Henry's decree outlawed the Roman Catholic Church, and Henry seized all church property, liquidating it as a source of revenue for his reign. Many people, who felt that Catholicism was about performance and ornamentation and that it lacked substance and piety, supported the seizure of church property. This emphasis on performance and an assumed lack of piety is evident in Marlowe's depiction of the friars as greedy and unscrupulous.

You are likely to notice how Marlowe plays on popular stereotypes to achieve a comic effect. The audience is not allowed to dwell on the crimes Barabas is committing - engineering the deaths of Ludowik, Mathias and his daughter, killing the two Friars, Pilia Borza, Ithamore and Bellamira - the fast-paced events underplay the serious nature of Barabas's crimes. The audience does not even sympathize with the religious characters because they are equally tainted; this allows Marlowe to present his protagonist Barabas as a part of a world where the desire for gold and power is more sacred than belief in God or religion.

The sub-plot echoes and repeats events that take place in the main plot and over plot. This strategy of the dramatist helps to undermine characters like Ferneze and Del Bosco, who might speak in a very elevated style but whose actions are no better than that of the prostitute, pimp and slave.

Try to connect the events in the sub-plot with that of the other plots.
Go back to the first act and see how Ithamore's dreams about what he will do with Barabas's money parodies Barabas's speeches, also Belamira's asides to Pilia Borza is reminiscent of Barabas's asides. Marlowe is, therefore, not positing or presenting Barabas's actions in a favourable light. He takes pains to undercut Barabas and at the same time show how he is no worse than other characters in the play.
Note that this act continues to arouse laughter which shows Marlowe's ability to undercut and expose all sections of society.

Act V

The act opens with Bellamira and Pilia-Borza confronting Ferneze with their information. The governor orders that Ithamore and Barabas be arrested, and the two are quickly brought in. Ithamore immediately confesses, and Ferneze orders that Barabas be taken away to prison. Within a few moments, Bellamira, Ithamore, and Pilia-Borza succumb to the poison that Barabas had earlier given them, and word arrives that Barabas is also dead; however, he is feigning death. Ferneze orders that Barabas' body be thrown over the wall, outside the city. The rest of the dead are to be buried. Barabas quickly awakes from a deep sleep, which he has induced by drinking "poppy and cold mandrake juice", and leads Calymath's men into Malta through the sewers. Ferneze and his men are taken prisoner and Barabas is appointed Governor of Malta. Barabas, however, is not interested in ruling Malta. He asks Ferneze what he will give him in return for freeing Malta from the Turks. Ferneze promises to collect a large sum of money from all the citizens of Malta. Barabas invites Calymath and his men to a banquet. He then makes provisions for Calymath's men to feast at a monastery. Barabas has made arrangements for the monastery to be blown up with all Calymath's soldiers in it. For Calymath and his Bashaws he has created a gallery with a false floor that will give way when a cable is cut so that all the Turks fall into a boiling cauldron of oil. Ferneze, however, betrays him and cuts the cord so that it is Barabas who falls into the cauldron and is boiled alive. Ferneze then keeps Calymath as a hostage in Malta so that the Turks will not attack the island. The play ends with Ferneze in complete control, Barabas dead and Calymath neutralized.

In this Act Marlowe neatly ties up all the plots of the play. The characters of the sub-plot, main plot and over plot are all taken care off. Students will notice how Marlowe has brought all the plots together; this is one reason that one cannot accept the view that Marlowe was not responsible for writing the entire play. This is an extremely well structured play.

The culmination of Barabas's Machiavellian policy is seen in this Act when he leads Calymath and his men into Malta and is made its Governor. His soliloquy at the point of his greatest triumph underlines all that was popularly conceived to be truly Machiavellian. He knows that he has to maintain the power he has got through the judicious use of policy:

No, Barabas, this must be looked into;
And since by wrong thou got'st authority,
Maintain it bravely by firm policy,
At least unprofitably lose it not.

(5.2. 34-37)

He is not interested in remaining the Governor of Malta and has no intention of ruining Malta for '"Twere slender policy for Barabas/ To dispossess himself of such a place" for it is in Malta "that I have got my goods" (5.2. 65-67). He has no compunctions about betraying the man who has made him the Governor of Malta:

And thus far roundly goes the business.
Thus loving neither, will I live with both,
Making a profit of my policy;
And he from whom my most advantage comes
Shall be my friend.

(5.2. 110-114)

Just when the audience feels with Barabas that the perfect Machiavellian is in control of the situation Marlowe allows Ferneze to turn the tables on him. By connecting the Jew to Machiavelli, Marlowe has simultaneously discredited Machiavelli and satirized Elizabethan England's stereotyped view of this author. It is important to consider one further way of interpreting Marlowe's use of Machiavelli -- there is the possibility that *The Jew of Malta* may be a satire on the underhand methods used by those in, or aspiring to, positions of power. Rather than the *advocate* of either the individualistic pursuit of power or a practical politics devoid of ethical considerations, Marlowe may in fact be their *critic*, who is exposing the corrupt practices of the ruling classes. The machinations of Ferneze would probably support such a reading.

The play ends with Ferneze in control - Barabas is dead, Calymath has been made prisoner. The audience, however, would probably recognize in Ferneze a truer disciple of Machiavelli than Barabas himself.

Check Your Progress

1.Compare Marlowe's play with Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. In what ways are Shylock and Barabas similar? How are they different?

2.Consider the historical events in England in the last half of the sixteenth-century. In what ways do these events influence Marlowe's play, especially the violence of the action?

3. Try to see how the introduction of popular beliefs connected with Machiavellianism which are introduced in the Prologue remains a constant factor in the play.

4. Does the ending of the play reflect prevalent ideas about the commercial enterprise of the period?

5.How does Marlowe use the conventions of the Revenge Tragedy form? Does the play conform strictly to this genre?

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Unit 3
Volpone

Contents:

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit is designed to help you to read the play *Volpone* and relate it to the context in which it was written. With the information provided in this unit you should be able to:

- *situate* this play in the development of British drama towards the end of the Elizabethan period
- *understand* the historical milieu which helped to shape this drama
- *relate* the play to Jonson's ideas of classicism and the results on the stage
- *trace* connections with the important texts of the period
- *sketch* Jonson's stagecraft and its popularity in his time.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Ben Jonson was a contemporary of his illustrious peer, William Shakespeare. The works of these two great playwrights together constitute the multiple trends of the period.

Ben Jonson was born in 1572. His father died before his birth and his mother remarried a master-bricklayer. His early education was at the Westminster school although he could not finish his university education. He is thought to have worked as a bricklayer for sometime, leaving it to engage in active combat in the Netherlands together with the English forces. It is also thought that Jonson came under the influence of William Camden, the famous sixteenth-century antiquarian and scholar, who was headmaster of Westminster School and with whom the dramatist retained an association until Camden's death in 1623.

Before 1598, the year when Jonson's status began its ascent, he worked as a "strolling player" perhaps with a minor drama company. By 1597, his writing of plays which included both tragedies and comedies, took place in association with Philip Henslowe, who was known in the public theatre as an impresario. *Every Man in His Humour* (1598) was Jonson's first major success as a dramatist, helping to establish his reputation.

During this time Sydney and Spenser dominated the literary scene and the University Wits had already started asserting their influence. In Jonson's time plays were meant to be enacted and they were hardly produced in print. Yet in 1616 it was perhaps the strength of his reputation which helped him to publish his plays, masques and poems in a folio which amounted to the publication of a 'complete works'.

Thomas Nashe's incomplete play, *The Isle of Dogs*, was Jonson's first work in collaboration appearing in 1597. It was charged as being seditious and scandalous, leading to his imprisonment. He was released in 1598 and in the same year he published *Every Man in His Humour*, which earned him recognition. Soon after the production of *Every Man in His Humour* he was involved in a quarrel with Gabriel Spencer, whom he killed in a duel. He converted to Roman Catholicism and escaped the full sentence. In the year 1600, he produced *Every Man Out of His Humour* and *Cynthia Revels*. The following year saw the production of *The Poetaster* and his first tragedy *Sejanus*.

Most of Jonson's more important works were produced before the year 1616. These plays include the comedies *Volpone, The Silent Man, The Alchemist, Bartholomew Fair, The Devil is an Ass,* and the tragedy *Catiline*. His masques were produced in the same period. Jonson's career

reached a climax in 1616 with the 'folio' that was published and the pension that was conferred upon him in the same year, the latter fact causing him to be regarded as the first poet laureate of Protestant England.

Jonson died in 1637 and he was buried in Westminster Abbey. His epitaph reads 'O rare Ben Jonson'.

The corpus of Jonson's works includes

Plays: *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), *Every Man out of His Humour* (1598), *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), *Poetaster* (1601), *Sejanus* (1603), *Eastward Ho* (1605, a collaboration with John Marston and George Chapman), *Volpone* (1606), *The Case is Altered* (date unknown, but first published 1609), *Epicoene, or the Silent Woman* (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610), *Catiline his Conspiracy* (1611), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), *The Devil is an Ass* (1616).

Masques: *The Entertainment of the Queen and Prince at Althorp* (1603), *The Coronation Triumph* (1604), *A Private Entertainment of the King and Queen on May-day* (1604), *The Masque of Blackness* (1605), *Hymenaei* (1606), *The Entertainment of the Kings of Great Britain and Denmark* (1606), *Hue and Cry after Cupid* (1608), *The Masque of Beauty* (1608), *The Masque of Queens* (1609), *The Speeches at Prince Henries Barriers* (1610), *Love Freed from Ignorance and Folly* (1610), *Oberon, the Faery Prince* (1611), *Love Restored* (1612), *A Challenge at Tilt, at a Marriage* (1613), *The Irish Masque at Court* (1615), *Christmas, his Masque* (1616), *Lovers Made Men* (1617), *The Vision of Delight* (1617), *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1619), *News from the New World Discovered in the Moon* (1620), *The Masque of Augures* (1621), *The Masque of Gypsies* (1621), *Time Vindicated to Himself, and to his Honors* (1623), *Neptunes Triumph for the return of Albion* (1623), *The Fortunate Isles and their Union* (1624), *Pans Anniversary, or The Shepherds Holy-Day* (1625), *The Masque of Owls at Kenilworth* (1626), *Chloridia. Rites to Chloris and her Nymphs* (1630), *The Kings Entertainment at Welbeck in Nottinghamshire* (1633), *Love's Welcome* (1634).

and other works including *Epigrams* (1612), *The Forest* (1616), (including *To Penshurst*), *A Discourse of Love* (1618), *Barclay's Argenis* (1623), *The Execration against Vulcan with Epigrams* (1640), *Horace's Art of*

Poetry (1640), *Underwoods* (1640) and *Timber*, or *Discoveries, a commonplace book.*

Stop to Consider

Jonson's production of masques is considered to be one of his achievements. M.H.Abrams tells us that it was a form of court entertainment combining the elements of spectacle--splendid costumes, song, dance, and music, and drama as well. A loosely-constructed plot held together all these elements while the ladies and the gentlemen of the court, including royalty itself, wore masques and played the characters. This form drew the best artistic talents of the day, including Ben Jonson (as a writer of the scripts) and Inigo Jones (the architect, who created the scenic stage-effects).

With the coming to power of Puritanism in 1642, the masque went out of existence as a dramatic form. Milton revived the masque in a more serious form as Comus in 1634.

3.3 BEN JONSON AND CLASSICISM

Jonson is regarded as clearly the most learned of all dramatists of Renaissance England. In the 'dedication' to the "Two Famous Universities" which precedes *Volpone*, the play, he describes his own endeavours as a dramatist, to "raise the despised head of poetry again and stripping her out of those rotten and base rags, wherewith the times had adulterated her form, restore her worthy to be embraced and kissed of all the great master spirit of the world".

Jonson's revered ideals stem from his regard for classical antiquity for he justifies his composition by citing examples drawn from among "the ancients themselves". With Elizabethan and Jacobean critics this was almost a prescriptive norm. For him, as a dramatist writing in classical traditions, it is "the office of a comic poet to imitate justice, and instruct to life, as well as purity of language, or stir up gentle affections".

For Jonson the purpose of comedy in classical terms was to 'give delight and mixing sweet and fit, teach life the right'. He tried to recapture the controlled, satirical and realistic comedy of the classical masters by maintaining the purity of genres and avoiding improbabilities. Yet Jonson did not accept traditions which could not serve a contemporary purpose. His didacticism is mostly the result of the influence of the native Morality and Miracle plays. But while he was a follower of the models of the classical masters like Plautus, Terence, and Aristophanes, Jonson modified his

classicism to suit his experience and thus often denied justice to the virtuous and punishment to the vicious.

Classical comedies deal with realism and are far from the improbabilities that have become fashionable in later years. Classicism also advocates strict separation of tragic and comic elements. The object of classical comedy is corrective and satiric. Some human follies are exposed and ridiculed. They do not laugh *with* the people but at them. In *Volpone* virtue is not triumphant even though the evil characters are arraigned.

Although he was for the centrality of plot, in *Volpone*, we have an example of double plot. He modified his characters and ideas wherever he felt the need, though the basic unities conform to the rules. In *Volpone* he has followed the unity of time and place but not the unity of action. But this modified structure is not as much of an irregularity as might be made out because it is finally justified by the balance attained by the play and the deeper sense that vice can be inexorably successful.

Stop to Consider

Classicism and Jonson's Comedy of 'Humours'

Classicism in art and literature means a reference to the period of antiquity of Greek and Roman aesthetic ideals. 'Classicism' in art or literature means that an artist is following the aesthetic ideals achieved in antiquity as he creates an artistic object. In upholding classicism, a writers tries to follow the models and rules which inspired the classical masters, like the writers of ancient Greece and Rome. Art which is inspired by the ideals of antiquity is "classical". Where such art or literature is produced in a later age but is inspired by classical ideals, it is "neo-classical". The distinction is discernible with reference to the contexts in which the terms are being used.

M.H.Abrams, in his *Glossary of Literary Terms*, names the authors of the neoclassic period, Dryden, Pope, Swift, Addison, Edmund Burke, Goldsmith and Johnson, as being "neoclassic" and remarks on their "strong traditionalism" which came with "their immense respect for classical writers" and their "distrust of radical innovation".

Abrams goes on to other neoclassical standards by which literature is regarded primarily as an "art". So the emphasis was not only on the writer's talent but also on the rules and principles of literary composition which the writer must acquire through study and practice.

Jonson is often classified as a critic with neoclassical sensibilities. In his plays we find a classical strain in the effort to maintain the unities of time, place and action. To this end, Jonsonian drama rests less on fantasies than other Elizabethan romantic plays. The setting for action is contemporary London and not any remote far-off realm. In this sense, Jonson's comedy is more realistic. Classical comedy strictly follows the rules of the three unities - unity of time, unity of place and unity of action. This aids the achivement of realism and strictly separates the comic and the tragic. The aim of this literature was corrective and satiric.

What should awaken your curiosity is how Jonson combines in his plays other elements like the ancient theory of 'humours' and the late medieval influence of the morality plays. Jonson's characters were neither exact imitations of Plautus and Terence's static stereotypes of jealous husband or the cunning servant, nor were they the allegorical types of the English Moralities. Drawing upon both traditions, Jonson created figures who combined both these conventions and added to these the ancient theory of 'humours' which categorised human personalities into four different dispositions influenced by the four 'humours' (blood, bile, phlegm and choler).

If you can understand the complexity which Jonson thus aims at you will acknowledge that simply naming Jonson as 'neoclassic' or 'classicist' may be only one restrictive label and may not help us to grasp his version of 'realism'.

3.4 INTRODUCTION TO THE PLAY

Volpone is said to be Jonson's darkest comedy. In the dedication where he addresses the two great universities, Jonson discusses the issues that preoccupy his writing. The 'dedication' gives us a glimpse into the problems of writing for the theatre and Jonson's understanding of the questions surrounding literary production in his time. James Howell wrote on *Volpone*,

> 'The Fox, The Alchemist and Silent Woman,
> Done by Ben Jonson and Out Done by No Man'.

Jonson dwells upon a number of themes in the play. The theme of 'Machiavellianism' is perhaps its most visible concern. Machiavelli's philosophy which is imbued with "amoral cynicism" finds a place in Volpone. Machiavellian traits are perceptible in most of the play's characters, particularly in Volpone, Mosca, Corbaccio, Voltore, Corvino and Sir Politic. The three legacy- hunters are ready to play any trick in order to grab Volpone's wealth. In such instances, we find 'Machiavellianism" in the idea

that a desirable end justifies whatever questionable means are employed to gain it.

SAQ:

1. To what extent can we make a valid comparison between *The Jew of Malta* and *Volpone* in relation to the 'Machiavellian' theme ? (50 words)

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2. Which 'traditions' can be said to have shaped Jonson's comedies ? (30 words)

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Jonson has handled both the plot and the subplot of the play with his usual mastery. For a considerably long time critics failed to establish any significant connection between the main plot of *Volpone* and the subplot represented by Lady Politic Would-be, Sir Politic Would-be and Peregrine. The main plot consists of *Volpone* and his strategies with three legacy-hunters. It ends without being directly connected with the sub-plot or without taking any narrative or structural help. One critic has identified Sir Politic and Lady Politic as the 'parrots' in the inherent beast-fable of *Volpone*. Parrots not only chatter but also mimic. And the Politics mimic the action of the main plot. In doing so, they serve to parody or as the burlesque subplot of traditional English plays thus intensifying the vision of the main plot.

We can discern an interception of the main plot with the subplot in three places of the play. We find Lady Politic joining the group of legacy-hunters in the very first act itself. Then she again appears in Volpone's house when Mosca sends her away by saying that he has seen her husband with a

courtesan. In her final appearance she gives a witness's testimony against Celia. When she comes for Volpone's wealth Mosca sends her away by threatening to expose her secrets.

SAQ:

In which scenes of the play do we see the sub-plot intervening in the main plot ? (40 words)

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What constitutes the action of the subplot in the play ? (25 words)

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How does the main action of the play get reflected in the subplot ? What kind of a 'reflection' is it ? (60 words)

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Both the Politics are at pains to imitate the manners and customs of Venice. While Lady Politic does so in dress and cosmetics, Sir Politic serves as a comic distortion of Volpone. In a sense this serves to intensify the idea of the theatricality - of the mountebank that Volpone also plays. But while Volpone is successful in almost all his attempts Sir Politic can never go beyond the level of talking. Lady Politic joins the legacy-hunters and she is not in anyway different from them. She is jealous like Corvino and compromising like Corbaccio.

The main plot of the play is severe, almost to the point of becoming savage. The subplot serves to lighten up the dark play a little by providing the much needed comic relief. The comments of Sir Politic are foolish, but provide much laughter.

Peregrine is the pilgrim falcon in the beast-fable. Although he is not as violent as the others, he hunts Sir Politic, the parrot. Lady Politic also serves as a contrast to the virtuous Celia. Sir Politic provides a contrast to the characters of the main plot. While the characters of the main plot intrigue at every moment behind a veneer of apparent simplicity, Sir Politic sees intrigue in the simplest things.Thus the subplot serves as a burlesque of the main plot and provides deeper insight into the working of the minds of the characters of the main plot.

Sub plot and the main plot:

Jonson follows the structure of Medieval Morality plays in the use of the subplot. The subplot, apart from providing comic relief, works as a parody of the main plot and symbolically represents the action of the main plot. You will find it useful to study the relationship of the subplot and the main plot for a better understanding of the play. Jonson's classicism is reflected in the way he structures his play. Just recall what he promises the audience in the 'Prologue': that he "presents quick comedy refined, / As best critics have designed".

Jonson incorporates a number of Renaissance concepts into the play, for instance, metempsychosis or the transmigration of the soul. Individual development and quest for knowledge and wealth dominated the Renaissance spirit. In *Volpone*, with the exception of Celia and Bonario, all the characters are in a constant quest for wealth. But their transmigration is the downward journey of the soul, as expressed in the chorus by the three fools. It is not merely the prerogative of Mosca and Volpone to practice role-playing - the three legacy-hunters also play a number of roles and their moral physical and social make up undergo many changes. Like them, the Politics are also subject to a number of reincarnations in the play.

Check Your Progress:

1. Write a note on Ben Jonson's treatment of the theme of avarice in the play *Volpone*.

2. Discuss the function of beast imagery and beast fable in *Volpone*.

3. Discuss *Volpone* as comedy of humours.

The Renaissance:

Renaissance, meaning rebirth, is generally applied to a period of European history following the Middle Ages. It was a period when European, art, architecture and literature reached its eminence. There was a new interest in humanism and classical learning was revived. In religion Martin Luther and others were reacting against the institutionalism of the Roman Catholic Church

3.5 DATE AND TEXT

Ben Jonson's plays were enacted in two different kinds of theatres. *Volpone* was first staged in 1606 by the King's Men at the Globe Theatre on the Bankside. The King's men were the oldest and most successful company of actors in London. They were active since 1572 under various names and assumed the name "King's Men" with the accession of James I in 1603. *Volpone* was repeated twice in the following year when the King's Men were visiting Oxford and Cambridge. In both productions it was immensely successful.

In the absence of artificial light the plays were produced in the afternoon. Because in *Volpone* the time of action was confined to a single day, the sun would be setting in stage time just as it was in real time. A full house consisted of about two thousand spectators ranging from the nobility, who set on boxes or chairs on the sides of the stage, to the lowest priced "groundlings", who stood in what they called the 'pit'. Because the stage protruded quite far out into the 'pit' or 'ground' a good deal of action onstage must have been essentially "in the round". The actors entered and exited through the doors set in the rear wall. There were generally two doors, although some stage directions hint at three - a third one might have been a door on a screen placed onstage. Owing to the lack of scenic props, none of Jonson's plays demand palatial luxury or elaborate visual effect. Female actors were

not allowed on the English stage until the Restoration of 1660. So, in *Volpone* the female characters were played by young boys.

Although *Volpone* was a success it is not clear if Jonson was rewarded for it. The publication of plays was not authentic and the authors hardly profited from it. Jonson was much ridiculed for publishing his **Works** in 1616. English writers were not supposed to have 'Works', because it was a privilege reserved for the Latin writers.

Stop to Consider

Drama is that branch of literature which is meant to be performed. Any study of drama will not be complete without a study of the aspects of performance and stage conventions. It will be useful to study the Elizabethan stage conventions and the play *Volpone* in performance.

You can speculate on what happens in performance when you have a character named 'Fox' (Volpone) on stage, delivering his lines in a particular style in an Italian setting, with gold and riches surrounding him, pretending sickness, abundantly energetic, with deformed dependants and animal-like visitors. How strongly would the Morality-play traditions be recalled by the audience ? How much of the question of morality is highlighted by Jonson's use of names of beasts ? How would this determine the audience's laughter –moral laughter– at a series of actions exposing social behaviour ? Do you think that it is Jonson's classical aesthetic norms which make his play such a great comedy ?

Perhaps it is the awareness of the 'theatricality' of Jonson's comedy which helps us to a better understanding of the historical moment.

3.6 SOURCES

The plot of the play is considered to be Jonson's own. However, the theme of legacy-hunters who prey on the sick and wealthy can be traced back to several classical writers: the *Satyricon* of Petronius, Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, Horace, Juvenal and Pliny. In the *Satyricon* is a passage where a group of voyagers who have been shipwrecked in a strange place, pretend that Eumolpus (one among them) is a rich, childless landowner who then becomes the target of the struggles of local legacy-hunters. In Lucian's *Dialogues*, the legacy-hunters or 'captatores' are often young and lose out to the bequestors.

The Italianate setting of the play is traceable to the fact that the vice of legacy-hunting prevailed in Rome. This specific form of greed and avarice was not something common in Jacobean London society. To that extent, Jonson was not being 'realistic'. However, the play is very 'English' in its perception of Venice as the land of exotic corruption.

The Beast Fable in *Volpone*:

Not only the title of the play, but also the names of the protagonists indicate the inherent beast-fable in Volpone. The fable of the fox is the most remarkable. The central dramatic situation is supported by the fox fable. One of the most famous stories is the story of the fox, who smeared himself with mud and pretended to be dead in order to attract unsuspecting birds of prey. A number of dialogues in the play also allude to the fable. It was from the tale of the death-feigning fox of medieval legend that Jonson drew the mythological substructure of the play. A Latin bestiary from the twelfth century recounts one version of the tale of the hungry fox.

SAQ:

To what extent, do you think, Jonson depends on the beast fable? (20 words)

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the significance of Jonson's adaptation of ancient sources. (30 words)

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3.7 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Volpone was first produced in the Globe Theatre in 1606 and its great success led it on its way to Cambridge and Oxford. The play was hugely successful in both these places so much so that Jonson dedicated the 1607 quarto to these two famous universities.

Volpone continued to be a success through most of the seventeenth century.

The play's criticism first came from Jonson himself. In the preface to the play Jonson seriously considered analysis of *Volpone* while reflecting on the nature of poetry. Later, Dryden wrote his criticism pointing out the disharmony of the last act with the first four acts. But it is only in the twentieth century that Jonson has attracted the critical attention that he deserves.

Jonson as a dramatist follows the classical rules in composition. Regarding the theme of the play, some critics point out that it was influenced by Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*. Volpone's salute to gold is an inversion of Christian values and his description of wealth as "infinite riches in a little room" is also a parody of biblical language.

G. E. Bentley argues in *Shakespeare and Jonson: Their Reputations in the Seventeenth Century Compared* that Jonson was more esteemed and dominant than Shakespeare in the seventeenth century. On the reopening of the English theatres after the Restoration of Charles II, the works of Jonson, Shakespeare and Fletcher formed the hub of the period's repertory, until after 1710.

Stop to Consider

Before the civil war "The Tribe of Ben" touted his importance, and during the Restoration Jonson's satirical comedies and his theory and practice of "humour characters" was extremely influential, providing the blueprint for many Restoration comedies. Even a rather good-hearted comedy, Congreve's *The Way of the World*, arguably the greatest play by the greatest playwright of this age, is to a large extent a reworking of Jonson's *Epicoene*.

Jonson's theory of humours can be understood from what he says in *Every Man Out of His Humour*:

"As when some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man, that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
In their confluctions, all to run one way,
This may be truly said to be a humour."

We should note, however, that Volpone himself does not quite fit into any single humour. He changes shapes according to his needs and desires. The characters, on the whole, can also be seen as being derived from the stock characters of classical comedy, such as in Plautus and Terence.

After this, Shakespeare's plays (ordinarily in heavily revised forms) were more frequently performed. Numerous critics since the eighteenth century have ranked Jonson as next only to Shakespeare among English Renaissance dramatists. Critical opinion has tended to call attention to the very traits that Jonson himself lauds in his prefaces, in *Timber*, and in other scattered prefaces and dedications: the realism and propriety of his language, the bite of his satire, and the care with which he plotted his comedies. For some, the inducement to compare Jonson (representing skill or technique) with Shakespeare (representing nature, or untaught brilliance) is not surprising: Jonson himself set the trend.

John Dryden offered a similar assessment in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesie*, where Neander compares Shakespeare to Homer and Jonson to Virgil: the former represented profound creativity, the latter polished artifice. However, "art" and "artifice" were almost synonymous with each other in the seventeenth century. Lewis Theobald spoke of how Jonson owed his distinction to his art whereas Shakespeare was the natural genius. A consensus of the times seems to have been that Jonson was the first English poet to comprehend classical precepts accurately, and the first to apply these effectively to current times. On the flip side, there were pejorative comments on Jonson's learned art: in the 1750s, Edward Young observed that Jonson's scholarship and skill worked to his own detriment.

The romantic revolution in criticism brought about a general decline of the critical evaluation of Jonson. Hazlitt dismissed Jonson's "laborious caution." and Coleridge portrayed Jonson as psychologically shallow: "He was a very accurately observing man; but he cared only to observe what was open to, and likely to impress, the senses." But he nonetheless appreciated his scholarship, placing Jonson second only to Shakespeare; other romantic critics were less sympathetic. The early nineteenth century saw a tremendous reclamation of Renaissance drama; but Jonson emerged less interesting to many, than writers such as Middleton or Heywood, who were 'discovered'.

Stop to Consider

The store that the romantic writers set by imagination, spontaneity and individual genius led to an attendant propensity to suspect an art that was premeditated, or 'artificial'. This obviously also had a negative impact on Jonson's critical status.

In the next epoch, Swinburne was more attracted to Jonson, "The flowers of his growing have every quality but one which belongs to the rarest and finest among flowers: they have colour, form, variety, fertility, vigour: the one thing they want is fragrance". Jonson still lacked 'spontaneity'.

By the twentieth century, Jonson's corpus was subjected to a variety of analyses, largely in keeping with the interests and agenda of modern literary criticism. In *The Sacred Wood*, T.S. Eliot attempts to reject the accusation that Jonson was a barren classicist via an analysis of the role of imagination in his dialogue. Eliot appreciated Jonsonian conceptions by and large, a scrutiny consistent with the modernist rejoinder against Romantic criticism that had tended to belittle playwrights who did not pander to mandatory representations of psychological profundity.

About mid-century, most critics and scholars followed Eliot's lead, and various comprehensive studies of Jonson's verbal style emerged. Around the same time, the contextual studies of Elizabethan life, times, themes and conventions, such as those by E.E. Stoll and M. C. Bradbrook made available a more vibrant sense of how Jonson's work was fashioned by the prospects of his time.

The explosion of new critical standpoints after mid-century has not touched on Jonson extensively. Jonas Barish was the principal figure in a group of critics that is responsible for Jonson's current reputation and inform perspectives on Jonson's art. Jonson has evoked less interest from the New Critics and his work did not seem conducive to the program of the psychoanalytic critics. It is only for the revived socio-political criticism that Jonson's work eventually became a focal point. Jonson's work, mainly the masques and pageants, present considerable information concerning the relationship between literary production and political power, as do his contact with aristocratic patrons to whom he dedicates several poems; furthermore, his centrality in contemporary London's rising literary world has been seen as typifying the growth of a commodified literary culture. In this respect, Jonson has been seen as an intermediary figure, a writer whose skill, ambition and drive led him to play a principal function both in the waning of patronage and in the intensifying mores of mass consumption.

Check Your Progress

1. Classicism is merely one among diverse influences on Jonsonian comedies. Explain this remark with particular reference to *Volpone*.

2. Caricature is the device by which Jonson accomplishes the exposure of a moral disease in society. Show how Jonson uses this device in *Volpone*.

3. Analyse Jonson's method of using the theory of 'humours' to reveal social realities in *Volpone*.

4. Do you consider the subplot of *Volpone* as an excrescence? Discuss the role they play in the movement of the play.

5. Consider *Volpone* as a morality play.

3.8 ACT-WISE READING OF THE PLAY

Act I

The **Argument** states that Volpone, a childless, rich man pretends infirmity, lies in bed and receives presents from legacy hunters. He assures each of them of his bequests, fooling them all. They devise plots, each luring the other, expose themselves, and all are punished.

The **Prologue** states the playwright's intention of making the play a success according to the prevailing literary tastes, mixing instruction and delight in the right proportions. The prologue draws attention to the composition of the play, affirming the author's originality and the fact that he does not employ cheap devices, but follows the classical tradition in its unity of time, place and action. The prologue is a clever piece of writing, witty and entertaining, and designed to take the audience into confidence.

Stop to Consider

Structure is important to Jonson's dramatic technique. The Prologue is not just an incidental device but allows the author and the audience to connect with the play. It also sets the tone of the play and thus prepares the audience for the action. One of its most important functions was to provide the setting of the play, when technicalities of staging a play were yet to develop.

You should note that we learn of some stage conventions of the day and that Jonson's effort here is to show his awareness of these contemporary practices and yet to define his work by setting it apart from them. (lines 20 -30 of the 'Prologue')

In the opening scene of act I, we find Volpone plotting with his servant Mosca. Volpone regards gold as the soul of the world, his praise of gold presented in terms of religious terminology. He compares gold to a dumb god, who gives man the capacity to speak, the virtue, fame and honour. He rejoices also, in the *manner* in which he acquires gold. Volpone apparently does not have any profession.

Volpone's servants Nano, Androgyno and Castrone provide a comic interlude to entertain Volpone. The reference to Pythagoras, the Greek mathematician, musician and philosopher acquires an important resonance in the play ("The drama of the warping of men's minds is preluded by this quizzical and faintly pathetic display of warped bodies, wedded to the timeless morality theme"). But the interlude is interrupted by the arrival of the property hunters and Volpone quickly adopts the role of an invalid with the help of Mosca.

With the arrival of Voltore the central action of legacy-hunting in the play begins. Voltore, the vulture is one of the three birds of prey who circle around Volpone in greed and expectation. By profession he is a lawyer and does not have any affiliations with the family. Like the other legacy-hunters he is unscrupulous and a cheat. The greed of wealth blurs his vision and he allows himself to be made a fool in the hands of Mosca. He is himself a legacy-hunter, yet he takes bribes from the other two parties and roundly hoodwinks them. Mosca convinces Voltore that he is ahead of the others in the game and Voltore presents a gold plate to Volpone. Before the exit of Voltore another legacy hunter Corbaccio arrives. Corbaccio is older than Volpone and yet ridiculously hopes to outlive Volpone, and inherit his wealth. In the inherent beast fable of *Volpone*, Corbaccio is the crow. He is old, infirm and deaf, a scavenger whose dialogues reflect his own character. Corbaccio also brings a present of gold coins. Mosca refuses to use the medicine that he brings saying that physicians are licensed killers like the judges who have the power to pronounce the death sentence. Corbaccio's visit is macabre in revealing the extraordinary wickedness which seems to be reflected in his own deafness and his senility. Mosca persuades Corbaccio to disinherit his son and make Volpone the heir of his property, so that he can later claim both his own and Volpone's wealth. Volpone and Mosca celebrate their triumph with peals of laughter when he departs. Mosca deals similarly with each of the legacy hunters, making each believe that he alone

is heir to Volpone. Corvino brings a pearl and a diamond for Volpone which Mosca accepts and in turn convinces him it is he that is to receive the legacy. Mosca then gets rid of Corvino by mentioning his wife. Volpone now orders all manner of entertainment to celebrate his possessions. But they have to receive yet another visitor - Lady Would-be, whose endless chatter sickens Volpone, but Mosca resourcefully gets her to retreat hastily saying that he has seen her husband Sir Politic Would-be with a courtesan.

Act I introduces almost all the important characters of the play. The play grows out of a popular Elizabethan beast fable, and the names of the characters retain the trace of their origin. As Volpone and Mosca calculate on their prey, Volpone's worship of gold becomes a parody of religious worship. Each entry in Act I introduces a new character with his traits and tricks.

Jonson's purpose behind the use of the beast fable is fundamentally didactic. Volpone is a man of noble heritage, but constantly the audience is made to see the likeness to a sly fox. Along with his cunning and crafty exterior, the audience can also discern the hidden venom in Mosca. The legacy hunters, who visit Volpone in his deathbed, are all like birds of prey.

The comic interlude performed by Volpone's servants is a parody of the comic relief of the morality plays, and raises vital questions about sexuality, theatricality, disguise and deception that are explored by Jonson throughout the play in various ways.

Volpone is the character central to concerns of the play, beginning the action and the intrigues in the play. Volpone is a Venetian nobleman who lives alone with Mosca and the three fools Nano, Andrgyno and Castrone. Although a nobleman, he shares the same follies and foibles with the fools in his household. They are naturally deformed but he brings about his own deformity himself with an insatiable desire to play tricks on people. His opening speech sets the tone for the rest of the play - he attaches more value to gold than anything else. Apparently, gold becomes his god and he sacrifices himself to his deity. But he is hardly an ordinary miser, and delights not so much in the money but in the manner of acquiring it. His pleasure is in the discomfiture of those he has cozened more than in the money itself.

Stop to Consider

Act I is expository in that it opens the main plot. It is slow but the details it presents regarding Volpone himself are important and decisive for what is to follow.

Observe the symmetry visible in the interlude of Volpone's deformed household inmates, paralleled by the visits of the "birds of prey". Volpone's character is delineated well in this Act.

Volpone and Mosca unleash their plans and set the traps around the legacy-hunters. The weaknesses and greed of the legacy-hunters are also exposed.

Mosca derives his name from a beast fable. His name means a flesh fly and like the other fools in Volpone, he is a parasite in Volpone's house. Although Mosca is not physically deformed like the three fools Nano, Andrgyno and Castrone, he is socially deformed, a fellow of low birth or blood. He is an ally in most of Volpone's tricks. Before the arrival of each legacy-hunter Mosca ensures that his master does not betray the truth. Mosca is also a consummate artist like Volpone and an expert in extempore acting.

SAQ:

1. How does the first Act begin the play's action ? (40 words)

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2. What is the relationship between Volpone and Mosca in Act I ? (40 words)

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Act II

The second act opens in the street, in front of Corvino's house. We are introduced to two new characters Peregrine and Sir Politic Would-be who

open up the sub-plot of the play. Sir Politic is peculiarly particular about mundane matters. He and Peregrine confer about the affairs back in England even as Mosca and Nano set up the platform for Volpone under Celia's window. Peregrine expresses his dislike of mountebanks but Sir Politic regards them as scholarly and great physicians. Volpone appears as Scoto of Mantua and puts up an excellent show. Finally he makes an offer that whoever will throw his handkerchief with six pence will get his oil free. Celia throws her handkerchief and Volpone sees her. An enraged Corvino fails to recognise Volpone, whom he drives away. This episode sets the stage for the later developments of the plot that reveal the foolishness of Sir Politic Would-be.

Volpone is now obsessed with Celia and starts describing his longing for her with great passion. Mosca complements Volpone's performance and assures him that he will try to arrange a meeting with her. Next we see Corvino as the jealous husband who abuses his Celia for becoming an object of lust in most violent and rhetoric terms threatening to thrust a knife into her body for abandoning her chastity. Celia's appeals and reasoning go in vain as he pronounces his ridiculous sentence - the window through which she looked at the mountebank will be closed and she will be subject to the most violent anger if she dares cross a line of chalk that he draws.

And yet Corvino's attitude changes immediately in the next scene. Mosca appears in Corvino's house, not with the news of Volpone's death, but of recovery owing to Voltore and Corbaccio who had given the oil taken from the mountebank. Mosca craftily suggests to Corvino that the physicians advised Volpone to sleep with young girl, and that one of the doctors have offered his virgin daughter. Taking the bait, Corvino immediately offers his wife Celia. Corvino now tries to persuade her to sleep with Volpone and says that he is no longer a jealous husband.

Act II introduces two new characters - Peregrine and Sir Politic Would-be and with them starts the subplot of the play. Lady Politic and Sir Politic are travellers from England, who get involved in the dominant theme of legacy hunting. They exhibit some ingenuity in scheming, but are quite ignorant of Italian ways. The Would-bes are purely 'humorous' characters in the play. Talkativeness is their folly; they mimic the Italian vices in their own way. In the beast fable of Volpone, the Politics can be identified as the 'parrots'.

The Politic-Would-bes, along with Peregrine, are detached from the Venetian setting. Sir Politic is a pompous man who regards himself to be clever and wise but is in reality a dull-witted fool. He serves as foil to Volpone. But while Volpone is adept in stratagems and plots, Sir Politic is only a timid imitator, stupid underneath his knowing exterior.

The action of the main plot now revolves round Corvino, Celia and Volpone. From the earlier focus on lust for gold there is now a shift to lust for the flesh. Volpone's role as a mountebank reveals this side of his character. The two themes are closely interwoven - Volpone is obsessed with Celia and Corvino's possessiveness is truncated by his greed. For Volpone, Celia becomes the obsession and gold now seems secondary.

SAQ:

How do the plans made in Act I unfold in Act II ? (30 words)

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What is Corvino's role in the unfolding of the plot ? (30 words)

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Try to analyse how Celia's presence is important both for the plot and for the moral statement for the play. (40 words)

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Act III

The third act is set on a street of Venice. Mosca is seen singing his own praises, and philosophizing. The scene throws more light on the shrewd

and analytical character and disposition of Mosca. He meets Bonario and tries to incite him against his father Corbaccio; he also informs him that his father has disinherited him and made his 'will' in favour of Volpone and invites him to overhear his father. Bonario, simple at heart, believes Mosca. Volpone eagerly waits at home for Mosca to bring happy tidings, ordering his servants to entertain him. But it is Lady Politic, instead of Mosca who calls, and tortures him with endless chatter on the importance of 'make up'. This sets her in contrast with Celia. Only with the arrival of Mosca is Volpone able to tactfully get rid of her. The scene serves as the proverbial 'lull before the storm' preceding the Celia episode and the main climax of the play.

Mosca hides Bonario in Volpone's house and takes leave to receive Corbaccio. Bonario waits to see what is at stake. But instead of Corbaccio, Mosca finds Corvino with his wife Celia and has to change his tactics. He sends Bonario to a distance and Corvino to Volpone's room. Corvino tries to persuade, request, and threaten Celia to go to Volpone and finally leaves her in Volpone's room. Volpone, impatient, jumps out of his sickbed and tries to lure her with money, jewels and estates. He invokes poetry and alludes to classical literature to strengthen his appeal. But when all means fail, Volpone forces himself on Celia. She screams, Bonario rushes out to help, rescues her and threatens Volpone with exposure.

Volpone and Mosca are now in peril. Corbaccio appears with the will in which he has nominated Volpone as his heir. Mosca informs him that his son Bonario is looking for him with a sword in his hand. Voltore overhears their conversation and charges Mosca who, with superb agility convinces him that he is actually acquiring the property of both Volpone and Corbaccio for Voltore.

Bonario becomes Mosca's victim in this act. Mosca juggles the three legacy hunters with consummate skill. Celia's arrival reveals Volpone's poetic nature as well as his lust. The course of the play changes when Bonario saves Celia and threatens Volpone with exposure. The scene also contains a comic interlude.

Stop to Consider

Act II is important in terms of the plot : try to find out why Mosca's speech in praise of the parasite is placed here. What do you infer from the encounter between Bonario and Mosca ? How does it help us to understand the moral vision of the play ?

The appearance of Lady Politic and insistence on 'make up' is part of Jonson's intended strategy of commenting upon role-playing, deception, and the art of the theatre itself. How does this scene link up thematically with the first scene of the Act ?

Volpone too, mimics, plots, sings and becomes a public entertainer at various points in the play. How does this advance the theme of illusion and reality in the play ?

There is an excellent comic sense in the single-mindedness and simplicity of Volpone's character. Volpone is the 'natural' actor who takes much pleasure in his disguises and gives the impression that he needs neither preparation nor perfection. He is often carried away by his roles and at times he jeopardizes himself. In the Celia episode, Volpone shows his creative side - his love for poetry and classical learning.

He is the poet, the actor, the shrewd schemer and sensualist in the play. There is seductive charm in the poetry that he uses to lure Celia away. He tries to satisfy his lascivious desires with Celia knowing fully well that she is married woman, becoming even bolder when he learns that she belongs to one of his gulls. Gold and trickery are at the centre of Volpone's world and these he is ready to abandon for Celia. So subtle are his tricks that the judges cannot believe that he has done what he is accused of doing.

Mosca lives by his wit, and expertise in flattery. He knows his position in the Venetian world and never attempts to conform. Mosca plays a pivotal part in carrying the intrigues of the play. He is both a devil and a parasite and he takes advantage of both the roles. It is his knavery that sets Bonario against his father and his resourcefulness that comes to the rescue of Volpone many a time.

Stop to Consider

The audience's expectations were raised for the Celia episode. Lady Politic's arrival and her sudden departure make room for the development of the play. But the presence of Bonario blunts the edge of the grotesque Celia episode, for the audience is aware that he is there and will appear just in time.

Act IV

The fourth act opens on the street with Sir Politic lecturing to Peregrine on the Venetian ways of life. Lady Politic arrives and takes Peregrine to be courtesan in man's guise and starts abusing the two. Mosca saves the situation. Voltore, Corvino, Corbaccio and Mosca appear on their way to the court. Voltore, being an advocate, takes the lead and advises the others to maintain consistency in their evidence. Mosca converses with each of them, convincing them of primacy in Volpone's will.

In the court the magistrates are much confused. Bonario and Celia are known for their high integrity. And although Volpone's character is doubtful, he is supposedly an invalid. Voltore in highly rhetorical language turns the whole case upside down. He accuses Bonario and Celia of an illicit relationship. Because Bonario is disinherited by his father and Volpone is made the heir, Bonario hunts for his father. Not finding him he throws out the invalid Volpone from his sick bed and uses Celia, who is his ally, to damage the reputation of Volpone. Corbaccio, Corvino, Mosca and Lady Politic give evidence in the case. Corbaccio disinherits Bonario and Corvino calls his wife a whore. Bonario and Celia are helpless with the odds piled up against them.

Jonson has often been criticized for his failure to develop the characters of Bonario and Celia - they lack the touch of flesh and blood. But the dramatic world of Volpone is characterized by the crooked and the good ones are ineffective, which highlights their sins in a better way.

Bonario is seen to be a good fellow, albeit sentimental and romantic. Celia stands against the wealth of Volpone, she regards her innocence as her greatest wealth. They are both innocent and are perhaps "foolish". They look at the world through the eyes of innocence and seriously misjudge the people around them. Their ideas of human nature are naïve. However, Celia

shows strength at certain moments in the play when she resists the temptation offered by Volpone. Celia does not move forward the plot but it is her presence that triggers off many of the intrigues. Volpone's obsession with her makes him assume various roles.

SAQ:

1. How 'realistic' are Celia and Bonario in the play ? (30 words)

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2. How close, do you think, are Celia and Bonario to Jonson's moral purpose? (40 words)

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Volpone is brought into the court, and Voltore points out his fragile condition– hardly a man in any position to gratify his sexual urges. The magistrates are successfully deceived by the ploy and order the segregation of Celia and Bonario - the plotters go scot-free. Corbaccio pays the fees of the advocate Voltore upon Mosca's reassurance that he will be Volpone's heir.

The subplot reemerges and the superfluity and vain nature of Sir Politic is hinted at. Lady Politic tries her hand in everything and succeeds in nothing. She mimics the Italian ways of life imperfectly and makes herself ridiculous. She becomes tool in the hands of Mosca who uses her as witness against Celia. Mosca, in comic justice, turns her unceremoniously out of the house with a threat to reveal her compromising secrets. She is important in the play as an alter ego of Celia. Unlike Celia she needs cosmetics to hide her rotten self. The climax begins and Mosca once again proves his ingenuity by his ability to handle three legacy-hunters.The functioning of the court is bitterly mocked.

Stop to Consider

The crisis that Volpone and Mosca faced in the previous act out for their own advantage. The turn of action is again in their control. It raises the audience's expectation once again. The audience is now prepared for the final action of the play.

Act V

Volpone is in a mood of exultation and must achieve more. The success of their dupery spurs on Volpone to newer heights. This is the mood in which he now takes a swig or two. The exchange with Mosca shows this sense of bloated achievement even as a new plan unfolds. For Volpone now asks Nano and Castrone to spread the news that Volpone is dead. As planned by Volpone, Mosca now takes on the part to disappoint all those who had hoped to inherit Volpone's wealth. Voltore is the first to arrive to claim his share of wealth, followed soon by Corbaccio, Corvino and Lady Politic. Playing his role to the hilt, with much satisfaction, Mosca does not pay attention to them, as he turns on each visitor showering disappointment on them by announcing that Volpone had left all his wealth to him.

He threatens and dismisses Lady Politic who has also come to claim her share by saying that he will reveal certain matters to her husband. He tells Corbaccio to pull out the only tooth left in his mouth and ridicules him for disinheriting his son in the hope of outliving Volpone. He dismisses Voltore by saying that he has an excellent gift of gab. He asks him to take consolation from his legal knowledge. Mosca says that his master has made him the heir but he never went seeking it. He asks him to execute his master's will. After everyone has left, Volpone comes out from behind the curtain and embraces Mosca for his excellent performance.

Overreaching himself and desiring to torment his victims more Volpone, with Mosca's help, takes on the guise of a commandantor. Mosca also takes the guise of a Venetian nobleman. The story takes another twist at this point. It is now Mosca's turn to be seized by greed and he decides to keep Volpone in the guise of the sergeant for the rest of his life having already spread the news of his death. With this aim he dismisses the three servants and takes control of the house.

In the subplot, Peregrine looks for a chance to revenge himself against Sir Politic Would-be. Disguised, and along with three other merchants, Peregrine

informs Sir Politic that his utterance that he will sell the City of Venice to the Turks is reported to the Senate, and that warrants have been issued in his name. Sir Politic gets nervous and hides himself in a tortoise shell. Peregrine and his companions jump over it, ride it and their revenge complete, reveal themselves. Sir Politic, humiliated, decides to leave Venice.

SAQ:

To what extent does Jonson abide by the rules of comedy in showing 'poetic justice' ? (40 words)

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In scene IV, Corbaccio and Corvino talk among themselves that they cannot alter their testimony in the court for reasons of their own security. Volpone in the guise of a commandator, arrives and congratulates them for the fortune they had acquired. They are irritated but Volpone impertinently tells them that they are trying to hide their fortune. When they move away Voltore appears cursing Mosca. Volpone congratulates Voltore too, and asks him for some favour. But Voltore, who has got nothing but humiliation, rebukes Volpone and moves away. Volpone again turns to Corvino and Corbaccio as Mosca is shown walking across the stage and asks them if the rumours about the parasite are true. He wonders how a wise old man like Corbaccio could be fooled by a servant and ridicules Corvino for publicly revealing his wife's adultery and thereby losing both her and the property. Voltore warns Mosca that his fortune is not going to last longer. Mosca ridicules him in return and Volpone arrives to torment him.

In scene V, Voltore comes to the court and confesses all, saying that everything was a conspiracy by Mosca; but Corvino and Corbaccio contradict him and insinuate that he is of unsound mind. The much confused court asks Mosca to appear in the court. Volpone is worried having seen that the lawyer is to expose him. He also becomes aware of Mosca's crookedness, but hopes that he will not harm him. Volpone, still disguised

as a sergeant informs Voltore that Volpone is still alive and that he can still be his heir. Voltore regrets damaging the case, but pretends that he was possessed by a devil, and creates a scene, so that whatever he has already said is nullified. But when Volpone approaches Mosca and reveals to the court that Volpone is alive, Mosca takes the opportunity and demands half of Volpone's wealth. Volpone denies this, and so Mosca complains to the magistrate who orders the officials to whip him. Volpone cannot stand the thought of Mosca getting his property and marrying the magistrate's daughter while he, Volpone,is whipped. He throws away his disguise and the game is up.

In this act we often see Mosca getting nasty with his master, taking the opportunity to make some monstrous onslaughts on Volpone's character, though not without a grain of truth. He later becomes a victim of greed and his future becomes uncertain. But perhaps the strongest trait in Mosca's character is his flexibility. He can switch between various roles with complete ease and perfection. Before the justice of the court, Mosca delivers comic justice to all the sinners. Although he is vulnerable to greed, he defeats almost everything but is finally defeated by fate.

SAQ:

1. Do you think that Mosca overtakes Volpone as protagonist in the later acts of the play ? (40 words)

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2. Assess the character of Volpone in the last act. Do you think that there is a rapid, satiric reduction ? (20 + 30 words)

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The court orders Mosca to be whipped and sent to the galleys. Volpone's wealth is confiscated and he is sent to prison. Voltore is debarred from his profession. Corbaccio is sent to a monastery to learn to die well. His spiritual condition is reflected in his physical condition. The old man ridiculously hopes to outlive Volpone to inherit his wealth. In his avarice he knows neither his failing faculties nor his old age. Greed dominates his character more than anything else. In terms of Mosca's comic judgment he is the one who is punished the most. In the court of law too, he receives censure. Celia and Bonario are set free. Corvino was ordered to return three times the dowry Celia has brought and send her to her father's house, and he was ordered to wear a cap with donkey's ears and the word 'cuckold' to be written on a paper and pinned to his breast. Thus he is to be rowed across the canals of Venice and then set free.

This act reveals Volpone's overreaching of himself, and the imminent doom. Peregrine's punishment of Sir Politic symbolically represents the final justice of the main act that has come. But Voltore's reappearance in the court and Mosca's duplicity undoes his plans. He is left with no choice but to reveal everything about everyone, which leads to their subsequent punishment.

The scenes confirm the devilish ingenuity of Mosca and Volpone. The scenes of the first act are short and brisk. They build up and reveal the frustration and disappointment of the legacy hunters. Confusions and chaos rule the court scenes. There are arguments, counter-arguments and conflicting versions given in the court. Voltore's change of heart is not a work of conscience but results from his hope of punishing Mosca and exposing Corvino and Corbaccio.

Check Your Progress

1. "…in *Volpone* satire becomes sultry poetry and diabolical humour." - Consider Volpone as a satire.

2.How does the Celia - Volpone episode effect the spirit of comedy?

3. Analyze Jonson's treatment of Celia in *Volpone*. Why do you think that she is the only character who escapes satire in the play?

4. How do Nano, Androgyno and Castrone figure in Jonson's scheme of things? Would you say that the author is making some kind of comment on deformity/ Tran sexuality?

5. Would you be able to trace the references to play-acting/ theatre/ role-playing/ disguise/ deception as Jonson's comment on the theatre of the time, and its mechanisms?

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Institute of Distance and Open Learning
Gauhati University

MA in English
Semester 2

Paper X
Drama I

Block 2
Shakespeare's Play

Contents:

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Block Introduction:

This block presents to you four plays by Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Henry V, Much Ado About Nothing* and *The Tempest*. A most important function of this block is to take you on a guided tour of 'Shakespeare-country'. As on every meaningful guided tour, what is pointed out are the special features and the correct perspectives on this uniqueness. Shakespeare's works are the products of, as well as the participants in, a particular history. This kind of historicisation is necessary for us to understand the range of meanings any text contains. Beyond that, there are many 'timeless' meanings that we must be alert to. If you pay correct attention to this block of your study material, then you will catch all these notes, major and minor, in the Shakespearean plays.

As with the entire series of blocks in your course, the study material must be read alongside with the text. Even while knowing that the text of a play is strictly a performance-text, for your course of study, reading the text is of prime importance. Shakespeare wrote, famously, for the stage. It is almost legendary knowledge that he even adapted lines to suit his players. In order to grasp this necessary dimension of Shakespeare's works, your knowledge of Elizabethan theatre and English history should be complete and reliable. Moreover, knowledge of the entire corpus of his works will help you to note the finer adaptations and changes or developments of his ideas. The material offered here takes all these questions into account. In order that you make the best use of this study material, give a preliminary reading to your text and then return to it after having compared the text with what our block gives you.

Merely knowing the date of the play, or the names of the characters, or the sequence of events (the story), the meanings of words, or the references to events and people 'outside' the play, will not help you to grasp the total meaning of any play. Had that been the case, any cheap 'guide' to be bought in the market would be enough for you to score high marks in the examinations. A literary work can also be read creatively, with a deeper philosophical grasp. In our study material we aim to bring this purpose to you. Your reading then becomes much richer making connections which constitute the underlying foundations of the text. This is what makes a Shakespearean play so enriching an experience of reading.

The Self-Assessment Questions (SAQ) guide you to probe those smaller but important aspects of the text without understanding which your reading of the play will be only superficial. All in all, our study material is not a collection of items which you can gather on your own from diverse sources. It is a 'guide', in the best sense of the word, which leads you up and down the truly 'literary' path of the sensitive reader or student. Again, it does not pretend to be encyclopedic in its coverage because the serious student of literature must always read history, philosophy, sociology, political theory and aesthetic theories parallel with the given texts in order to understand the connections between literature and the rest of the intellectual universe.

Contents of Block 2

Unit 1
A General Introduction to Shakespeare

Contents:

1.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit is designed to provide a general introduction to Shakespeare that should help you to understand and appreciate the plays in their Elizabethan and Renaissance context.

With the help of this unit you should be able to

- trace the unique intellectual climate in which the plays were written and how they 'work' as drama
- *develop* a sense of Elizabethan theatrical convention
- *obtain* an overview of the forms of drama Shakespeare wrote
- *define* the concept of 'character' in the Shakespearean play.
- *connect* the themes to contemporary issues that are repeated in several plays, and
- *read* the plays more productively and creatively using the information provided with a sensitive understanding of their complexity and resonances.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare is the kind of writer who is fruitfully read in his time and as one who transcends that time, and it will be my effort in this conversation with you to draw upon resources from both ends of the Renaissance experience

- the reception of the plays in the Elizabethan age, their links with politics and society of the time, their uniquely Elizabethan/ English Renaissance ethos; as well as our reading of the period and the playwright from our own time. In other words, it will be interesting to see how our immersion in our own time and context influences our access to Shakespeare's age and how we therefore **ideologically construct** it to suit our theatrical and readerly expectations. Or, what is even more challenging, to use it as a political tool as the colonialists did in India. This approach, I hope, will help you to appreciate and understand why Shakespeare has always been such a central figure, not only in the history of English culture, but in the dissemination of that culture abroad.

At the same time you will acknowledge that when we speak of reading Shakespeare against the Elizabethan / English Renaissance background our access to that area is only through textual representations, and for that matter, the most powerful and influential textual representations. For example, you may be familiar with certain conceptions about the English Renaissance that are based on order or harmony expressed variously as 'the great chain of being,' 'the golden mean,' 'the music of the spheres' or 'the Elizabethan World Picture.' In confronting these ideas it is useful to bear in mind the fact that such ideas, while not absent in the time, have been selected and given a special degree of importance in the construction of the English Renaissance, and in Shakespeare's response and negotiation of them, by motivated readers and critics who have read the period from the vantage point of their time, place and political preoccupations. When you look at the various 'Shakespeares' that have been constructed under different kinds of ideological compulsions I think you will appreciate this point better.

What do I mean by the **construction of Shakespeare?** In fact the term construct is likely to appear frequently in any critical essay on a literary text. So what does it mean here?

'Construct' is a term that has crept into language use as a result of our awareness of the willed (voluntary) nature of our thought, of the recognition that the supposed 'naturalness' of an artistic work is actually the result of a great deal of deliberation and care and hard work.

As examples of such constructions of Shakespeare you might consider 'Shakespeare our Contemporary', 'political Shakespeare' or 'postcolonial

Shakespeares'. (Constructs that represent the governing ideas of a time, these are also the titles of important path-breaking books on Shakespeare.)

The second term I wish to draw your attention to is 'context'. Why is this concept so important for us? I use the word not only to refer to the Elizabethan background that this unit seeks to bring before you but also to the fact that as readers we read from our own time and intellectual preoccupations. For example we might discover that Elizabethan culture was a 'listening' culture and therefore it is possible to find in the plays innumerable references to ears, to eavesdropping, to characters urging one another or the audience to listen. However our interest in this may be propelled by

a) a political climate where an authoritarian regime intrudes into the private lives of its citizens (as shown in Jan Kott's *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*) or

b) our post- 9/11 recognition of listening to the 'other' as a moral imperative.

1.3 SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

The first extant reference to Shakespeare is as the member of a theatrical troupe (The Lord Chamberlain's Men). Shakespeare, along with William Kempe and Richard Burbage, signed a receipt for the company's honorarium of 20 pounds. There is very little definite information but the traces that are available make extremely intriguing reading. Shakespeare acted in 1598 in Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* and in 1603 in *Sejanus*. We also learn from what the *Cambridge Companion* calls "traditions of uncertain reliability" that Shakespeare played "kingly parts" and that he also played the faithful old servant Adam in *As You Like It* and the Ghost in *Hamlet*. We do know for sure that Shakespeare served his troupe in a triple capacity: as playwright, actor and business director.

The story that has been built up from these and similar scanty sources tells us that Shakespeare's grandfather, Richard, farmed land near the market town of Stratford-upon-Avon, about ninety-six miles north-west of London. His father, John, was a successful landowner, moneylender and dealer in wool and other agricultural goods. His mother, Mary Arden, was the daughter of a prosperous farmer from the same area.

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564. He had three younger brothers and two younger sisters.

About his education there is some information. Though Stratford was a small provincial town it had long been the site of a free school established by the church in the thirteenth century. The main purpose of such schools had been to train clerics but in the 16th century the situation changed. Protestantism, with its rejection of the mediation of the church for individual worship, placed great emphasis on lay literacy: for the sake of salvation it was necessary to be acquainted with the Holy Bible which, thanks to printing, was now easily available. Schools became less bound up with training for the church and more linked to the acquisition of general literacy and cultural knowledge. In keeping with these views the free school in Stratford was reorganized during the reign of Edward VI (1547-53) and renamed the King's New School. And it is almost certain that Shakespeare attended this school.

At the centre of the curriculum was the study of Latin and Shakespeare's texts often carry echoes of many of the great Latin texts taught there - Plautus and Seneca in *The Comedy of Errors* and *Titus Andronicus*. Shakespeare also seems to have been particularly fond of Aesop's *Fables*, Apuleius's *Golden Ass* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ben Jonson's comment that Shakespeare had 'small Latin and less Greek' appears in a new light in the face of such evidence.

There are some traces of Shakespeare's life as a family man. In 1582, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. Their first daughter Susanna was baptized six months later. On February 2, 1585 the twins Hamnet and Judith were baptized in Stratford.

Shakespeare was also a man of property. Evidence of this aspect of his life is found in records of assessments, small fines, real estate deeds, and minor actions in court to collect debts. He had a fine house in Stratford with a large garden and cottage facing it. At some point after 1610 Shakespeare seems to have begun shifting his attention from the London stage to his Stratford properties. By 1613, when the Globe Theatre burned down during a performance of *Henry VIII*, Shakespeare was probably residing in Stratford, though he retained his financial interest in the rebuilt playhouse.

In February 1616, on the occasion of the wedding of his daughter Judith, Shakespeare appears to have fallen ill. A Stratford physician and vicar noted

fifty years later in his diary that Shakespeare and his fellow poets Michael Drayton and Ben Jonson "had a merry meeting, and it seems drank too hard, for Shakespeare died of a fever there contracted".(Shakespeare's daughter Judith was still alive when Ward made his diary entry).(Source: *The Norton Shakespeare*)

1.4 OVERVIEW OF THE PLAYS

While you will, of course, study the plays prescribed for you in detail it is necessary to have a brief overview of the kinds of plays Shakespeare wrote and a list of the plays for easy reference or for comparison when you wish to do that, or simply to read them as further examples of Elizabethan drama.

Shakespeare began his career probably in the early 1590s by writing both comedies and histories.

Richard III (the final play of the first tetralogy or group of four history plays that covers the reigns of Henry VI and Richard III) showcases his unusual and powerful talent in the depiction of a brilliantly conceived central character, a command of histrionic rhetoric and a moral vision of English history - elements that he will go on to elaborate and explore memorably in the later histories.

The Comedy of Errors, one of his early efforts, displays what was to become his characteristic sense of comedy: mistaken identity, confusion and the threat of disaster give way in the end to reconciliation, recovery and love. His other comedies from this early period, *The Taming of the Shrew, The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Love's Labour's Lost* are all sophisticated variations on familiar comic themes but also present in the midst of festive celebration, a poignant sense of loss.

Shakespeare's achievements in the late 1590s and up to 1602 is marked by dramatic masterpieces like *A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night* - plays remarkable for their poetic richness and emotional intensity.

In the same period he also wrote the history plays, we now call the second tetralogy - *Richard II, 1 & 2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* - which together explore the end of feudal England and the birth of the modern nation-state.

Simultaneously, he was also exploring the genre of tragedy. In 1593, he wrote the crude and violent *Titus Andronicus*. In *Richard II* he presents a king who is also a tragic figure. And he tries his hand at a romantic tragedy in *Romeo and Juliet*. However it was in the years between 1601 and 1607 that he wrote the great tragic plays, *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* which mark a major shift in sensibility and show a sense of the darkness, depth and anguish of human life. At the same time there is also a discernible shift in his comic sensibility. The comedies written between 1601 and 1604, *Troilus and Cressida, All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* are biting in tone, uneasy with comic conventions, questioning of the values of the characters and the resolutions of plots. They have been commonly called the 'dark comedies'.

In the final years of his career between 1608 and 1611 Shakespeare wrote the plays that came to be called the 'romances' - *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest.* These plays are concerned with patterns of loss and recovery, suffering and redemption, and despair and renewal.

It is possible to see a distinct pattern connecting the plays if you see them in the order in which they are briefly discussed above. There is evident progress from youthful exuberance and a heroic grappling with history (the comedies and the histories); through psychological anguish and radical doubt (the tragedies and the dark comedies); to a mature serenity built upon an understanding of loss (the romances).

(Source for overview: Stephen Greenblatt's General Introduction to *The Norton Shakespeare*)

List of plays

Comedies:

The Two Gentlemen of Verona
The Taming of the Shrew
The Comedy of Errors
Love's Labour's Lost
A Midsummer Night's Dream
The Merchant of Venice
The Merry Wives of Windsor
Much Ado About Nothing
As You Like It

Twelfth Night or What You Will
Troilus and Cressida
Measure for Measure
All's Well That Ends Well
The Two Noble Kinsmen

Histories:

Henry VI (The First part of the Contention of the Two Houses of York and Lancaster).
3 Henry VI (The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York and the Good King Henry the Sixth).
1 Henry VI
Richard III
Richard II
King John
1 Henry IV
2 Henry IV
Henry V
Henry VIII

Tragedies:

Titus Andronicus
Romeo and Juliet
Julius Caesar
Hamlet
Othello
Timon of Athens
King Lear
Macbeth
Antony and Cleopatra
Coriolanus

Romances: (also known as the last plays)

Pericles
The Winter's Tale
Cymbeline
The Tempest

Poetry:

Venus and Adonis
The Rape of Lucrece
The Sonnets
A Lover's Complaint

1.5 INTELLECTUAL CONVENTIONS

Intellectual convention refers to the predominant habit of mind or mode of thinking that is characteristic of a given period. It must be distinguished from merely individual habits of thinking. The modes of thinking delineated in this section will be found in all the writers of the period of the Renaissance. Here we try to identify it in Shakespeare's usage.

The prevailing intellectual mode during the period of the English Renaissance was the **analogical**. The analogical habit of mind involved **correspondences**, **hierarchies** and **microcosmic-macrocosmic relationships**. Man as microcosm was thus a mediator between himself and the universe, and knowledge of one element in the microcosm-macrocosm analogy was knowledge of the other. What this meant was a unified theory of the human imagination with poets and scientists seeking to discover the harmonious, ordered and interrelated universe.

In the Shakespearean theatre, analogy, in this sense a momentary leap between levels, correlated the disparate planes of earth (the stage), hell (the cellarage), and heaven (the 'heavens' projecting above part of the stage). And lines spoken on this stage often allude to the universe, to the state or body politic, to the family, and to the microcosmic individual - all of which you see in Shakespeare's resonant, layered writing. So for example, sinful predisposition, marked by pride, predominance of passion over reason and neglect of degree, was outwardly analogous to political disorder and the decay of nature.

SAQ

1. How do technical details like the structure of a stage or the theatre help to give visual effect to a controlling idea like 'analogy' ? (50 words)

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2. How would you understand ideas of 'plenitude', 'hierarchy', and 'continuity' in a contemporary (not in a Renaissance) sense ? (50 words)

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Shakespearean analogy ordered the world's diversity through such principles as **plenitude** (that the universe, created by God out of nothing, was to be populated through all possible kinds); hierarchy (each creature, in accordance with distance from divine perfection, had an allotted position, observing degree, priority and place); and **continuity** (regular progression in the universal chain of being).

In addition to cosmic correspondences, analogical thinking implied hierarchy and order in the political realm. Proceeding from the idea of God as ruler of the macrocosm to the idea of the monarch as ruler of the political world, argument by correspondence had evident royalist implications. This mode of argument led to the analogy of the body politic that corresponded to the human body whose heart or head corresponded to the king and whose lower members resembled the lower members of the social organism. As the body obeyed the soul, and the world the Creator, the subjects were to obey the king. This habit of mind also implied a need for belief - see for example, Hamlet's need to trust the Ghost.

While the analogical mode of thinking was important, there were also elements in Elizabethan writing that pointed to a breakdown of this tradition. Theologically, in the later 16th century, divine providence seemed increasingly to be questioned. In place of a special providence, capricious Fortune and personal power were reemphasized by Machiavelli and other Renaissance writers. Further, the Reformers on the one hand and skeptics like Montaigne on the other, showed a deity who was beyond comprehension. Montaigne helped demolish man's own self-image that put him above the beasts as specially created and favoured.

SAQ

1. Can you find any reasons for the breakdown in traditional ways of thought in the Renaissance ? (40 words)

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2. How important was the skepticism of thinkers like Machiavelli and Montaigne during the period ? (50 words)

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To turn to philosophical contexts, the Renaissance epistemological crisis emphasized the notion of the relativity of perception, recalling the appearance-versus-reality motif recurring throughout Renaissance drama and calling attention also to the manifestation of theatrical illusion. (The separation of reality from illusion, truth from hallucination is the task set Hamlet by the Ghost).

An area of interest within this relativity of perception is the relation of language and reality exemplified in Hamlet's "Words, words, words" (2.2.191) or in its manipulation in Falstaff's celebrated speech on 'Honour' (*1 Henry IV*, 5.1.131-40). Extensions of the idea may also be seen in Lear's discordant babble as madman, beggar and Fool or in Macbeth's "tale told by and idiot" (5.5.26-8).

Relativism inhered too in the Renaissance mingling of contradictory and disparate Christian and non-Christian currents. In such doctrines as the Creation, for example, along with the idea of creation by divine design Renaissance thought also affirmed creation from pre-existing chaos.

Philosophical values were also disturbed as seen in the dissolution of ethical absolutes and natural law. What is in one context a virtue might in another be a vice (You would see this in a play like *Measure for Measure* in the variety of opinions expressed on the crime of Claudio and Juliet by characters belonging to the very different worlds of the court, the nunnery, the streets or the brothel).

SAQ

Would you agree that the rise of 'relativism' implies a decline in orthodoxy? (50 words)

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Elizabethan political views were also in a process of change. The monarchic analogy with God was weakened and human weakness argued against mankind's earlier unique state, just below the angels. In fact the premises of Elizabethan political thought were themselves paradoxical, being based at once on the divinity and mortality of the king. Divinely enthroned he is also elected, his power being drawn from Parliament or the people. The monarch could not be usurped, but if he were, the usurper himself could not be replaced, for the orderliness of the commonwealth had priority. These contradictory attitudes are seen in the dramatic ambivalences of the second tetralogy which begins with the deposition of Richard II by the usurper, Bolingbroke, who became Henry IV.

For Machiavelli and Machiavellianism, worldly politics were shaped by the will, desire, cunning and energy of man. Machiavelli's relativistic view that the interests of the state supersede principles of morality was a recognized political notion of the later 16th century. Shakespeare explores the idea of Machiavellian policy frequently in his plays and his Henry V, seen as the ideal king, appears an adept practitioner.

Among the most important evidences of Renaissance relativism is the transformation of the traditional geocentric Ptolemaic universe to the Copernican heliocentric one (You might wish to look up in *King Lear*, Lear's shocked discovery of a universe indifferent to his welfare). Richard Burton in *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (on Renaissance thought) asks, regarding a plurality of worlds and their possible inhabitants: "are we or they lords of the world, and how are all things made for man?"

Other disturbing developments included the recognition that corruption and mutability affected not only the sublunar but also the supralunar universe. In

1572, a bright new star or nova appeared (followed by others in 1600 and 1604) and then slowly disappeared, an event interpreted as showing the impermanence even of the cosmos.

As these doubts crept into Renaissance thought, dread of the hereafter, the impossibility of meaningful action, and uncertainty about life on earth and human relationships seem to have become the areas of concern for Renaissance dramatists who repeatedly figured the world as stage and man as actor in temporary, borrowed and often ill-fitting costume, strutting and fretting his meaningless hour.

For the tensions of his age, Shakespeare's drama provided an appropriate conflict structure: a dialectic of ironies and ambivalences, avoiding in its complex movements and multi-voiced dialogue the simplifications of direct statement and reductive resolution. The theatrical form itself allowed such internalizing of conflicts. For example the questioning of identity inherent in the plays might be mirrored in the actor's assumed role as actor, as well as in his changes of costume. Renaissance ethical problems could be reflected in the necessity, within the dramatic action, of the actor's having to decide on doing one thing or another - often involving moral choice. Renaissance epistemological crisis might be evoked through the emphasis on illusion and appearance-versus-reality of the theatrical setting itself as well as through juxtaposition of scenes.

Manipulating all these diverse attitudes Shakespeare achieved an integrated, yet complex and multifaceted, dramatic form. (Source: *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies*).

"Irony" and "ambivalence" express the unreliability of texts. Since "irony' exposes the gap between apparent meanings and underlying intentions (of descriptions, dialogues, narrations, etc.) it can thus show signs of intellectual or emotional conflict. Similarly, ambivalence expresses uncertainty regarding allegiance to any single strain of thought.

You can understand 'dialectic' by seeing how all the diversity of conflicting strands of thought are brought together in any single textual example. 'Dialectic' thus means the bringing together of opposing or widely differing criteria.

Note how the analogical habit of mind seems to be a common feature in the sense that you get of the Shakespearean drama, but is frequently subverted

by the relativist bent of mind, by the disjuncture between language and reality, by the dissolution of absolutes and the breakdown of earlier conceptions of politics based on the maintenance of the analogy between king and God.

Try and see if you can identify, in the plays prescribed for you, the intellectual conventions mentioned above. Give yourself a little exercise: How do these ideas balance out in the four Shakespearean you are studying ?

Check Your Progress

1. What is meant by intellectual convention? Explain with the help of examples taken from any play prescribed for your study.
2. What is the "analogical habit of mind" and what does it involve? What are the main principles of the analogical mode? Take the example of a passage from one of the prescribed plays and show how it appears as an explanation of the characters' situation.
3. What is the relativistic habit of mind? How does it differ from the analogical? Support your answer with textual illustrations.
4. How does relativism affect philosophy, language and the understanding of reality? Illustrate your answer with textual references.

1.6 THEATRICAL CONVENTIONS

You will agree that while a drama represents people in action on the stage it is impossible to depict that action 'realistically'. Therefore, from the very beginnings of dramatic performance there has been a tacit agreement among the dramatist, the actors and the spectators that certain kinds of props or indicators would be understood to mean specific things. These conventions varied from age to age. The theatrical language of Shakespeare's time differed from that of our own time though certain conventions like the *soliloquy* or the *aside* or *impenetrable disguise,* continue in use despite presenting difficulties in realistic terms. But generally the conditions of performance - daylight in Shakespeare's theatre, the darkened auditorium and the lighted stage in our own - varied enough to affect interpretation.

The stage conventions taken for granted by Shakespeare and his audience were linked to the physical characteristics of the Elizabethan stage. Whether

at the Theatre or the Globe or the Blackfriars, Shakespeare's plays were presented on a large platform stage to an audience on three (perhaps four) sides. Large properties like beds, scaffolds (for executions) and bars (for courtroom scenes) had to be carried onto the stage in full view of the audience.

The players could not resort to variable lighting - the play was performed either in daylight or in candle light - and the depiction of night for example, had to be indicated through actors carrying a taper or wearing a nightgown. (Although Shakespeare could not bank on variable lighting, night and darkness play an important role in many of his plays (See Hamlet's "Tis now the very witching time of night' - 3.2.373). In fact an Elizabethan dramatic company would have used dialogue, torches, nightgowns, groping in the dark, and failures in 'seeing' - all presented in full light - to establish the illusion of darkness for a viewer, who would infer night from such signals and stage behaviour.

Similarly you will note how change of locale was indicated by marching about the stage or by means of dialogue.

A major key to the shared sense of theatre lies in the active role demanded of the audience and the Prologue to *Henry V* provides a compelling representation of this jointly produced effect. Shakespeare's spokesman in the Prologue apologizes for the limits of 'this unworthy scaffold' in conveying 'so great an object' as Agincourt; still the players can 'on your imaginary forces work' if the viewers are willing to 'suppose'. To 'make imaginary puissance' by dividing one man into a thousand parts, to 'think, when we talk of horses, that you see them/Printing their proud hoofs i' th' receiving earth', in short to 'piece out our imperfections with your thoughts'.

The Chorus in Act III of the same play pleads with the audience to 'suppose', 'behold', 'do but think', 'grapple your minds', 'work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege', and finally, 'still be kind,/ And eke out our performance with your mind.'

Before the battle of Agincourt, the Chorus to Act IV apologizes in advance for disgracing the great event 'with four or five most vile and ragged foils,/ Right ill-disposed in brawl ridiculous', but asks the audience: 'Yet sit and see,/ Minding true things by what their mock'ries be.'

These three instances from *Henry V* of the expectation of the imaginative participation of the audience is an essential ingredient in the staging and stage conventions of Shakespeare's time.

We might also look at an example from the stage directions that call for a character to enter *as from torments, or as from tilting etc*. "As from" stage directions represent an essential part of the strategy for using the Elizabethan open stage, building upon a few clear signals and the actor's ability to convey a recently completed or continuing action. What results is theatrical shorthand for the audience, providing a sense of a busy real world just off stage. Absence of sets and fluidity of staging also led to the emergence of a theatrical shorthand linked to costume and portable properties. Female figures regularly appeared with their hair disheveled to indicate madness or extreme grief (Ophelia in *Hamlet*). To indicate a journey recently completed or about to be undertaken, a figure might enter in boots. This principle whereby a dramatist relies upon a spectator's imagination to transform a part into a whole is particularly worth noting.

Understanding Convention

You might understand theatrical conventions if you reflect for a moment on the many cinematic conventions you accept unthinkingly - sitting in a darkened auditorium, watching figures larger than life especially in close-ups, projected on a flat screen and seen through camera angles that often do not correspond to our normal viewing range; and listening to voices booming around you in stereophonic sound, accompanied by music from a full orchestra.

An acceptance of Elizabethan stage conventions is a necessary step in understanding the complexity and sophistication of Shakespeare's plays.

Theatrical conventions like intellectual conventions are shared elements of a particular period. We frequently speak about Shakespeare's "originality". But to get a sense of the truly "original" in his plays it is important to understand that a great deal of the structure and mode of dramatic communication comes from these shared practices. Just as Shakespeare transformed commonly known narrative sources to write his great dramas, he relied on commonly used and recognized cues and signs to develop his own sophisticated presentations.

SAQ

1. How would you identify theatrical conventions in the four plays of Shakespeare?

2. Would individual examples that I derive from the plays be recognized as conventional? (25 + 30 words)

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3. Would Ophelia's disheveled attire qualify as a theatrical convention? And how is Hamlet's soliloquy an example of a theatrical convention? (20 + 40 words)

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1.7 CHARACTER

In understanding 'character' in a play or any other literary text for that matter, it is important to remember that the term cannot be used in the same sense as it is used to speak of the character of a friend or a contemporary.

Character, as the term is used to refer to a figure in a play, suggests one whose actions are determined not so much by an integrated sense of being as by the necessity of a play's action. Lionel Trilling's reminder, that the number of children Lady Macbeth may or may not have had is not essential to understanding her in the play is useful to have in mind at this point because this is the way the audience is expected to see her as she appears in the context of the play.

An example from *Hamlet* should make this clear. Take the scene where Gertrude recounts the moment of Ophelia's drowning. One could read this scene by imagining Gertrude standing by on the bank watching the dying struggles of Ophelia, noting details of flowers and so on and doing nothing to help her and interpret her character from this apparently callous behavior.

The point of this scene however is not to give an insight into an aspect of Gertrude's character which is insignificant for the role that she is given in the play. In keeping with Elizabethan stage conventions the audience is expected to accept the information of Ophelia's death as a step in the progression of the play.

SAQ

Name the Act and scene referred to above - summarise the lines mentioned. (40 words)

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Similarly with other characters, it is important to approach them in the context in which they appear and read the significance or otherwise of their actions against the very important stage conventions of the period.

1.8 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Even as you get a sense of Shakespeare in his time it is equally necessary to see his contemporary relevance. In the Introduction above, I spoke of the importance of reading in context, by which I meant a dual sense of context, i.e. a simultaneous attention to his own time and place as also to ours. In this section I want you to get a taste of the various ways in which the contemporary context of postcolonialism has recreated Shakespeare.

Postcolonial critics who have investigated the historical interactions between Shakespeare and colonialism have shown how Anglo-American literary scholarship of the last two hundred years created a 'Shakespeare' who celebrated the superiority of the 'civilized races'. They have also noted the ways in which Shakespeare was used by colonial educationists and administrators to reinforce cultural hierarchies.

The background to these readings of Shakespeare is a necessary element in understanding. The collapse of formal empires brought in its wake critiques

of imperial and colonial philosophies, ideologies and aesthetics. All of these critiques challenged dominant writings on philosophy, language, history, culture and aesthetics that had marginalized the experience and cultures of the underprivileged - lower classes and castes, women, colonized people and others. The decentring of the human subject was an important element of this process because such a subject had been theorized by European imperialist discourses as male and white.

Several oppositional movements (anti-colonial and feminist struggles) as well as the new critical perspectives emphasized culture and literature as a site of conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed. They also paid special attention to language as a tool of domination and as a means of constructing identity. Together these positions have enabled a new kind of literary criticism where history is not just a background for the study of texts but forms a part of textual meaning. At the same time texts are seen as basic to the creation of history and culture. Many of these critical ideas developed through the study of Shakespeare and early modern culture. Among the most influential of course has been the work of the cultural materialists, new historicists and feminists who interpreted class, gender and sexual relations in the period known as the early modern, and reflected on the interrelationships between culture and power. They also showed how these earlier cultural, social and literary heritages shape the contemporary world.

As a result of these re-readings, scholars began to examine emergent colonial discourses and relations during the early modern period and their impact on various aspects of English history, culture and representations. They looked at representations of Islam in Elizabethan and Jacobean England (Samuel Chew's *The Crescent and the Rose*); images of Black Africans in the period and the literature (Eldred Jones' *Othello's Countrymen* and *The Elizabethan Image of Africa*); racial discourses and the status of foreigners during the period and in Shakespeare's plays (G.K. Hunter's *Dramatic Identities and Cultural Tradition*).

Studies of this kind provided a preparatory ground for subsequent scholarship that looked at the relations between state power, the emergence of new classes and ideologies, the reshaping of patriarchal authority, the development of the idea of an English nation, sexual practices and the real and imaginary experiences of English people in the Americas, Africa and

Asia. These experiences built upon and transformed ideologies about 'others' that had come from the experiences of the Crusades; had emerged in the interactions with other Europeans such as the Spanish, the Italians and the Dutch; and those that developed in relation to 'others' living on the margins of English society - the Jews, the gypsies, the Irish, the Welsh and the Scots.

The 'other'

This revelation of the 'other' in English culture is an important corollary to understanding the significance of Shakespeare for our postcolonial world because of the perception of the colonized as 'other' by the colonizer. Such a perception is the product of the new ideas that energized the study of society and culture and invited consideration of marginality and the decentred subject.

Stop to Consider

What is meant by 'creating or recreating' Shakespeare? The most immediately available sense of this is in the kind of descriptions that name a 'feminist' Shakespeare or a 'postcolonial' Shakespeare. Such naming would indicate that Shakespeare can be found to contain ideas that are sensitive to feminist or postcolonial issues. A feminist reading of *Hamlet* for instance might pay particular attention to the depiction of Ophelia by the playwright, but also note her treatment by the male characters in the play. A postcolonial approach to *The Tempest* might find in the Prospero and Caliban relationship a metaphor for the relationship of the colonizer to the colonized.

And how is Shakespeare 'used' by colonial educationists? These are aspects of the same process. A writer may be presented as carrying certain ideas or cultural values from the culture of origin. So Shakespeare, presented as the repository of English values was to be taught in order to pass on a sense of the superiority of those values to a colonized people. This is the 'use' to which he may be put.

SAQ

1. Make a brief comparison between traditional readings of Shakespeare and contemporary re-readings of his plays. How is the information provided in this unit relevant for understanding the plays ? (150 words)

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2. Attempt a brief explanation of the 'relativity of perception' attributed to Shakespeare's times. Support your answer with examples from a play of your choice. (100 words)

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*While it is not expected that you will read all the books listed in the Bibliography during your course it is necessary that you are familiar with a fair selection of books relevant to the area. This list contains general books on the plays representing various critical positions, the political, social and intellectual background of the Elizabethan Age and a life of Shakespeare. It is hoped that this list will provide you with a starting point for further studies in the area of Shakespeare studies.

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Unit 2
Hamlet

Contents:

2.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit should help you to read the play *Hamlet* and develop your own unique understanding of the ethos of the play. With the aid of the information provided in this unit you should be able to

- *describe* the unique character of the hero in the light of the intellectual conventions of the time.
- *connect* the concerns of the entire play to the relativistic mode of thinking which became popular at that time.
- *analyse* the nuanced presentation of Hamlet's delay and avoid a simplistic search for a conclusive reason for it.
- *read* each act for its development of certain dramatic elements like the ghost, Hamlet's assumption of madness, the play-within-the-play.
- *note* the reasons for various critical positions on the play at different historical junctures.

2.2 INTRODUCTION

Hamlet presents a skilful manipulation of the audience's knowledge of the circumstances surrounding the death of the king and Hamlet's doubts about it. The audience knows for certain, from Claudius's attempts to pray in Act III, that there has been a 'foul murder', a fratricide that has been covered up

with the story that the king died from snake bite. Hamlet however does not hear Claudius's confession. He must bank on the testimony of the Ghost which seems to require corroboration.

Shakespeare exploits this initial sense of uncertainty throughout the play. Hamlet sets the trap of the play-within-the-play for his uncle and as if reacting to the presentation Claudius rushes out. But the doubts remain and the audience is made to wonder at the working of Hamlet's tortured mind.

The fracture between inner thoughts and feelings and the world around him is evident in his evasiveness with his school friends, with Polonius and the courtier Osric, but also with Ophelia and his closest friend Horatio. When he confronts his mother with the charge of murder she reacts with astonishment. Hamlet's strange and painful admonition seem to affect her deeply but then the Ghost reappears (this time visible only to Hamlet and of course to the audience) and Gertrude is convinced from Hamlet's behaviour that he is really mad. These oscillations lend their own density to the play making it difficult even for the audience to make up its mind one way or the other.

The distance between what Hamlet sees and what those around him see is smallest in the case of Claudius since they share knowledge of the secret crime and each manouevres against the other. This is an area of the play that you might find particularly interesting because you can actually see this in operation by the play's predominant use of devices of watching or spying that physically present on stage the dominant atmosphere of suspicion at all levels.

The opposition between Hamlet and his uncle never actually becomes visible until the final moments, nor does Hamlet succeed in unambiguously establishing his uncle's guilt. Until the final moments of betrayal and murder, the audience only sees a loving Claudius who refers to Hamlet as his son. Hamlet begins to explain 'O I could tell you' - but is cut short by death, caught in tragic isolation.

It is important to note that even before the Ghost exposed his uncle's villainy, Hamlet was a troubled young man - suffering from the traumas associated with his father's death, his mother's sexuality and a sickening awareness of the vulnerability and corruptibility of the flesh. From the exaltation of 'What a piece of work is a man!' to the anguished 'And yet to me what is this

quintessence of dust?' (2.2 293-298), Hamlet's melancholy is apparent.

Though Claudius's secret crime is a political act that has poisoned the public sphere (note the concern with regicide, deposition of the rightful king, and questions of succession in the history plays), the roots of Hamlet's despair lie elsewhere. If there were only the usurper to depose Hamlet might have been able to act. But his melancholy has several layers one behind the other: beyond political corruption there is the shallowness of his friends, Ophelia's dismayingly compliant obedience to her father, his mother's carnality and 'frailty' and finally the ongoing but morally indifferent cycle of life itself.

Hamlet's sense of disgust is a corollary to these discoveries. He sums up this pervasive feeling in the statement to Claudius: 'We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots' (4.3. 22-23). In a world that is marked by decay the process of natural renewal also seems disgusting. Images of unweeded gardens, of nature run riot, of uncontrolled feeding and breeding come to centre on the body of woman - as evidenced in his bitterness at his mother's marriage and his advice to Ophelia, 'Get thee to a nunnery' where the nunnery in Elizabethan slang could also refer to a brothel.

Stop to Consider

The question of Hamlet's delay, his inability to either make up his mind about Claudius's guilt or to act must be seen against this complex presentation of uncertainty and anguish about human life in an indifferent world. You should be able to connect this reading of the play to the great doubts and intellectual shifts that occurred during the period of the Renaissance and of which you get a glimpse in Unit 1.

After you have read the play come back to this sub-unit and reassess Hamlet's inability to act. You will, by then, have also become familiar with the critical positions on this aspect of the play and should be able to form your own opinion on the issue.

2.3 DATE AND TEXT

Shakespeare probably wrote *Hamlet* in 1600, but the exact date of composition is uncertain. The text of the play is problematic because of the number of variants of the text that have come down to us. The First Folio of 1623 contains the text called *TheTragedie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*,

but most editions of the play since the 18th century, have included passages from the text of the play as it appears in the Second Quarto (1604) with the title *The Tragicall Historie of Hamlet, Prince of Denmarke*.

2.4 SOURCES

As with many of his other plays, with *Hamlet* too Shakespeare was relying on available narrative sources. The tale of Hamlet (Amleth) was recounted at length in the late 12th century *Danish History* compiled in Latin by Saxo the grammarian. This version was adapted in French in *Histoires Tragiques* (1570) by Francois de Belleforest. The story goes as follows: Feng kills his brother Horwendil and marries Horwendil's wife, Gerutha. The son of the murdered man undertakes to avenge his father's death. He is watched carefully by his uncle and in order to divert attention from his intentions, he pretends to be mad. This ploy works and he succeeds in shaming his mother into helping him. He kills his uncle and his uncle's followers and is proclaimed king of Denmark. There is no ghost to urge him, no doubts and no pangs of conscience, probably because in pre-Christian Denmark revenge was a filial duty, not a violation of the moral or religious law.

Another version of the story seems to have been staged by 1589 in England. This play called the Ur-Hamlet (or original *Hamlet*) featured a ghost. Other details have been derived from a German version, *Der bestrafte Brudermord* (Fratricide Punished) also based on this Ur-Hamlet but dated 1710. This text contains the play within the play, Ophelia's madness, and the final slaughter from poisoned sword and drink.

The other Elizabethan play which has distinct similarities is Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*. It has a ghost clamoring for revenge, a secret crime, a hero torn by doubt and uncertainty, a feigning of madness, a woman who goes mad with grief and commits suicide, a play within a play and a climactic slaughter that wipes out much of the royal family, the court and the avenger himself. The Spanish Tragedy is built around the problem of revenge and initiated an entire genre of which Hamlet is certainly a part. The conventional assumptions at work in this genre are useful to know in order to read *Hamlet* more productively.

Justice and Revenge:

Conventional assumptions of revenge tragedy are discussed in the context of Hamlet by Stephen Greenblatt in his introduction to the play. "First revenge is an individual response to an intolerable wrong or a public insult. It is an unauthorized, violent action in a world whose institutions seem unable or unwilling to satisfy a craving for justice. Second, since institutional channels are closed and since the criminal is usually either hidden or well protected, revenge almost always follows a devious path toward its violent end. Third, the revenger is in the grip of an inner compulsion: his course of action may be motivated by institutional failure - for instance the mechanisms of justice are in the hands of the criminals themselves - but even if these mechanisms were operating perfectly, they would not allow the psychic satisfactions of revenge. Fourth, revengers generally need their victims to know what is happening and why: satisfaction depends on a moment of declaration and vindication. And fifth, revenge is a universal imperative more powerful than the pious injunctions of any particular belief system, including Christianity itself" (Greenblatt 1662).

SAQ

What are the important sources of the play ? What are the common features in these sources? (40 words)

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How has Shakespeare handled these issues in his play? What significance has he added to the issues of revenge, to filial relationships, to incest and to regicide?

2.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

The history of Hamlet criticism is an interesting point to begin to understand the play. The familiar procrastinating Hamlet, who is plagued by doubt about the ghost and about himself, is a late entrant into the scene of Hamlet reception.

For the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries his lack of initiative was not an issue that interested critics and he was seen primarily as a princely avenger who eventually does the job he sets out to do.

It was in 1736, that for the first time a critic (Thomas Hanmer) noted two important facts about Hamlet - his delay, and his cruelty. He explained the delay as imposed by the necessities of the dramatist's craft (if Hamlet had not delayed the play would have ended too soon). And he also recorded his distaste of a cruelty unworthy of a hero, referring to the incident when Hamlet spares Claudius because he is at prayer reasoning that he would in fact like to destroy his soul. Dr. Johnson echoed this distaste in 1765.

Towards the close of the eighteenth century this trend of noting particularities of character became popular. Critics grew aware of his complexity and some like Goethe saw in him a reflection of themselves. The shift to a more psychological approach also marks the shift to acceptance of the play as a literary text. Coleridge's influential reading of Hamlet as a man whose great and subtle intellect made it impossible for him to take action marks the beginning of a philosophical-psychological analytic trend which remains well into the twentieth century.

As you observe, the increasing interest in Hamlet's character and the motives for his inaction, meant that the focus began to shift from the play to the individual and this also signals the move towards the nineteenth century interest in character analysis [Hartley Coleridge represents the most extreme position in this development when he invites readers to "put Shakespeare out of the question, and consider Hamlet as a real person, a recently deceased acquaintance".] Hamlet's delay became central and the debate on the play circled around questions about the external obstacles to his fulfilment of the Ghost's command. Was it moral scruples, extraordinary sensitiveness or neurosis, or was it his great reflective intellect that stood in the way? (Hippolyte Taine, A.C.Bradley, Dowden and Shaw all considered these issues).

The most well known and important landmark in the trend of character analysis is A.C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*(1904). Bradley denies Hamlet the stature that he gives to the other tragic heroes. He has been accused of treating the play as a study of Hamlet's character, almost like a nineteenth-century novel, of neglecting the poetry, and of not taking enough

note of Elizabethan stage conditions or of Elizabethan thought. But his important contributions include his noting of, a) Hamlet's puzzlement at his own procrastination; b) his doubting of the Ghost's word to still his conscience; and c) his genuine and active interest in the perfect performance of the play at the same time that he is also interested in Claudius's reaction and urges Horatio to take note of it. The contrary and ambivalent aspects that Bradley pointed to are still with us in contemporary approaches to the play which regard plurality as a significant Shakespearean trait.

There is noticeable neglect of theatrical reality in many of these interpretations. But the twentieth century has seen some attempts to address this aspect. Harley Granville-Barker's most substantial preface (*Prefaces to Shakespeare*) is the one he writes to *Hamlet*. A.J.A.Waldock who followed with *Hamlet*: *A Study in Critical Method* (1931), noted that in the theatre, Hamlet's procrastination is hardly noticeable. But generally critics have stayed with the method of character-analysis. Dover Wilson argues that Hamlet's delay is prudent because the Ghost is an ambiguous figure. Some critics refute the notion of Hamlet as a gentle and noble figure. Wilson Knight sees him as a sick, cynical and inhuman prince who corrupts an otherwise healthy world. L.C. Knights points out his "attitudes of hatred, revulsion self-complacence and self reproach" as "forms of escape from the difficult process of complex adjustment which normal living demands and which Hamlet finds beyond his powers." Following Freud (1900) who ascribed Hamlet's irresolution to an Oedipus complex, Ernest Jones famously elaborated this idea in several versions before the final published version in 1949.

More comprehensive views of the play that do not exclusively concentrate on the character of the hero are those of D.G. James who averred that the play must not be seen "as merely an affair of the character of its hero;" W.H. Clemen who analyses the language and imagery; Maynard Mack who describes the world of the play, its imaginative environment; H.D.F. Kitto and John Holloway who see *Hamlet* as religious drama offering 1) the corroding influence of sin and 2) the developing spectacle of a diseased society respectively. Helen Gardner reads it against the background of the Elizabethan revenge play. Harry Levin examines Hamlet's 'antic disposition' against the background of other treatments of real and assumed madness in Elizabethan drama. T.S.Eliot sees *Hamlet* as a flawed masterpiece because

it fails to find what he calls an "objective correlative" - "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion". Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear."

A new direction in criticism (brought about by structuralism and poststructuralism) has meant critical focus shifting to a wholly new set of issues. A few examples should be indicative. In an essay titled "On the Value of *Hamlet*" (1973), Stephen Booth shows how the play constantly frustrates its audience's understanding and creates a sense of unease through its inconsistencies and contradictions. He emphasizes the play's plurality and in a remarkable departure from traditional criticism he decentres the mainstays of the earlier approaches (character and moral values) and replaces them with critic, audience (the question of reception) and language (particularly in its poststructuralist slipperiness).

James Calderwood in his book *To Be and Not To Be* is particularly interested in the self-reflexive or metadramatic quality of *Hamlet* - that is, in the way *Hamlet* draws attention to itself as a play so that it seems only to be about itself; to be, in other words, metaphorically about drama. You might like to reflect on the idea of the play-within-a-play on these lines.

Feminist criticism is perhaps most tellingly illustrated by Coppelia Kahn in her book *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare.* Kahn argues that Shakespeare's work is filled with "problems of sexual identity, family relationships and gender roles" and his plays "reflect and voice a masculine anxiety about the uses of patriarchal power over women, specifically about men's control over women's sexuality". *Hamlet* as you will by now have recognized offers fertile ground for such an approach with Hamlet expressing his despair at the 'frailty' of women and the two problem figures of Gertrude and Ophelia trapped in stereotypical images of womanhood. One fascinating study by Elaine Showalter shows the representation of Ophelia through the centuries - a character who is the product of the criticism directed at her. In the process she suggests that feminist criticism involves confronting male hegemony (or rule) which reproduces Ophelia in the image of its own ideas and values.

Stop to Consider

On the one hand the play offers grounds for serious **psychological speculation** about Hamlet's reluctance/ inability to act. But the same elements of the play which feed this reading also allow consideration of a **political design**, his madness itself subverting a corrupt regime that is based on lies, spies and treachery.

Speculation about Hamlet's psychological makeup is closely tied to how we respond to dramatic characterisation. Let us remember also that Hamlet is a 'play', meant for 'live performance' whose meaning is finally dependent on the real human being who is going to enact the role.

This point becomes clearer if you refer to Bertolt Brecht's interpretation of *Hamlet* and how he used the hero's dilemma to interpret a wider ideological conflict.

SAQ

1. Briefly outline the sequence of different views that have developed about Hamlet connecting them with different schools of thought.(100 words)

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2. How convincing do you find any particular reading of the play currently available ? Discuss how the adoption of any one of these positions affects your reading of the play. (100 words)

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2.6 ACT-WISE READING OF THE PLAY

Act I

The first act begins with the change of guard on a dark winter night outside Elsinore Castle in Denmark,. In the heavy darkness, the men talk about a ghost they think they have seen on the castle ramparts in the late hours of the night looking exactly like the dead King of Denmark. The appearance of the ghost is central to the development of the entire play primarily because a restless spirit indicates foul play and forebodes some great misfortune perhaps in the form of a military attack.

The ghost materializes for a second time, and Horatio tries to speak to it. The ghost remains silent, however, and disappears again just as the cock crows at the first hint of dawn. Horatio suggests that they tell Prince Hamlet, the dead king's son, about the apparition. He believes that though the ghost did not speak to him, if it is really the ghost of King Hamlet, it will not refuse to speak to his beloved son. . His reaction to the ghost functions to overcome the audience's sense of disbelief, since for a man as skeptical, intelligent, and trustworthy as Horatio, to believe in and fear ghost is far more impressive and convincing than if the only witnesses had been a pair of superstitious watchmen. The supernatural appearance of the ghost on a chilling, misty night outside Elsinore Castle indicates immediately that something is wrong in Denmark. The ghost serves to enlarge the shadow King Hamlet casts across Denmark, indicating that something about his death has upset the balance of nature. The appearance of the ghost also gives physical form to the fearful anxiety that surrounds the transfer of power after the king's death, seeming to imply that the future of Denmark is a dark and frightening one. Horatio in particular sees the ghost as an ill omen boding violence and turmoil in Denmark's future, comparing it to the supernatural omens that supposedly presaged the assassination of Julius Caesar in ancient Rome. Since Horatio proves to be right, and the appearance of the ghost does presage the later tragedies of the play, the ghost functions as a kind of internal foreshadowing, implying tragedy not only to the audience but to the characters as well.

The situation Shakespeare presents at the beginning of *Hamlet* is that a strong and beloved king has died, and the throne has been inherited not by his son, as we might expect, but by his brother Claudius. We meet prince Hamlet grieving over the death of his father and brooding over his mother's actions. His mother is no longer the widow of his dead father but the newly wedded Queen of King Claudius. Hamlet would rather have died and met his worst enemy in heaven than seen his mother's second marriage. When Horatio informs him about the appearance of the ghost, he is left perturbed and decides to look into the matter himself. As he waits with Horatio and Marcellus, the ghost appears. Hamlet not only talks to it but also follows it to a remote spot to discover its real purpose. The ghost starts telling its own story to the prince that it is indeed the spirit of his dead father. His own brother, who not only usurped the throne but also married his wife, that is

Hamlet's mother, killed him. Hamlet is urged to take revenge without harming his mother. When his friends find him Hamlet is a changed man. He hints at the terrible discovery and makes them promise not to reveal anything of what they have seen. Hamlet now knows the truth behind his father's death and is determined to act alone. The act ends in Hamlet deciding to "put on an antic disposition", that is, he will pretend to be mad in the company of others. Everyone will then keep away from him and he will be able to plan his own strategy without anyone knowing about it. Hamlet seems to be aware that the present king keeps him under surveillance.

Theme and Dramatic Effect

Note how the anticipation of the Ghost's arrival by Hamlet is exploited for the generation of suspense and the increase in interest for the audience. See how the dramatic effect is created by the Ghost's arrival when Hamlet, his companions and the audience are briefly distracted by the sounds of revelry inside the castle. Also important to note is the debate on regicide introduced in this Act by the suspicion associated with the death of the king, with Claudius assuming the monarch's place and power and the son Hamlet seeking the right answer.

We have a hero in deep mourning for his father and doubts raised about the father's untimely death. We are also presented with the picture of unseemly haste with which the marriage of Claudius (the dead king's brother and the new king) and Gertrude (the wife of the dead man) takes place. You might find it an interesting exercise to read this sense of haste against the delay predominantly associated with Hamlet.

What is the dramatic effect of the anticipation of the Ghost's arrival? Does it heighten in any way the sense of a calamitous truth or does it simply detract from the sense of a plausible fact ?

SAQ

What are the important points of Act I? What does it tell us about the state of Denmark? (30 + 20 words)

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After the audience's interest in the Ghost is dissipated by its appearance how is dramatic interest sustained? (30 words)

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Act II

This act includes several important revelations and furthers the development of some of the play's main themes.

Hamlet has started behaving strangely and his first victim is Ophelia, Polonius' daughter. She rushes into her father's room to tell him about Hamlet's strange looks and even stranger behaviour. Critics down the ages have offered diverse views on Hamlet's supposed madness. His portrayal is so convincing that many critics contend that his already fragile sanity gets shattered at the sight of his dead father's ghost. It seems his madness is an outlet for his pent-up emotions. Within the castle Claudius and Gertrude welcome Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, two of Hamlet's friends from Wittenberg. Increasingly concerned about Hamlet's erratic behavior and his apparent inability to recover from his father's death, the king and queen have summoned his friends to Elsinore in the hope that they might be able to cheer Hamlet out of his melancholy, or at least discover the cause of it. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern agree to investigate, and the queen orders attendants to take them to her son.

This is followed by Polonius's conversation with Claudius and Gertrude, which includes the discussion with the ambassadors; Hamlet's conversation with Polonius, in which we see Hamlet consciously feigning madness for the first time; Hamlet's reunion with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and the scene with the players, followed by Hamlet's concluding soliloquy on the theme of action. These separate plot developments take place in the same location and occur in rapid succession, allowing the audiences to compare and contrast their thematic elements.

Polonius enters, announcing the return of the ambassadors whom Claudius had sent to Norway. They enter with the good news that Fortinbras swore he would never again attack the Danes. The Norwegian king, overjoyed,

bequeathed upon Fortinbras a large annuity, and urged him to use the army he had assembled to attack the Poles instead of the Danes. He has therefore sent a request back to Claudius that Prince Fortinbras's armies be allowed safe passage through Denmark on their way to attack the Poles. Relieved to have averted a war with Fortinbras's army, Claudius declares that he will see to this business later. It is notable that Claudius appears indifferent to the fact that a powerful enemy will be riding through his country with a large army. Claudius seems much more worried about Hamlet's madness, indicating that where King Hamlet was a powerful warrior who sought to expand Denmark's power abroad, Claudius is a politician who is more concerned about threats from within his state.

Turning to the subject of Hamlet, Polonius declares, after a wordy preamble, that the prince is mad with love for Ophelia. He shows the king and queen letters and love poems Hamlet has given to Ophelia; he and the king decide to spy on Hamlet and Ophelia together. Polonius attempts to converse with Hamlet, who appears insane; But many of Hamlet's seemingly lunatic statements hide observations about Polonius's pomposity and his old age. Polonius comments that while Hamlet is clearly mad, his replies are often "pregnant" with meaning. As Polonius leaves, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern enter, and Hamlet seems pleased to see them. They discuss Hamlet's unhappiness about recent affairs in Denmark. Hamlet replies that having lost all his joy he has descended into a state of melancholy in which everything (and everyone) appears sterile and worthless. They propose possibilities, develop ideas according to rational argument, and find their attempts to understand Hamlet's behavior entirely thwarted by his uncooperative replies.

The other important event in this act is the arrival of the players. The presence of players and play-acting within the play points to an important theme: that real life is in certain ways like play-acting. This is particularly true in Hamlet's case because he too is feigning madness for a purpose. Hamlet welcomes a few players to the court and entreats one of them to give him a speech about the fall of Troy and the death of the Trojan king and queen, Priam and Hecuba. Impressed with the player's speech, Hamlet orders Polonius to see them escorted to guestrooms. He announces that the next night they will hear "The Murder of Gonzago" performed, with an additional short speech that he will write himself.

Hamlet professes to be amazed by the player-king's ability to engage emotionally with the story he is telling even though it is only an imaginative recreation. As soon as he is alone in the room, he begins cursing himself for his inability to take action even with his far more powerful motive. He feels he is prevented from responding to his own situation because he does not have certain knowledge about it. He is certainly confused and upset, and his confusion translates into an extraordinarily intense state of mind suggestive of madness. He resolves to devise a trap for Claudius, forcing the king to watch a play whose plot closely resembles. Again, we find Hamlet finding a reason for his delayed action which is repeated again and again.

Another important area this act lets us explore is the contrast between Hamlet and Fortinbras. Like Hamlet, Fortinbras is the grieving son of a dead king, a prince whose uncle inherited the throne in his place. But where Hamlet has sunk into despair, contemplation, and indecision, Fortinbras has devoted himself to the pursuit of revenge. This contrast will be explored much more thoroughly later in the play. Here, it is important mainly to note that Fortinbras's uncle has forbidden him to attack Denmark but given him permission to ride through Denmark on his way to attack Poland. This at least suggests the possibility that the King of Norway is trying to trick Claudius into allowing a hostile army into his country.

Stop to Consider

Note here the disturbing use made by the king and queen of Hamlet's friends against him, setting them to spy on him. In the actual progress of the play you would do well to note the many instances when different characters conceal themselves to eavesdrop on private conversations, and a general atmosphere of watchfulness is created. (Hamlet and Ophelia are overheard by Claudius and Polonius; Polonius hides himself to listen in on Hamlet speaking to his mother). It might also be worthwhile to compare this 'watchfulness' with several other plays (take for example *Measure for Measure*) where spying is an inextricable part of political intrigue and the retention of political authority.

Act III

Claudius and Gertrude discuss Hamlet's behavior with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who say they have been unable to learn the cause of his

melancholy. Claudius and Polonius intend to spy on Hamlet's confrontation with Ophelia arranged by her father. Gertrude exits, and Polonius directs Ophelia to walk around the lobby. Polonius hears Hamlet coming, and he and the king hide behind the tapestry.

Hamlet enters, speaking thoughtfully and agonizingly to himself about the question of whether to commit suicide to end the pain of experience. He also philosophizes regarding the terrors of life after death. This act contains the soliloquy that has been seen as representing Hamlet's nature and mental state most effectively: "To be, or not to be". The soliloquy is a brilliant technique of Shakespeare to make his characters seem three-dimensional. The audience senses that there is more to Hamlet's words than meets the ear-that there is something behind his words that is never spoken. Or, to put it another way, the audience witnesses signs of something within Hamlet's mind. However it can also be argued that even in this speech Hamlet is not trying to express himself at all; instead, he poses the question of suicide and after-life as a matter of philosophical debate.

In mid-thought, Hamlet sees Ophelia approaching. Having received her orders from Polonius, she tells him that she wishes to return the tokens of love he has given her. Angrily, Hamlet denies having given her anything; he laments the dishonesty of beauty, and claims both to have loved Ophelia once and never to have loved her at all. Bitterly commenting on the wretchedness of humankind, he urges Ophelia to enter a nunnery. Claudius is convinced that Hamlet's strange behavior has clearly not been caused by love for Ophelia and that his speech does not seem like the speech of insanity. In the king's opinion the best way to relieve his trouble is to send him away to England

This act contains the play-within-the-play staged in the great hall of the castle at Elsinore, which is important thematically as it exposes Claudius' guilt. Suspicions are confirmed and from now on the action centers on the struggle between Hamlet and his uncle. As the pressure builds on Claudius, he makes the final preparations to get Hamlet away to England. Hamlet on the other hand gets an opportunity to kill Claudius while the king was in his prayers but he hesitates. He makes an excuse for his inability to act that his revenge will not be fulfilled if he sends Claudius' soul to heaven while murdering him in his prayers. He thinks it best to wait to catch the king at some vice or other, and then kill him.

Hamlet then enters his mother's room. Polonius hides behind the wall-covering to eavesdrop on Gertrude's confrontation with her son, in the hope that doing so will enable him to determine the cause of Hamlet's bizarre and threatening behavior. Hamlet accosts her with an almost violent intensity and declares his intention to make her fully aware of the profundity of her sin. His manners make his mother think he is mad and she cries out for help fearing for her life. Polonius answers her from behind the arras and Hamlet thinking it to be Claudius seizes on this as the best opportunity to kill the King. Polonius, thus, pays the price of his own trickery. Hamlet's rash, murderous action in stabbing Polonius is an important illustration of his inability to coordinate his thoughts and actions, which might be considered his tragic flaw. In his passive, thoughtful mode, Hamlet is too beset by moral considerations and uncertainties to avenge his father's death by killing Claudius, even when the opportunity is before him. However, when he does choose to act, he does so blindly, stabbing his anonymous "enemy" through a curtain.

At this very moment, the ghost appears to remind him not to delay in carrying out his resolves. Noting that Gertrude is amazed and unable to see him, the ghost asks Hamlet to intercede with her. Hamlet describes the ghost, but Gertrude sees nothing, and in a moment, the ghost disappears. Hamlet tries desperately to convince Gertrude that he is not mad but has merely feigned madness all along, and he urges her to forsake Claudius and regain her good conscience. Though Gertrude's speech in this scene is largely limited to brief reactions to Hamlet's lengthy denunciations of her, it is our most revealing look at her character. As the scene progresses, Gertrude goes through several states of feeling: she is haughty and accusatory at the beginning, then afraid that Hamlet will hurt her, shocked and upset when Hamlet kills Polonius, overwhelmed by fear and panic as Hamlet accosts her, and disbelieving when Hamlet sees the ghost. Finally, she is contrite toward her son and apparently willing to take his part and help him. An interpretation of her character in this act seems to be that she has a powerful instinct for self-preservation and advancement that leads her to rely too deeply on men. Not only does this interpretation explain her behavior throughout much of the play; it also links her thematically to Ophelia, the play's other important female character, who is also submissive and utterly dependent on men.

Stop to Consider

The great soliloquy and the element of subjectivity - the sense of being inside a character's psyche and following its twists and turns - both effects of a greatly expanded use of language are essential to an understanding of the play's complexity. The use of the play-within-the-play and the disturbing exchanges and intimate encounters where love and poison are intermingled are Shakespeare's unique ways of rendering suspicion and spying from another angle. The two important points to be noted about this act are the great soliloquy and the play within the play.

SAQ

1.What are the significant points in the soliloquy? (50 words)

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2.Is it possible to arrive at a conclusion about Hamlet's reasons for delaying his revenge from this soliloquy ? Comment on Shakespeare's use of the device in terms of plot and dramatic effect. (100 words)

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3. What does the play-within-the-play tell us about the theatre of Shakespeare's own time? How does it reflect on the resources of Elizabethan theatre? (80 words)

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Act IV

When the queen tells Claudius about Polonius' death, he thinks first of his own safety. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are to watch Hamlet and get him out of the country as soon as possible. Hamlet is instructed to leave for England immediately. Claudius reveals in a soliloquy that he has arranged for Hamlet to be killed as soon as he lands in England.

Many events take place simultaneously in this act. Fortinbras' army is given a safe passage through Denmark. The Norwegian soldiers are on their way to meet the polish army in the battlefield. When they have gone Hamlet compares the urgent and large-scale action of this army over a trivial point of honour, with his own inaction in the face of the gravest offence. He describes Fortinbras as a "delicate and tender prince /Whose spirit, with divine ambition puffed"(IV.iv). This comparison allows him to judge his own folly thereby inducing him to act fast and in a bloody manner.

SAQ

What are the several events that take place in this Act? How do these events develop from earlier ones and what is the dramatic significance of each ? (50 + 50 words)

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Ophelia makes a dramatic reappearance on stage after a long absence in disheveled clothing with garlands of flowers about her. She is driven to insanity by the sudden loss of her father and the realization that Hamlet does not love her. She sings pathetic love songs and the theme of these songs is of a girl forsaken by her lover. The King laments the calamities, which have led her to the present state. It is then announced that Laertes has come with a band of men threatening the life of the King. Claudius's behavior throughout this act shows him at his most devious and calculating. Shakespeare shows Claudius's mind working overtime to derail Laertes' anger, which is thus far the greatest challenge his kingship has faced. When Laertes demands to know about his father Claudius decides that the way to appease Laertes is by appearing frank and honest. When Laertes demands to know the whereabouts of his father, Claudius replies, "Dead" (IV.v). Additionally, in a masterful stroke of characterization, Shakespeare has the nervous Gertrude, unable to see Claudius's plan, follow this statement with a quick insistence on Claudius's innocence: "But not by him" (IV.v). At this point Ophelia re-enters singing and giving out flowers from her garland,

each a symbol of her sorrow. Her brother's anger rises at her deranged state.

Claudius is able to convince Laertes that Hamlet is responsible for the death of his father. He and a calmer Laertes discuss Polonius's death. Claudius explains that he acted as he did, burying Polonius secretly and not punishing Hamlet for the murder, because both the common people and the queen love Hamlet very much. As a king and as a husband, he did not wish to upset either of them. A messenger enters with the letter from Hamlet to Claudius, which informs the king that Hamlet is safe and will return the next day. Claudius' plan to kill Hamlet fails; Hamlet outsmarts his uncle by his presence of mind and judgment. Laertes is pleased that Hamlet has come back to Denmark, since it means that his revenge will not be delayed.

The scheming Claudius encounters Laertes at approximately the same moment as he learns that Hamlet has survived and returned to Denmark. He decides to appease Laertes' wrath and dispense with Hamlet in a single stroke: he hits upon the idea of the duel in order to use Laertes' rage to ensure Hamlet's death. The devious king thus thinks of a way for Laertes to ensure his revenge without creating any appearance of foul play. Laertes agrees, and they settle on a plan. Laertes will use a sharpened sword rather than the customary dull fencing blade. Laertes also proposes to poison his sword, so that even a scratch from it will kill Hamlet. The king concocts a backup plan as well, proposing that if Hamlet succeeds in the duel, Claudius will offer him a poisoned cup of wine to drink from in celebration.

Gertrude enters with tragic news. Ophelia, mad with grief, has drowned in the river. Anguished by the loss of his sister so soon after his father's death, Laertes flees the room. Claudius summons Gertrude to follow. He tells her it was nearly impossible to quiet Laertes' rage, and worries that the news of Ophelia's death will reawaken it. The image of Ophelia drowning amid her garlands of flowers has proved to be one of the most enduring images in the play, represented countless times by artists and poets throughout the centuries. Ophelia is associated with flower imagery from the beginning of the play. In her first scene, Polonius presents her with a violet; after she goes mad, she sings songs about flowers; and now she drowns amid long streams of them

The resulting plan brings both the theme of revenge and the repeated use of traps in the plot to a new height-Laertes and Claudius discuss several mechanisms by which Hamlet may be killed.

Note how the issue of revenge is presented in this Act. Shakespeare introduces several complications into the simple structure of the revenge tragedy from which he drew his theme and his story. You can compare the way this theme is developed by Shakespeare throughout the play with the way it is swiftly developed in the several sources mentioned briefly in 2.4.

SAQ

How many times does Ophelia appear in this Act and how does her appearance each time affect the characters and also have serious dramatic impact? (20 + 40 words)

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Act V

In the churchyard, two gravediggers shovel out a grave for Ophelia. They argue whether Ophelia should be buried in the churchyard, since her death looks like a suicide. Though they are usually figures of merriment, in this scene the gravediggers assume a rather macabre tone, since their jests and jibes are all made in a cemetery, among bones of the dead. Their conversation about Ophelia, however, furthers an important theme in the play: the question of the moral legitimacy of suicide under theological law. By giving this serious subject a darkly comic interpretation, Shakespeare essentially makes a grotesque parody of Hamlet's earlier "To be, or not to be" soliloquy (III.i), indicating the collapse of every lasting value in the play into uncertainty and absurdity.

Hamlet and Horatio enter at a distance and watch the gravediggers work. Hamlet's confrontation with death, manifested primarily in his discovery of Yorick's skull, is, like Ophelia's drowning, an enduring image from the play. Hamlet tells Horatio that as a child he knew Yorick and is appalled at the

sight of the skull. He realizes forcefully that all men will eventually become dust, even great men like Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar.

However, his solemn theorizing explodes in grief and rage when he sees Ophelia's funeral procession, and his assault on Laertes offers a glimpse of what his true feelings for Ophelia might once have been. Grief-stricken and outraged, he bursts upon the company, declaring in agonized fury his own love for Ophelia. He leaps into the grave and fights with Laertes, saying that "forty thousand brothers / Could not, with all their quantity of love, / make up my sum" (V.i.). The funeral company pulls the combatants apart. Hamlet picks up a skull, and the gravedigger tells him that the skull belonged to Yorick, King Hamlet's jester. The king urges Laertes to be patient, and to remember their plan for revenge.

Interestingly, Hamlet never expresses a sense of guilt over Ophelia's death, which he indirectly caused through his murder of Polonius. In fact, the only time he even comes close to taking responsibility for Polonius's death at all comes in the next and last scene, when he apologizes to Laertes before the duel, blaming his "madness" for Polonius's death. This seems wholly inadequate, given that Hamlet has previously claimed repeatedly only to be feigning madness. But by the same token, to expect moral completeness from a character as troubled as Hamlet might be unrealistic. After all, Hamlet's defining characteristics are his pain, his fear, and his self-conflict. Were he to take full responsibility for the consequences of Polonius's death, he would probably not be able to withstand the psychological torment of the resulting guilt.

The next day at Elsinore Castle, Hamlet tells Horatio how he plotted to overcome Claudius's scheme to have him murdered in England. He replaced the sealed letter carried by the unsuspecting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, which called for Hamlet's execution, with one calling for the execution of the bearers of the letter-Rosencrantz and Guildenstern themselves. He tells Horatio that he has no sympathy for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who betrayed him and catered to Claudius, but that he feels sorry for having behaved with such hostility toward Laertes. In Laertes' desire to avenge his father's death, he says, he sees the mirror image of his own desire, and he promises to seek Laertes' good favor.

Their conversation is interrupted by Osric, a foolish courtier comes to tell them that Claudius wants Hamlet to fence with Laertes and that the king has made a wager with Laertes that Hamlet will win.. Against Horatio's advice, Hamlet agrees to fight. The court marches into the hall, and Hamlet asks Laertes for forgiveness, claiming that it was his madness, and not his own will, that murdered Polonius. Laertes will not forgive Hamlet but accepts Hamlet's offer of love.

They select their foils (blunted swords used in fencing), and the king too is ready with a cup of poisoned wine for Hamlet. The duel begins with Hamlet striking Laertes but declining to drink from the cup, saying that he will make another hit first. He hits Laertes again, and Gertrude unknowingly drinks from the poisoned cup. In the meantime, Laertes scores a hit against Hamlet with his poisoned sword, drawing blood. Scuffling, they manage to exchange swords, and Hamlet wounds Laertes with Laertes' own blade.

SAQ

What are the important events in this Act? How are they the culmination of decisions taken and of actions undertaken in earlier Acts? (20 + 40 words)

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Which action in this Act has been led up to inexorably from an earlier action? (30 words)

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In the final scene, thus, the violence, so long delayed, erupts with dizzying speed. Characters drop one after the other, poisoned, stabbed, and, in the case of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, executed. The queen falls. Laertes, poisoned by his own sword, declares, "I am justly kill'd with my own treachery" (V.ii). The queen moans that the cup must have been poisoned, calls out to Hamlet, and dies. Laertes tells Hamlet that he, too, has been slain, by his own poisoned sword, and that the king is to blame both for the

poison on the sword and for the poison in the cup. Hamlet, in a fury, runs Claudius through with the poisoned sword and forces him to drink down the rest of the poisoned wine. With this the theme of revenge and justice reaches its conclusion. Hamlet tells Horatio that he is dying and exchanges a last forgiveness with Laertes, who dies after absolving Hamlet. Hamlet achieves his father's vengeance, but only after being spurred to it by the most extreme circumstances one might consider possible: watching his mother die and knowing that he, too, will die in moments.

The sound of marching echoes through the hall, and a shot rings out nearby. Osric declares that Fortinbras has come in conquest from Poland and now fires a volley to the English ambassadors. Hamlet tells Horatio again that he is dying, and urges his friend not to commit suicide in light of all the tragedies, but instead to stay alive and tell his story. He says that he wishes Fortinbras to be made King of Denmark; then he dies. The arrival of Fortinbras effectively poses the question of political legitimacy once again. In marked contrast to the corrupted and weakened royal family lying dead on the floor, Fortinbras clearly represents a strong-willed, capable leader, though the play does not address the question of whether his rule will restore the moral authority of the state.

Hamlet's Psyche and His Situation

The great soliloquies which present Hamlet's troubled state of mind as a reflection of the political turmoil in the state and the doubt in Hamlet's own mind about the death of his father, the remarriage of his mother, the role of his uncle in his father's death, the veracity of the ghost; the atmosphere of intrigue and spying that spares no one; the problematic human relationships especially Hamlet's relationships with Ophelia, with his mother and uncle, and even with his friends. Also important for an appreciation of the play's characteristic impression of indecision and delay, is the dramatic contrast offered by the dizzying speed with which the events at the end are played out.

The Use of 'Scenes'

The comic scene with its 'grave' undertones may compare well with other scenes in many Shakespearean plays where serious action is apparently relieved by a comic scene. One famous example that may be set beside the gravedigger scene is the porter scene from Macbeth. The porter in his

speech on equivocation adds resonance to the dominant atmosphere of ambivalence of that play. Here the gravedigger's talk of suicide adds another dimension to Hamlet's great problem: "To be or not to be".

SAQ

1.How does the triad of Hamlet/ Fortinbras/ Laertes add to the complexity of the play's meaning?

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2.All three, Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras, are connected to the problematic of action that is the play's overriding concern - how to act, when to act and the debate between thought and action? Do you think that Fortinbras can be seen as achieving a happy balance between the tragic extremes represented by Hamlet and Laertes?(100 words)

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Unit 3
Henry V

Contents:

3.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit should help you to read the play *Henry V* as a unique example of the history play.

The information provided in this unit is designed to guide your understanding of the play in the following areas, to

- *See* the play as the culminating piece in the second tetralogy.
- *Note* Shakespeare's understanding of history
- *Appreciate* how Shakespeare has taken this hero of English history and added nuances to the concept of the hero king.
- *Read* Shakespeare's unique perspective on Machiavellianism.
- *Note* the place given to women in this predominantly male genre.
- *Attend* to the innovations that Shakespeare has introduced, particularly to the way he has used the Chorus to provide commentary but also to undermine the spirit of heroism.
- *see* how the play was ideologically placed in the age as a glorious prelude to the age of the Tudors.

3.2 INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare's *Henry V* is the last of a set of eight plays on medieval English history.

The first four (*Henry V*I (parts 1, 2 & 3) and *Richard III*) dealt with the Wars of the Roses (1422-1485).

The second set of four plays (*Richard II, Henry IV* (Parts 1 & 2) and *Henry V*) presents the events of 1398-1420 that led up to these wars over the royal succession. For our purposes it is useful to have a brief idea about the contents of the preceding three plays. *Richard II* depicts Henry Bolingbroke's successful rebellion against Richard II and his coronation as Henry IV. The next two plays deal with his troubled reign, with his former allies turning against him and his son keeping bad company and showing all the signs of a wastrel. At the end of 2 *Henry IV* the King dies and the young Prince Hal ascends the throne as *Henry V*. In the final lines of Henry V the Chorus foresees Henry's death, after which civil strife will break out again.

3.3 THE HISTORY PLAY AND *HENRY V*

The history play had emerged in the early 16th century from the morality form and depended upon the replacement of 'Everyman' the representative of humanity, by the nation at the centre of the moral struggle. Its popularity as a theatrical form also stemmed from the Tudor English interest in historical matters particularly on the educative potential of history. Other reasons included the upsurge in national awareness in the last years of the 16th century and England's victory against the Spanish Armada - awaking a desire to know of the nation's past. Shakespeare's own interest in the history play also may be traced to his fascination with politics. He makes the history play an exploration of human political behaviour and of the desire for power. "Power in English history meant kingship, and the relationship between the theoretical amplitude of the office and the human limitation of the man who holds it" (Smallwood, p.147).

Henry V registers the excitement of war and the dread that accompanies it. For much of the 16th century, England had been content to defend its borders (you may note this in the border skirmishes recorded in 1 *Henry IV*). But as it became wealthier and more powerful expansion seemed feasible. Ireland and the Netherlands beckoned as did the New World where France and Spain had already established colonies. Henry V's foray into France represented the kind of enterprise that was desired by many of

Shakespeare's contemporaries and denounced by others as wasteful and dangerous.

The play's reception has always been complex and it has been regularly viewed through the lens of contemporary events. For example, in Laurence Olivier's film version made during World War II, the play is a vindication of England's excellence, and the victory at Agincourt a precedent for success in a justified European war. Kenneth's 1989 film on the other hand reflects the dark experiences of more recent conflicts: the American intervention in Vietnam, the British in the Falklands Islands. So, did Shakespeare intend the play to be a paean to militarism or an expose of war's senseless brutality?

Henry's grandeur is repeatedly emphasized by the Chorus, by his followers and even sometimes by his enemies. He triumphs over the difficult circumstances of his inheritance: uniting his warring people against an external enemy, spending their aggressions abroad instead of at home, and gaining himself a kingdom in the process. His combination of personal bravery and eloquence prove inspirational to his men throughout the French campaign.

However, this play like the three before it, also acknowledges that the factors that render someone an effective king are not necessarily morally admirable ones. Shakespeare displays Henry's charisma but refuses to be dazzled by it. Machiavelli had introduced the Renaissance to the idea that success as a ruler might be separable from, or even inimical to, what was conventionally considered virtuous behaviour. Henry's career poses some of the same questions that Machiavelli had posed in *The Prince* about the relationship of political success to personal goodness. A close look at *Henry V* shows a play that is deeply equivocal. It represents the peak of Shakespeare's years of experimentation in the history play form. While comedy and tragedy are concerned with the individual's life, and culminate in marriage or death, the history play, even when it centres around a single character, dramatizes the life of a nation. Characters in history plays are conceived as parts of a continuous succession, inheriting a political and historical situation from ancestors and passing it down to their descendents. In this context, the king's marriage in the play is not just a natural culmination of his personal story but one episode in a family's attempt to perpetuate a dynasty.

Henry must come to terms with what it means to be part of a family line or a dynasty. And this line is particularly complicated in Henry's case. His title

to the throne is at best dubious and reflects the instabilities in the concept of inheritance: what does it mean to acquire name and title "legitimately" from a man who stole the throne (Henry IV took the throne from Richard II). This theme is once again reflected in the aftermath of Henry's victory at Agincourt when the French king has to recognize an English conqueror rather than his own son as heir to the French throne.

The difficulties of succession and inheritance are issues for Shakespeare the playwright as well as for his protagonist. Just as the character Henry V must strive to match and excel the patterns set by his ancestors, the play *Henry V* must concern itself with what it means to be a sequel: the way in which it re-presents actual historical events in a theatrical form, and the way in which it must try to gratify an audience whose expectations have been formed by three popular plays in the same series. *Henry V* tries to make up for all the problems associated with its belatedness through a strategy of overstatement, exaggerating some of the issues from the earlier plays.

Shakespeare dramatizes Henry's success and greatness, not merely by magnifying his exploits but by minimizing threats from possible competitors. Henry's victory over his enemies who are shown as bumbling and laughable seems almost preordained. His allies are similarly diminished. Falstaff, who dominated the two earlier plays, dies without reappearing. The problem with England's borders that exercised his father so much is handled with facile ease by Henry. He enlists the Irish, the Welsh, and the Scots in his cause not by homogenizing their differences but by inspiring their allegiance to him even as they quarrel amongst themselves. Shakespeare seems to be showing that Henry's triumph at Agincourt involves the whole British nation.

In all of this the absence of Falstaff is worth noting. Falstaff is missing probably because his critique of military valour would undercut the premises of Henry's magnetism. There is no one within the play to point out the ironies of many of the turns of the plot.

Stop to Consider

Look at the following problematic elements of the plot:

-Presumably the venality of the clerics who finance Henry's expedition to France is clear enough to the audience.

Likewise, when Gower remarks loyally that Henry never killed any of his friends,

we are likely to think back to Falstaff's unlamented demise and the death of all of Henry's Eastcheap friends except Pistol.

In I.1, Henry decides to press his claim to the French throne through the female line of descent. A little later he executes three of his erstwhile friends for conspiring against his life. In fact their plot was inspired by the conviction that Henry's title to the English throne was illegitimate, the real claimant being the Earl of Mortimer's daughter (the Earl of Mortimer is referred to in the earlier two plays as having a claim to the throne that had been usurped by Henry IV, being in the direct line of descent from the deposed king, Richard II). In other words Henry is shown employing against the French a principle that, if it were enforced against him would strip him of both French and English kingdoms. However the point is made in the play in such a way that it is likely to be missed by an audience that is not aware of the tangled Plantagenet genealogy. There is nothing comparable to the Falstaff take on valour and honour that ironically comments on the glorious aims of the king's battles in 1 *Henry IV.*

As the stature of Henry's foes and associates diminishes, the ethical problems posed by his exploits are aggravated. Henry has unusual gifts as a leader. Richard II disregarded common folk and Henry IV avoided them: but Henry V inspires them and wins them over by his sympathetic involvement in their lives. His insistence upon his ordinariness becomes a strategy of rule (You might find it illuminating to read this aspect of his policy as a version of Machiavellianism). This is an ambivalence that remains unresolved in the play. When Henry disguises himself as a commoner and ventures among the rank and file of his army, he argues for the essential sameness between the king and his followers. (IV. 1, 99-104). The ordinary soldiers are unconvinced, pointing out that if they lose the battle, the king will be ransomed while they will be killed. On the other hand, because they are expected to obey the king under all circumstances, they need not concern themselves with the justice of the king's cause: their blood will be on Henry's head if he is waging an unjust war. In stark contrast to Henry's views, the common soldiers see the king as unlike themselves with special responsibilities to compensate for his special privileges. (Note Henry's indignant response at this point: IV. 1, 146-55)

Against these depictions of special responsibilities and privileges, Shakespeare also shows the king's isolation from the ordinary pleasures of

life. This is most apparent if you remember the carefree Hal of 1 *Henry IV*. And one of the ways that Shakespeare makes this dramatically present before his audience is through episodes that show Henry's absolute power and control. In II. 2, when he pretends to hand the traitors Scrope, Grey and Cambridge their military commissions, he is actually giving them letters that show that he knows of their plot. Theatrically this scene is most effective but it is also chilling as a picture of absolute control. He is like the cat playing with mice. You might also see a version of the king's control even in the game of the gloves that he plays with William in IV. 7. Henry's power contaminates even what he wants to see as a game.

While in the earlier plays Prince Hal had the advantage of rank, it was possible for Falstaff to tease and scold and treat him like an equal. Now that Henry is king and Falstaff is dead, Henry is always the winner and the game is never merely a game but a battle between the powerful and the powerless. Perhaps Henry goes to war with France because he misses a sense of competition - because the fate of the effective king is that he cannot find real opposition at home.

In *Henry V,* Shakespeare has to cope with a particularly knotty dramatic problem - how to interest an audience in a man who has, or wins, everything. In the final scene as in the rest of the play Shakespeare leaves us with the impression of the inevitably equivocal nature of kingly glory. (Source: The *Norton Shakespeare*)

Reading the tetralogy

Since *Henry V* is the final play in the second tetralogy it is fruitfully read with at least a working knowledge of the three earlier plays, especially the manner in which the legitimacy of Henry's inheritance becomes part of the special role that Henry assigns to himself in this play. The troubled mind of his father, Henry IV, and the doubts expressed by him about his son's inadequate preparation and failure to recognize his historical role as England's future king provide a useful backdrop against which you can understand Shakespeare's ambivalent presentation of *Henry V*.

SAQ

How are the various aspects of the play, discussed so far, to be found through the sequence of acts and scenes in the play ? Give exact references. (70 words)

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(Come back to this sub unit after you have read the play and see if you can find the various aspects discussed here, in different acts and scenes of the play.)

3.4 DATE AND TEXT

Shakespeare's *Henry V* was staged in 1599. It exists in the 1623 First Folio version and in a quarto version first issued in 1600 and reprinted in 1602 and 1619. Henry, considered one of the great monarchs of England, was a popular subject for plays and there were a few dramatizations of the story before Shakespeare set his hand to it.

3.5 SOURCES

Henry's reign is chronicled by both Edward Hall and Raphael Holinshed and the story that Shakespeare dramatized was well known primarily because of Henry's military and political victories. Of special significance for Shakespeare's England with its growing nationalist fervour, was Henry's revival of an English claim to the French throne. In 1414 Henry invaded France and in the following year he won the Battle of Agincourt forcing the King of France to declare him his heir and marry him to his daughter.

3.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Criticism of the histories has concentrated on three features: their patriotism, their preoccupation with politics and their sequential nature.

The first substantial book on the histories in the 20th century is Felix E. Schelling's *The English Chronicle Play*(1902) which he traces to the morality and miracle traditions and attributes its spirit to the surge of nationalism that accompanied the defeat of the Spanish Armada. This view

of the history-play as patriotic drama was dominant during the First and Second World Wars and J.A.R. Marriot in *English History in Shakespeare* (1918) attempts to bring Shakespeare's message on "national unity and social solidarity" (293) to a country torn by war without and dissension within. Books with a similar thrust are H. B. Charlton's *Shakespeare, Politics and Politicians*(1929), G.Wilson Knight's *The Olive and the Sword*(1944), J. Dover Wilson's *The Fortunes of Falstaff*(1943) and his Cambridge editions of the histories, especially *Henry V,* in which he asserted that Henry's words before Agincourt and Churchill's before the Battle of Britain "come from the same national mint"(xxxi).

The major shift in the reading of the histories comes with E.M.W.Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays* (1944). While still acknowledging the importance of patriotism Tillyard's major concern lay in the politics of the history plays and their unity as a series. Critics after Tillyard, in their interpretations, have responded largely to his political views, taking his position into account even when they have differed.

Since the Second World War the approach to the histories has been mostly political. Charlton had earlier seen the Henriad as a study of kingship. But now critics began to see the histories as didactic political dramas the lessons of which could be decoded through a study of Elizabethan political thought. In *Shakespeare's 'Histories'*(1947), Lily B. Campbell suggests that Shakespeare was using history as a mirror for contemporary politics. Tillyard complements Campbell's approach by looking at the philosophical context of political doctrine - the most famous example of his stand being the idea of the 'Elizabethan world picture' that was based on principles of order and degree and that could therefore be tied in with the specific political doctrine of non-rebellion promulgated by the Tudor monarchy.

The influence of these views is evident in lines of criticism that continue to this day repeating or resisting their broad premises. One approach tries to show that the **'world picture' they created is simplistic and merely reflects Tudor propaganda**. Instead, critics like Ernest William Talbert *(The Problem of Order*[1962]) and William Sanders (*The Dramatist and the Received Idea*[1968]) find in the plays **the skepticism, tensions and equivocations that characterized Elizabethan debate on political questions**.

A second approach showing the influence of New Criticism tries to break away from such historical connections to show Shakespeare's independence

and to consider the plays as pure works of art. A.P. Rossiter in his lectures on 'Ambivalence: the dialectic of the histories' (1951) studies the plays for ironies and ambiguities and suggests that **the characteristic political attitude of the plays is ambivalence**.

A third reaction to the Tillyard-Campbell position has been to insist on the contemporary relevance of the histories and to highlight their universality. L.C Knights who is a good representative of this trend (his essay 'Shakespeare and History' [1978] is one example).

The third major line of thinking on the histories explores the continuities among the plays of the two tetralogies taking their cues from Shakespeare's historical sources. Tillyard, for example, claims that Hall's *Chronicle* depicts the working out of God's curse against England for the deposition and murder of Richard II - a curse lifted temporarily during the reign of Henry V but expiated only with the triumph of Henry VII and the establishment of the Tudor monarchy. Through this 'Tudor myth' Shakespeare unified the eight histories into a national epic. Tillyard's reading has encouraged critics to look at connections among the plays.

The second tetralogy which culminates in *Henry V* has been recognized for its unity and its greatness. Most critics have followed the lead of H.B. Charlton for whom these plays were 'psychologically, studies in kings' but dramatically 'views of kingship'. Derek Traversi in a predominantly psychological approach (*Shakespeare from 'Richard II' to 'Henry V*'[1957]) finds their basic concern to be the personal qualities that go to the making of a king? Una Ellis-Fermor ('Shakespeare's Political Plays'[1945]) traces throughout the histories the manner in which Shakespeare builds the composite figure of the statesman-king.

Henry V, the final play in the second tetralogy has been the most controversial of the histories with critical opinions polarized on the issue of the 'ideal king'. At one extreme are critics like J.Dover Wilson who celebrate Henry V as Shakespeare's ideal king and the play as a great dramatic epic. Others see Shakespeare aspiring towards a conception heroic kingship but failing to portray it convincingly. Still others detect a vein of irony in Shakespeare's treatment of Henry especially in his rejection of Falstaff for the sake of political expediency. At another end are critics who view the play as close to satire. Harold C. Goddard for example in *The Meaning of Shakespeare*

(1951) dissects Henry's flaws both as man and as king finding him 'too close for comfort to Machiavelli's ideal prince'.

In a reworking of old ideas Philip Edwards (*Threshold of a Nation*[1979]) returns to the patriotic view of the plays distinguishing between patriotism and nationalism and placing the plays, particularly *Henry V* within the context of Elizabethan expansionism.

Coppelia Kahn (*Man's Estate*[1981]) in a combination of feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives explores the problem of masculine identity in this overwhelmingly masculine genre.

SAQ

1. What are the major critical interests in the histories? Try and identify them in the play. (60 words)

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2. Which of the themes explored down the years are most convincing for an understanding of the play? (You must find textual support for your answer.) (50-60 words)

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3.7 ACT-WISE READING OF THE PLAY

In Henry V Shakespeare inherited from all the sources he could have consulted an enthusiastic picture of the legendary hero-king. He adopted the eulogistic tone of his sources (and Holinshed is typical) through a method unique among the history plays. He had a chorus before each act and in the commentary provided by the chorus you hear the voice of the historian, interpreting events, guiding our reactions, demanding our approval, and (curiously when such a voice becomes part of a play) suggesting the

inadequacy of theatre for the realization of history: "Can this cockpit ……...Agincourt" (Chorus I, 11-14). Set against the chorus's enthusiasm for Henry is Shakespeare's invitation to his audience to examine the heroic image more closely. He does this through the comic subplot which, in the early stages of the play, offers a different interpretation of the main action. Each of the first three choruses is followed by a scene that undercuts its evocation of heroism.

Chorus I as prologue

The first chorus enters the stage and wishes for a Muse that could provide a kingdom for a stage etc. and present this great period in English history with appropriate and matching grandeur. But as this is obviously not possible, the chorus urges the audience to use their imagination while watching the play. This prologue deserves special attention because apart from performing its function as commentator it draws attention to the peculiar limitations of the Elizabethan stage and takes the audience into confidence about them. What we have said about theatrical convention earlier should be of some use to you in understanding the special appeal made by the Chorus to the audience: "Piece out our imperfections with your thoughts" and "Think, when we talk of horses, that you see them".

This first chorus from its appeal to the muse and its declared intention to present the heroic king and his deeds, leads into the unheroic conversation of the two clerics who scheme to avoid taxation and discuss means to divert Henry's attention.

Act I

Scene 1

The opening scene of the play is set in an antechamber in the King's palace in London. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely are discussing a bill passed against the church which may cost them dearly. Actually the bill had been passed long back, but due to the civil strife at that time it was forgotten. Now, once again, it is under consideration, and this becomes a matter of concern for the two prelates. Nevertheless they are convinced that Henry being a true Christian king will not allow any law to

be passed against the church. In this context, various virtues of the king get listed and we come to know that the king is devoted to the church; that he is scholar, theologian, and defender of commonwealth, military strategist, and statesman who can unravel all the complexities of statecraft. The Archbishop also refers to the sudden spiritual transformation which appeared in Prince Hal after the death of his father. He also informs Ely that in order to mitigate the bill, on behalf of the Convocation, he has offered a subsidy to help the king in his forthcoming war with France.

Scene 2 takes place in the Presence Chamber of the Palace. The king urges the bishops to tell him whether his claims to France are righteous or not. He wants to know this before meeting the ambassadors from France. The archbishop convinces the king that he is just in claiming the French throne through Edward III- his great grandfather. At this point, Ely, Exeter, and Westmoreland ask the king to remember his noble ancestry and courageous heritage and encourage him to fight for his rights. The Archbishop promises to provide financial assistance in the war. These, of course, motivate him, but the King is still worried regarding the Scots, who, he thinks, might attack the country on finding it defenceless. But the nobles think that the state is strong and sound and war with France will not affect its health. Satisfied, the king declares that he and his forces are going to France.

Now he summons the ambassadors from France. The message from the Dauphin that they carry tells him that the Dauphin is well aware of Henry's claims on France. But according to him Henry is quite young and immature and deserves the only gift which the Dauphin has sent for him - the tennis balls. Henry responds gravely to this insult. He says that he will dazzle the eyes of France; that the Dauphin's tennis balls will be turned into gunstones; that many thousands will die and he will be avenged. Carrying this message, the French ambassadors leave and Henry says that now he has no thoughts other than invading / going to France.

SAQ

In view, particularly, of the fact of the Church offering to fund the king's overseas ventures, what can be inferred of the relationship between the Church and the State in medieval England ? (60 words)

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Stop to Consider

How does the opening scene set the tone for the rest of the play? Note the venality of the two clerics and the bargain they have in mind: financial support in exchange for withdrawal of the bill regarding the secular property of the Church.

Hold in view the picture of the king that emerges in the conversation of the two prelates as you read different perspectives through the rest of the play.

Why do the clerics convince the king that he is right in staking a claim to the French throne? What is the dramatic significance of this?

Chorus II

The second chorus again celebrates Henry V as the mirror of all Christian kings. It also informs us about the preparation for war. It says that young men are leaving their farms and joining forces with the king. Honour is the only thought reigning in the breast of everyman. And the French are frightened on hearing England's plan to wage war. But along with all this everything is not all right in the country. Through the spies, the French have corrupted three important nobles of England- Richard, Earl of Cambridge, Henry, Lord Scroop of Masham and Sir Thomas Grey, the knight of Northumberland.

Act II

This second chorus celebrating the youth of England is followed by the scene where the youth of England is represented by Bardolph, Nym and Pistol, their planned expedition to France, a parody of the King's.

Scene 1 set in a street in London shows the meeting of Corporal Nym and Lieutenant Bardolph. Bardolph informs the other about Pistol and Nell Quickly's marriage. Nell Quickly had once promised to marry Nym. As soon as Pistol and Mistress Quickly enter the scene, Nym and Pistol draw

their swords and get into a verbal tussle. While the other two are still trying to calm them down a Boy enters and urges Quickly to comfort sick Falstaff. She leaves with the Boy. Bardolph forcibly stops the two 'fighting heroes'. At this point Quickly comes back and announces that Falstaff is ill and everybody leaves to see him.

Scene 2 is set in the Council Chamber in Southampton. Exeter, Bedford and Westmoreland enter the scene discussing the three traitors who had plotted to kill the king and we come to know that the King has discovered the truth. At this moment the King enters with Scroop, Cambridge, and Grey- the three traitors, who have no idea that the king already knows about their plan. The three try to flatter the king and speak of the upcoming war in exaggerated way. Here, Henry refers to a case where a man was arrested railing against the king while drunk. Henry says that he is thinking of pardoning the person, but these three are all against showing any sort of mercy to such a man. Then Henry wonders if such a little offence is to be dealt so sternly, what should be done with serious criminals. Now Henry handles the three some papers which reveal king's knowledge of the plot. All the three confess their crime and ask for mercy, but keeping in view the seriousness of their crime, Henry sentences them to death. Once they are gone, we find that the king is quite relieved, as all the immediate obstacles on the way to France are removed.

In Scene 3 we again meet the comic characters and we come to know that Falstaff is dead. In the two earlier plays where Falstaff is featured his large and skeptical presence provides a counterweight to the ideals of heroism and honour. Here, the focus being on the presentation of a hero king, the direct subversion by a figure like Falstaff would destroy the play's dominant theme (though a milder form of questioning is offered by the first three Choruses).

Scene 4 is set in the French king's palace in France. Here we meet the French king worried over the approaching English forces. But the Dauphin does not take it seriously. To him Henry is nothing but a trivial, empty and wayward youth. However the Constable of France thinks differently. He says that he had heard a lot about Henry being a very competent ruler. While they are discussing all these, Exeter comes in, on behalf of the English

King, with the advice that the French should concede the just claim of Henry; otherwise devastating war is inevitable. He also says that the Dauphin's gift of tennis balls was not appreciated and he would have to answer Harry for this insult. The French king promises to answer the next day.

SAQ

1. What is the effect of the contrast between the Chorus's glorification of the youth of England and the parodic representation of that youth in the scene that follows? (60 words)

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2. Why is Falstaff's illness and death given minimum theatrical time? Why does Shakespeare bring it in at all instead of eliminating it completely? Reflect on the significance of this small reference to a major influence from Henry's youth. (30 + 40 words)

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Henry, Falstaff and the Relations of Power

What kind of understanding must we employ to explain why Henry treats the traitors the way he does? Can this scene be better understood in the context of the dismissal of Falstaff from the play? Why does Shakespeare have all these erstwhile friends of Henry removed?

These questions need your close attention in order to expand your reading beyond drama and history to ideas of political philosophy in the period.

Chorus III

Once again the chorus enters and appeals to the imaginative powers of the audience. It asks the audience to imagine that the English ambassador's return from France with the French king's offer of his daughter Katherine

along with a few "petty and unprofitable dukedoms" as dowry. Henry, of course, rejects the offer. Now he and his people have sailed to France and landed at Harfleur. The mood that is evoked by Henry's exhortation to his troops is overturned in the following scene by the arrival of Bardolph and his fellows who find the alehouse more attractive than the prospects of victory in battle.

Act III

Scene 1 is set before Harfleur gate in France. In a rousing speech, Henry urges his soldiers to charge the city walls saying-"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more" (1). In the long address he tries to motivate his men to fight bravely against the French by appealing to their manhood, ancestry and love for England.

In Scene 2 which parodically repeats the earlier scene, we find that Bardolph also calls his men - himself and Pistol - to the breach. But both of them are reluctant to go, as they are afraid of death. At this point Fluellen, a Welsh officer, enters and drives them to the breach.

In Scene 3 again in front of the Harfleur gate, King Henry warns the Governor and the citizens of disastrous consequences if they do not surrender. Henry says that he and his people will convert the whole city into ashes mercilessly if they do not yield. Receiving no help from the Dauphin, the Governor surrenders and asks for mercy. The king responds positively and gives Exeter the charge of the town and orders him to be merciful to the people. We also get to know that after a night's halt, Henry and his men are going to march towards Calais.

Scene 4 takes us to a room in the French Palace. Here we find Katherine trying to learn English from her gentlewoman Alice.

Scene 5 is also set in the French Palace. The French king is worried about the presence of King Henry and his army in France and is wondering about their capabilities and their strength. But the Dauphin and the Constable do not think too highly of the English. Nevertheless everybody agrees that the English must be stopped quickly. The French King calls upon all the French nobles to fight against Henry, but orders the Dauphin to stay back. When the French king comes to know from the constable that the English army is

in disarray, he sends the French Herald Montjoy to Henry to find out how much ransom the English king is willing to pay to the French.

Scene 6 takes us to the English camp in Picardy. Fluellen informs Gower of the glorious victory at the bridge they were fighting for and praises Exeter lavishly. Along with him Fluellen praises Pistol as well for his bravery. All of a sudden Pistol enters the scene and asks Fluellen to use his power to save Bardolph, who has been accused of theft and is going to be executed as per Exeter's orders. When Fluellen rejects to help, Pistol becomes very angry and leaves abusing Fluellen. Now Gower tells Fluellen about Pistol's true character and says that he must be careful while dealing with a person like him. At this point the king enters the scene and Fluellen reports him the glorious victory at the bridge. When king asks about the casualties, Fluellen tells him about the Bardolph case. King also supports Exeter's decision and tells that French people must be dealt fairly and justly. English army must not abuse or upbraid them. In this way Henry hopes to win people's loyalty and respect. Here the French herald Montjoy enters and delivers the message that the French king has asked Henry to pay ransom for the damage English troops have caused in France. Henry refuses to pay the ransom and says that though his people are sick and he wants to avoid confrontation with the French but if required he and his people will fight- they are not going to turn their back. With this message, Montjoy is sent back and we hear Henry saying-

"We are in God's hand, brother, not in theirs." (175)

Scene 7 is set in the French camp near Agincourt. We find that the Constable, Lord Rambures, Orleans, Dauphin, etc. are talking to each other. They are boasting about their armour and horses. It is a scene on the preparations for war. At this point a messenger brings the news that the English are camped just fifteen hundred yards away. Hearing this they make fun of the miserable condition of the English party. And they are sure that they will be able to beat the English quite easily. Orleans even comments-

Is it now two o'clock; but, let me see, by ten
We shall have each a hundred Englishmen."

(156-157)

Stop to Consider

At this point it is useful to pause for a while and take stock of the mood created. The arrival at Agincourt is accompanied with an awareness of war as the tool of scheming politicians, an opportunity for petty crooks to make money - war therefore as an inspiration for both cowardice and valour. The differences in the statements of the chorus and the scenes that follow are points that should be noted.

SAQ

1. Like Falstaff, another figure who gets very little theatrical space and time is Katherine, the daughter of the French king. Why is this so? (40 words)

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2. What knowledge can we gain regarding the place of women in history from the fact that Katherine is destined to be a pawn in the power struggle between Henry and her father? (60 words)

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Chorus IV

The fourth Chorus gives a description of the two opposing camps on the night before the battle- there are whispers of the sentinels, neighs of the horses, sound of armour, firelights in each camp, etc. In such a situation, in the French camp the confident soldiers are playing dice while waiting impatiently for the dawn. On the other hand, the English, aware of their small number and weakened condition are contemplating 'the morning's danger'. And King Henry can be seen walking from tent to tent talking to his soldiers- comforting and motivating them.

Act IV

Act IV, Scene 1 - one of the longest scenes in the play - is set in the English camp at Agincourt. On the night before the battle the King tells Gloucester that he is worried about the outcome of the battle. When Erpingham enters the scene, Henry on impulse borrows his cloak planning to roam around in disguise. In disguise he meets many of his common soldiers and interacts with them - coming to know what common people think about the king, the war, the French claim, the relationship between the king and his subjects, duties of soldiers etc.

When the conversation with a particular group of soldiers reaches the topic of the king's ransom, Henry says that the king has refused to be ransomed. But one of the soldiers, William, says that the king may ultimately give in. Feeling insulted Henry challenges William to a duel in the future, if both of them survive the war. As marks of identification for that duel they exchange their gloves. Once this group of soldiers has left, Henry starts reflecting on the burdens of being a king. He thinks that the only benefit kings have is ceremony and that also comes along with poisoned flattery. He finds a slave much better off than a king because he can at least sleep peacefully at night. After this Henry prays to god to fill the hearts of his soldiers with courage and to forgive his father's crime of usurping Richard II's throne as he has already made reparation and is planning to do more.

Scene 2 is set in the French camp. Here we see that the Dauphin is very excited and eager to fight. A message arrives that the English are ready for the battle. Listening to the news the Constable comments on the pathetic condition of the English and how easy it will be to defeat them.

Scene 3 is set in the English camp. Gloucester, Bedford Exeter Erpingham, Salisbury and Westmoreland are discussing the battle. Exeter says that the French army is five times larger than the English and the French soldiers are fresh. Salisbury leaves and the king enters. Westmoreland expresses his wish to have some more people with them to fight in front of the king. But Henry says that they are just the right number - enough either to die or to win honour without sharing it with more people. The king's motivating speech works like magic on the exhausted and disheartened nobles.

At this point the French herald Montjoy enters and asks the king to surrender before the slaughter begins, but the king says that he and his people will

either defeat the French or die. Getting this reply, Montjoy leaves and we see Henry give his cousin the Duke of York the privilege of leading the troops into battle.

In Scene 4 on the battlefield Pistol encounters a French soldier and manages to get a fine ransom. Through the Boy we come to know that Nym and Bardolph are already dead.

In Scene 5 set in another part of the battlefield, we see the constable, the Duke of Orleans, Bourbon, Dauphin, and Rambures realize that though they outnumbered the English they are actually being defeated. There is utter confusion in the field, but they decide to continue the fight save themselves from shame.

Scene 6 takes us to another part of the battlefield where Henry having prisoners with him is talking to Exeter and others. The king says that they have done well in the war up to this time but thee is still a lot more to do. Exeter informs about the brave death of the Duke of the York and Earl of Suffolk. All of a sudden a new alarm is heard. Thinking that this may be a renewed French attack, the king orders his men to kill all the French prisoners.

Scene 7 is set in another part of the same battlefield. Fluellen and Gower are seen discussing Henry's order to kill all the French prisoners. After some time the king enters with several nobles and prisoners and here also comes the French herald Montjoy who admits the French defeat. King Henry declares that this victory will be remembered as the Battle of Agincourt. Everybody is quite happy and Fluellen expresses his love and loyalty to the king. In the meantime William enters the scene. He is the soldier with whom Henry had once exchanged his gloves and had challenged for a fight. In a jolly mood the king plays a trick on Fluellen and William and creates the situation where both of them will confront each other as rivals.

Scene 8 is set before King Henry's pavilion. Here as Henry had expected William and Fluellen face each other and just before they are going to get into serious fight Henry comes up and tells them the truth and admits his part in the charade. At this moment an English herald enters with casualty report and we come to know that French have died in exceptionally large

number, and English loss is quite light. Henry repeatedly thanks god for this victory and orders for mass / holy rites. (Please refer to the text)

Stop to Consider

With the fourth chorus and the Act that follows we finally have a coincidence of mood. The heroic Henry, anticipated all this while but not actually seen in the real figure that appears on the stage, finally arrives on the scene. For the first time the King, through a soliloquy, confronts the audience and speaks about his own responsibility for the situation his policies have created.

Chorus V

The Chorus enters and begs pardon from the audience for the lapse of time as five years have passed since the battle of Agincourt. During this period many things have happened - Henry V's return to London, his triumphant reception there, the visit of the Holy Roman Emperor Sigismund, etc. Then we are told to imagine Henry's second visit to France after five years which we know ended with the treaty of Troyes.

Act V

In Scene 1, set in France in the English camp, we meet the comic characters-Fluellen and Gower once again. We see that Fluellen is wearing a leek even though it is not St. Davy's Day just to irritate Pistol and he succeeds in this intention. In return, Fluellen forces Pistol to eat the leek. After Fluellen leaves Pistol curses him and laments his lot as his wife has also died recently. Left with no solace in life he decides to adopt his old profession of stealing.

Scene 2, the last scene of the play, takes place in an apartment in the French Palace. As soon as the scene opens, we see King Henry, Bedford. Gloucester, Warwick, Westmoreland and other lords entering from one side and the French king with Queen Isabel: princess Katherine Alice Duke of Burgundy and others enter from the other side. King Henry greets the French King and Queen and others. Replying to the greeting Queen Isabel says that now they should talk of love not war. The Duke of Burgundy makes a long speech telling Henry how desperately the French nation needs peace. To this Henry replies that only if all his demands are met peace is

possible in France. For the purpose of discussing the terms of settlement, king sends his nobles with the French king. Queen Isabel also follows them to take part in the discussion leaving behind Henry alone with Katherine with her gentlewoman Alice.

In the long wooing scene that follows we see Henry in a different light- trying to win the heart of a woman and here also he succeeds. When the French king and others return, Henry asks for Katherine as his first demand as a part of the Treaty. The French King agrees to the marriage hoping that this will bring an end to the long enmity between the two countries. Others also bless the match. King Henry calls for preparations for the wedding.

Chorus VI

The chorus enters and as usual apologizes for the shortcomings of the dramatic medium. It also points out that none of the fine hopes raised in the last scene were realized. During Henry VI's reign France was again lost and England suffered bloody losses.

SAQ

Note the various ways through which the play subverts its own picture of the glorious hero-king. Make a list of as many such references and instances as you can from the play. (60 words)

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The 'Machiavellian' strain

Can I call the political dealings in the play Machiavellian? Would the French king's willingness to give his daughter to Henry qualify as a Machiavellian decision? Does the text support such an interpretation or could you say that it goes only so far as to provide a more 'psychological' reading ?

Questions such as these are meant to provoke your critical awareness of which set of explanations you employ to understand the play.

Check Your Progress

1. Elaborate the concept of kingship that emerges in the play. How does the king's view of kingship differ from that of the commoners and what does it tell us about the discussion of 'power' in the play?

2. How would you read the strategies of Henry in the light of Machiavellianism? Justify your reading with textual examples.

3. Which episodes best illustrate Henry's special understanding of kingly power? Explain with reference to the text

4. What dramatic effect does Shakespeare achieve by employing the Chorus? Comparison with the traditional role normally reserved for choric commentary.

5. What do you feel about the presentation of Katherine by Shakespeare and her treatment by her father the king of France and by Henry in the light of the complete play ? From this what can you say about the place of women in history and consequently in the history play?

6. How would you distinguish the history-play from the tragedies or the comedies?

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Unit 4
Much Ado About Nothing

Contents:

4.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit should help you to read the play *Much Ado About Nothing* and to help you understand the play's various nuances.

With the aid of the information provided in this unit you should be able to:

- *note* Shakespeare's attitude to and explorations of the possibilities of the comic genre
- *analyze* the deliberate problematizations of language to set off the dialectic within the play
- *appreciate* the male-female equations in the context of the conventions of the time
- *recognize* the concerns of the entire play towards theatre/disguise/ counterfeiting
- *understand* the various and unique representations of the female characters and avoid reductive generalizations

- *read* each act as it develops and builds upon specific dramatic/ situational elements
- *examine* the various critical interpretations of the play at different times

4.2 INTRODUCTION

Much Ado About Nothing is generally considered one of Shakespeare's better comedies that combine jocularity and mirth with the more serious negotiations with honor, shame, and court politics. Like *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night, Much Ado About Nothing,* is interspersed with darker concerns, presents the veneer of a joyful comedy that ends with multiple marriages and no deaths. The crisis at the center of *Much Ado About Nothing* troubles us, since the play creates a very strong sense of anger, betrayal, hatred, grief, and despair among the main characters. And though the crisis seems to resolve itself soon enough, the play often seems a few steps away from tragedy: in this the plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* shares significant elements with that of *Romeo and Juliet* (which does end in tragedy). The play also has much in common with *The Winter's Tale*, where Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* stages a false death only to come back to life once her beloved has repented, like Hero in *Much Ado*.

Stop to Consider

Although one of the features of Shakespearean comedy is that no one dies, it would be a mistake to assume that death is absent from this genre. Often, Shakespeare's comedies are more accepting of death than his tragedies, treating death as part of the natural cycle of life. *Much Ado about Nothing* is no exception, and Hero's pretending to die of humiliation makes death even more vividly present here.

Although it would seem that the young lovers Hero and Claudio provide the chief thrust for the plot, it is the sparring, warring and finally, the courtship between Benedick and Beatrice makes *Much Ado about Nothing* impressive. Benedick and Beatrice bicker with enjoyable humor, and Shakespeare develops their passage from hostility to authentic affection unlike the Katrina-Petruchio relationship in *The Taming of the Shrew* that

almost seems venomous in comparison. That Beatrice and Benedick have histories behind them adds to their affiliation - they are older and more mature than most of the typical lovers in Shakespeare's comedies.

4.2.1 The Title: Nothing / Noting

Shakespeare's use of the word nothing in the title and text of *Much Ado about Nothing* would have held significant, if sometimes ambiguous, religious and philosophical meanings for Elizabethan audiences. In the time, the "Nothing" of the title would have been pronounced "Noting." Thus, the play's title could read: "*Much Ado About Noting*." Indeed, many of the players participate in the actions of observing, listening, and writing, or noting. In order for a plot hinged on instances of deceit to work, the characters must note one another constantly. When the women manipulate Beatrice into believing that Benedick adores her, they conceal themselves in the orchard so that Beatrice can better note their conversation. Since they know that Beatrice loves to eavesdrop, they are sure that their plot will succeed: "look where Beatrice like a lapwing runs / Close by the ground to hear our conference," notes Hero (III.i.24-25). Each line the women speak is a carefully placed note for Beatrice to take up and ponder; the same is true of the scheme to convince Benedick of Beatrice's passion.

Don John's plot to undo Claudio also hinges on noting: in order for Claudio to believe that Hero is unchaste and unfaithful, he must be brought to her window to witness, or note, Margaret (whom he takes to be Hero) bidding farewell to Borachio in the semidarkness. Dogberry, Verges, and the rest of the watchmen discover and arrest Don John because, although ill-equipped in language, they overhear talk of the Margaret-Borachio staging. Despite their verbal deficiencies, they manage to capture Don John and bring him to Leonato, after having had the sexton (a church official) "note" the occurrences of the evening in *writing*. In the end, 'noting', in the sense of 'writing', unites Beatrice and Benedick for good: Hero and Claudio reveal love sonnets written by Beatrice and Benedick, *textual* evidence that notes their love for one another.

SAQ

Shakespeare's, indeed, the Elizabethan tendency to play and pun with words leads to the rich texture and the complexity in the plays of the period. Can you detect any such other instance of wordplay in this play? (60 - 70 words)

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The title is at least a quadruple *entendre* (not a mere double entendre). Most obviously there is the perplexity that 'much ado', or a great fuss, is being made of something that is of no significance, '*nothing*'. Secondly, *nothing* was pronounced the same as noting, meaning, observing. Thus Claudio's line, "Didst thou note the daughter of Signior Leonato?", and Benedick's reply, "I noted her not, but I looked on her," is a playful allusion to the title adding to the play's comedic status (I.1.158-60). Thirdly, again because *nothing* was pronounced the same as *noting*, the title is an allusion to *noting*, creating musical sound. An example of this 'noting' comes when Don Pedro says to Balthazar "Or if thou wilt hold longer argument, Do it in notes," or, loosely translated, stop arguing and sing (II.3.54-5). The fourth sense of *nothing is no thing*, meaning signifying, in Shakespeare's time, a bawdy reference to the female anatomy.

4.2.2 The Ideal of Social Grace

The characters' dense, colorful manner of speaking represents the ideal that Renaissance courtiers strove for in their social interactions. The play's language is heavily laden with metaphor and ornamented by rhetoric. Benedick, Claudio, and Don Pedro all produce the kind of witty banter that courtiers used to attract attention and approval in noble households. Courtiers were expected to speak in highly contrived language but to make their clever performances seem effortless.

'The Courtier'

The most famous model for this kind of behavior is Baldassare Castiglione's sixteenth-century manual The Courtier, translated into English by Thomas Hoby in 1561. According to this work, the ideal courtier masks his effort and appears to project elegance and natural grace by means of what Castiglione calls sprezzatura, the illusion of effortlessness. Benedick and his companions try to display their polished social graces both in their behavior and in their speech.

The play pokes fun at the fanciful language of love that courtiers used. When Claudio falls in love, he tries to be the perfect courtier by using intricate language. Benedick notes: "His words are a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes" (II.iii.18-19). Although the young gallants in the play seem casual in their displays of wit, they constantly struggle to maintain their social positions. Benedick and Claudio must constantly strive to remain in Don Pedro's favor. When Claudio silently agrees to let Don Pedro take his place to woo Hero, it is quite possible that he does so not because he is too shy to woo the woman himself, but because he must accede to Don Pedro's authority in order to stay in Don Pedro's good favor. When Claudio believes that Don Pedro has deceived him and wooed Hero not for Claudio but for himself, he cannot drop his polite civility, even though he is full of despair. Beatrice jokes that Claudio is "civil as an orange," punning on the Seville orange, a bitter fruit (II.i.256). Claudio remains polite and nearly silent even though he is upset, telling Benedick of Don Pedro and Hero: "I wish him joy of her" (II.i.170). Clearly, Claudio chooses his obedience to Don Pedro over his love for Hero.

Claudio displays social decorum, but his strict adherence to social propriety eventually leads him into a trap. He abandons Hero at the wedding because Don John leads him to believe that she is unchaste (marriage to an unchaste woman would be socially unacceptable). But Don John's plan to unseat Claudio does not succeed, of course, as Claudio remains Don Pedro's favorite, and it is Hero who has to suffer until her good reputation is restored. It has been argued that many of Claudio's purported character inconsistencies in the play are actually quite consistent when seen as the actions of a soldier rather than of a courtier.

4.2.3 The Significance of 'Honor' and 'Chastity'

The aborted wedding ceremony, in which Claudio rejects Hero, accusing her of infidelity and violated chastity and publicly shaming her in front of her father, is the climax of the play. In Shakespeare's time, a woman's honor was based upon her virginity and chaste behavior. For a woman to lose her honor by having sexual relations before marriage meant that she would lose all social standing, a disaster from which she could never recover. Moreover, this loss of honor would poison the woman's whole family. Thus, when Leonato rashly believes Claudio's shaming of Hero at the wedding ceremony, he tries to obliterate her entirely: "Hence from her, let her die" (IV.i.153). Furthermore, he speaks of her loss of honor as an indelible stain from which he cannot distance himself, no matter how hard he tries: "O she is fallen / Into a pit of ink, that the wide sea / Hath drops too few to wash her clean again" (IV.i.138-140).

For women of the era, the loss of honor was a form of annihilation - a kind of death. For men, on the other hand, honor depended on male friendship alliances and was more military in nature. Unlike a woman, a man could defend his honor, and that of his family, by fighting in a battle or a duel. Hence Beatrice urges Benedick to avenge Hero's honor by dueling to the death with Claudio. As a woman, Hero cannot seize back her honor, but Benedick can do it for her via physical combat.

Stop to Consider

In this play, *accusations* of unchaste and untrustworthy behavior can be just as damaging to a woman's honor as such behavior itself.

Is the same true for the males in the play? How is a man's honor affected by accusations of untrustworthiness or unfaithfulness?

SAQ

1. Do sexual fidelity and innocence fit into the picture in the same way for men as it does for women? (50words)

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2. Examine the question of honor and fidelity as it relates to four male characters in the play: Benedick, Leonato, Claudio, and Don Pedro. (80words)

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3. What could Shakespeare be saying about the difference between male and female honor? (60words)

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Hero's Dishonour/Death

Claudio's powerful words accusing Hero of unchaste and disloyal acts cause her to fall down in apparent lifelessness. Leonato accentuates the direness of Hero's state, pushing her further into seeming death by renouncing her, "Hence from her, let her die" (IV.i.153). When Friar Francis, Hero, and Beatrice convince Leonato of his daughter's innocence, they maintain that she really has died, in order to punish Claudio and give Hero adequate time to 'regain' her honor, which, although not lost, has been publicly savaged. Claudio performs all the actions of mourning Hero, paying a choir to sing a dirge at her tomb. In a symbolic sense, Hero has died, since, although she is pure, Claudio's damning accusation having permanently besmirched her name. She must therefore, symbolically die and be reborn pure again in order for Claudio to marry her. Hero's false death is less a charade aimed to induce remorse in Claudio than a social ritual designed to cleanse her name and person of infamy.

Even though Hero is ultimately vindicated, her public shaming at the wedding ceremony is too terrible to be ignored. In a sense, this kind of humiliation incurs more damage to her honor and her family name than would an act of unchaste behavior-an transgression she never commits. The language that both Claudio and Leonato use to shame Hero is extremely strong. To Claudio she is a "rotten orange" (IV.i.30), and to Leonato a rotting carcass that cannot be preserved: "the wide sea / Hath . . . / . . . salt too little which may season give / To her foul tainted flesh!" (IV.i.139-142).

Shame is also what Don John hopes will cause Claudio to lose his place as Don Pedro's favorite: once Claudio is discovered to be engaged to a loose woman, Don John believes that Don Pedro will reject Claudio as he rejected Don John long ago. Shame is a form of social punishment closely connected to loss of honor. A product of an illegitimate sexual coupling himself, Don John has grown up constantly reminded of his own social shame, and he will do anything to right the balance. Ironically, in the end Don John is shamed and threatened with torture to punish him for deceiving the company, clearly losing his place in courtly society.

4.2.4 Deception

The plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* is based upon deliberate deceptions, some malevolent and others benign. The duping of Claudio and Don Pedro results in Hero's disgrace, while the ruse of her death prepares the way for her redemption and reconciliation with Claudio. In a more lighthearted vein, Beatrice and Benedick are fooled into thinking that each loves the other, and they are maneuvered to actually falling in love. *Much Ado About Nothing* shows that deceit is not inherently 'evil', but something that can be used as a means to good or bad ends.

In the play, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between positive and negative deception. When Claudio announces his desire to woo Hero, Don Pedro takes it upon himself to woo her for Claudio. Then, at the instigation of Don John, Claudio begins to mistrust Don Pedro, thinking he has been deceived. Just as the play's audience comes to believe, temporarily, in the illusions of the theater, so the play's characters become caught up in the illusions that they help to create for one another. Benedick and Beatrice flirt caustically at the masked ball, each possibly aware of the other's presence yet pretending not to know the person hiding behind the mask. Likewise, when Claudio has shamed and rejected Hero, Leonato and his household "publish" that Hero has died in order to punish Claudio for his mistake. When Claudio returns, penitent, to accept the hand of Leonato's "niece" (actually Hero), a group of masked women enters and Claudio must wed blindly. The masking of Hero and the other women reveals that the social institution of marriage has little to do with love. When Claudio flounders and asks, "Which is the lady I must seize upon?" he is ready and willing to commit the rest of his life to one of a group of unknowns (V.iv.53). His willingness stems not only from his guilt about slandering an innocent woman but also from the fact

that he may care more about rising in Leonato's favor than in marrying for love. In the end, deceit is neither positive nor negative: it is a means to an end, a way to create an illusion that helps one succeed socially.

The **theme of appearance versus reality** has been deemed central to the structure and tone of *Much Ado.* Eavesdropping and misunderstandings; masquerade and sham - are deliberately interwoven into the design of the play - and error, affectation, and misreading are the very stuff of life in Messina.

The ideas of deception that are so intrinsic to the meaning of the play can also be seen as a kind of self-reflexive observation by the playwright into the very notion of 'theatricality'. (See Section 4.2.7)

4.2.5 Animal Imagery

The play is peppered with metaphors involving the taming of wild animals. In the case of the courtship between Beatrice and Benedick, the symbol of a tamed savage animal represents the social taming that must occur for both wild souls to be ready to submit themselves to the shackles of love and marriage. Beatrice's vow to submit to Benedick's love by "[t]aming my wild heart to thy loving hand" makes use of terms from falconry, suggesting that Benedick is to become Beatrice's master (III.i.113). In the opening act, Claudio and Don Pedro tease Benedick about his aversion to marriage, comparing him to a wild animal. Don Pedro quotes a common adage, "'In time the savage bull doth bear the yoke,'" meaning that in time even the savage Benedick will surrender to the taming of love and marriage (I.i.213). Benedick mocks this sentiment, professing that he will never submit to the will of a woman. At the very end, when Benedick and Beatrice agree to marry, Claudio pokes fun at Benedick's mortified countenance, suggesting that Benedick is reluctant to marry because he remembers the allusion to tamed bulls:

> Tush, fear not, man, we'll tip thy horns with gold,
> And all Europa shall rejoice at thee
> As once Europa did at lusty Jove
> When he would play the noble beast in love.
>
> (V.iv.44-47)

Claudio changes Benedick from a laboring farm animal, a bull straining under a yoke, to a wild god, empowered by his bestial form to take sexual possession of his lady. While the bull of marriage is the sadly yoked, formerly savage creature, the bull that Claudio refers to comes from the classical myth in which Zeus took the form of a bull and carried off the mortal woman Europa. This second bull is supposed to represent the other side of the coin: the bull of bestial male sexuality.

Check Your Progress

1.How do gossip, conversation, and overhearing function in the play?

2.What does the play say about relationships between women and men in the period?

3. Speech and conversation are important in the play, and many of the characters have distinctive ways of speaking. How do the characters' speech patterns differ?

4.2.6 War

Throughout the play, images of war frequently symbolize verbal arguments and confrontations. At the beginning of the play, Leonato relates to the other characters that there is a "merry war" between Beatrice and Benedick: "They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them" (I.i.50-51). Beatrice carries on this martial imagery, describing how, when she won the last duel with Benedick, "four of his five wits went halting off" (I.i.53). When Benedick arrives, their witty exchange resembles the blows and parries of a well-executed fencing match. Leonato accuses Claudio of killing Hero with words: "Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart" (V.i.68). Later in the same scene, Benedick presents Claudio with a violent verbal challenge: to duel to the death over Hero's honor. When Borachio confesses to staging the loss of Hero's innocence, Don Pedro describes this spoken evidence as a sword that tears through Claudio's heart: "Runs not this speech like iron through your blood?" (V.i.227), and Claudio responds that he has already figuratively committed suicide upon hearing these words: "I have drunk poison whiles he uttered it" (V.i.228).

SAQ

Language in *Much Ado About Nothing* often takes the form of brutality and violence. "She speaks poniards, and every word stabs," complains Benedick of Beatrice (II.i.216). Find examples of speech and words representing wounds and battles in the play. What do Shakespeare and his cast of characters accomplish by metaphorically turning words into weapons? What does the proliferation of all this violent language signify in the play and the world outside it? (60 + 60 words)

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4.2.7 Self-conscious theatricality

From the witty yet plaintive song that Balthasar sings about the deceitfulness of men to the masked ball and the music and dancing at the end of the play, the characters of *Much Ado About Nothing* spend much of their time engaging in elaborate spectacles and entertainments. The play's title encapsulates the sentiment of effervescent and light court entertainment: the two hours' traffic onstage will be entertaining, comic, and absorbing. The characters that merrily spar and fall in love in the beginning will, of course, end up together in the conclusion. Beatrice compares courtship and marriage to delightful court dances: "wooing, wedding and repenting is as a Scotch jig, a measure, and a cinquepace" (II.i.60-61). By including a masquerade as court entertainment in the middle, as well as two songs and a dance at the end, the play presents itself as sheer entertainment, conscious of its own theatricality.

The idea of counterfeiting, in the sense of presenting a false face to the world, appears frequently throughout the play. A particularly rich and complex example of counterfeiting occurs as Leonato, Claudio, and Don Pedro pretend that Beatrice is head over heels in love with Benedick so that the eavesdropping Benedick will overhear it and believe it. Luring Benedick into this trap, Leonato ironically dismisses the idea that perhaps Beatrice

counterfeits her desire for Benedick, as he and the others counterfeit this love themselves: "O God! Counterfeit? There was never counterfeit of passion came so near the life of passion as she discovers it" (II.iii.98-99).

Another, more serious reference to counterfeiting occurs at the wedding ceremony, as Claudio rhetorically paints a picture of Hero as a perfect counterfeit of innocence, unchaste and impure beneath a seemingly unblemished surface:

> She's but the sign and semblance of her honour.
> Behold how like a maid she blushes here!
> O, what authority and show of truth
> Can cunning sin cover itself withal!
>
> (IV.i.31-34)

Hero's supposed counterfeiting is of a grave nature, as it threatens her womanly reputation. It is not her emotions that are being misconstrued, as with Beatrice, but her character and integrity.

Masks are worn by many characters during the course of the play. The men are masked at the party in the beginning of the play so that the women will not know who they are, while the women are masked at the final wedding ceremony so that the men cannot see their faces. These masks illustrate the idea of how things and people can be deceiving and are not always as they appear to be.

The centers of power

Jean Howard charts not only the ways in which the Elizabethan theatre may have served the interests of the state but also how material conditions of theatrical production served to render its products "volatile" and susceptible "to subversive appropriation' ' (164) and focuses on a series of anti-theatrical tracts, she argues that *Much Ado About Nothing* comprises a series of "playlets" that expose class tensions and which serve to address a range of "political debates about who will control the theater, and whose theatrical practices will be considered legitimate?' (165). She traces out connections between the play and these tracts, and her suggests that it becomes "an effective producer and disseminator of ideology…'. In this reading of *Much Ado*, Dogberry and Verges exist almost outside of language, performing "a

sentimental, utopian function" (177). This is, however problematic, because Dogberry's dogmatic insistence upon a ludicrously eccentric grammar in a sense demystifies the very language which holds the precarious social hierarchy of Messina in place.

Analysis of the play can point to its exploration of diverse concepts and themes. You can see below some of these and trace out how the play contains and involves references to these ideas -

Battle of the Sexes
Faithfulness
Mistaken Identity/ Disguise
Eavesdropping/ Overhearing
The Relation of Class and the Language of the Theatre

It is important here for you to understand that the above are not just names of old-fashioned 'themes'. For instance, how would you understand the idea of 'disguise' ? Is it a 'theme' ? Or just a recurrent motif in the play ? If it is, what should we make of it? Is it meant to make us think of only 'appearance and reality' as a theme?

We can take the help of what Catherine Belsey, the critic, has to say : consider the relation between language and thought. We can point to the meanings created by images, gestures and social behaviour. These also can be seen as signifying systems just as language is one such signifying system. Even clothes can help to create meaning. These are all elements of the symbolic order, the order that 'speaks' through us in society. Belsey points out that "language is simply the most flexible and perhaps the most complex of the signifying systems. Thought, if not exclusively dependent on language, is inconceivable without the symbolic order in general." Thus categories of thought, mental categories, the laws which order our thinking tend to reproduce the differences which characterize the symbolic order. Thus language should be seen as not merely based on references to signifieds but as also simultaneously reflecting the ways in which we comprehend the world through classifying strategies. Therefore we cannot have unmediated knowledge of the world; knowledge is created only through the categories and the laws of the symbolic order. Thus when we read a text like a Shakespearean play we must note what kind of symbolic order guides the playwright. We have to be alert to the many silent meanings which keep

making their appearance through an ordering of recurrent patterns, like disguise, eavesdropping, etc.

Semiotics, the study of 'signs' is premised on the notion that all aspects of a culture constitute systems of signs: clothes, movements, gestures, building or furniture, etc. By detecting these systems of signs and interpreting them, we can understand a culture. Signs do not involve meanings or concepts but can only lead us to meanings which we can fathom by interpreting these signs according to the laws or cultural conventions which people employ consciously or unconsciously.

SAQ

How would you name the various semiotic patterns or referents that one may track through the play? (For instance, many of the events of the play occur in Antonio and Leonato's orchard. Beatrice and Benedick are tricked into falling in love with one another in the orchard and many great conversations occur there, as well. This may well be taken to indicate a set of meanings related to the special significance of the orchard.) (50 - 60 words)

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4.3 DATE AND TEXT

The play was probably written in 1598 and 1599, as Shakespeare was approaching the middle of his career. *Much Ado About Nothing* was first published in 1600 and was probably written in 1598. The 1600 print was the only copy published during Shakespeare's lifetime, and bears the title inscription describing that the play "hath been sundrie times publickly acted by the right honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants". Scholars tend to agree that the 1600 Quarto originated from Shakespeare's own manuscript. Several stage directions and the inclusion of characters subsequently abandoned from the play lend credence to this belief. The First Folio of 1623 relied on the 1600 publication of the play.

Production & Payment

The play is also listed in the Stationers' Register as of August 4, 1600, along with *As You Like It* and *Henry V* and all are marked "to be staied", i.e. not published until further permission is given by the company. Scholars tend to believe that the Lord Chamberlain's men were fighting to ensure they would receive payment for the publication of the manuscript, a dispute that was obviously resolved given the subsequent publication later that year.

4.4 SOURCES

Much Ado About Nothing conflates two separate stories into one plot: the baiting of Benedick and Beatrice into a declaration of love and the deception of Claudio into mistakenly thinking that Hero is unchaste. There is not specific source for the first story, although Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde provides a basis where two people who scorn love fall in love with each other. For the second story of a lady falsely accused, however, there are numerous possible sources. Ludovico Ariosto's version in Canto V of *Orlando Furioso* in 1516 was translated into English in 1591 by Sir John Harington or Matteo Bandello's twenty-second Novella from 1554 and translated into French by Belleforest in 1590 are two possible versions that Shakespeare may have known.

Linguistic Conventions

Much Ado About Nothing is written largely in prose, contrasting with the usual blank verse of Shakespeare's other plays… but it does seem more familiar to modern audiences used to plain prose. But unlike our modern speech, Shakespeare's prose is rich, full of colorful imagery, and importantly, puns - or play with words. Note that is self-conscious - Benedick makes fun of Claudio's prose, commenting that Claudio used to speak plainly whereas he now uses orthography.

4.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

Stage History

After the first performance of *Much Ado* in late 1598, there are records of several later performances at the court of James I, including one in 1613

(under the title *Beatrice and Benedick*) as part of the festivities in honour of the marriage of James's daughter, Princess Elizabeth to the German prince Frederick V. The play seems to have remained popular until the closing of the theatres by the Puritans in 1642. After the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, William Davenant, whose Duke's Company was one of two that were licensed to perform plays in London, held exclusive rights to *Much Ado*, from which he took the Beatrice-Benedick subplot, combined it with *Measure for Measure* and called the result *The Law Against Lovers*. Samuel Pepys recorded seeing a performance of this hybrid on February 18, 1662. Shakespeare's original play was revived at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1721; however, it still had to compete with further adaptations and combinations, including Charles Johnson's *Love in a Forest* (1723) and James Miller's *The Universal Passion* (1737), a grafting together of *Much Ado* and Molière's *La Princesse d'Elide*. Meanwhile, the original play reappeared at Covent Garden in 1727 and 1746, and in 1748 David Garrick mounted the first of what would become an annual series of productions at Drury Lane - a tradition that lasted until Garrick retired in 1776. *Much Ado* was chosen to open the first Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, in 1879. Other notable 19th-century productions included one by Henry Irving in 1882 that one critic called "as near to perfection as human art can go." Memorable productions of the 20th century included John Gielgud's in 1949 (revived in 1950, 1952 and 1955); Franco Zeffirelli's in 1965, featuring Maggie Smith and her then husband, Robert Stephens; and Joseph Papp's 1972 production set in America at the turn of the century. In 1976, the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford-upon-Avon mounted a production set in India during the British Raj - directed by John Barton, it featured Judi Dench and Donald Sinden.

Other Media Productions

The earliest known TV production of *Much Ado* was broadcast in the U.K. in 1937. Directed by George More O'Ferrall, it featured Henry Oscar as Benedick and Margaretta Scott as Beatrice. A 1978 British TV production directed by Donald McWhinnie featured Anthony Andrews as Claudio, Penelope Keith as Beatrice, Ian Richardson as Don John and Michael York as Benedick. Franco Zeffirelli's 1965 stage production was

directed for British television in 1967 by Alan Cooke. Maggie Smith played Beatrice opposite Robert Stephens as Benedick, with Frank Finlay as Dogberry and Derek Jacobi as Don John. The 1972 Joseph Papp staging was produced for American television in 1973. Sam Waterston played Benedick opposite Kathleen Widdoes as Beatrice, with Barnard Hughes as Dogberry. Stuart Burge (who directed three of Shakespeare's history plays at the Stratford Festival in 1964 and 1965) directed *Much Ado* in 1984 for the BBC's "Complete Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare" project. Robert Lindsay played Benedick opposite Cherie Lunghi as Beatrice. Kenneth Branagh directed and starred in a popular feature film released in 1993. It featured his then wife, Emma Thompson, as Beatrice, Michael Keaton as Dogberry and Canadian Keanu Reeves as Don John. Hector Berlioz's comic opera *Béatrice et Bénédict*, composed between 1860 and 1862,omits altogether the character of Don John and his disruption of the romance between Claudio and Hero, and focuses instead on the gulling of Beatrice and Benedick. Gone, too, are Dogberry and Verges, who are replaced by an incompetent Kappelmeister named Somarone, whom Berlioz conceived as a satire on one of his musical colleagues. A modernized version of Much Ado aired on British TV in 2005. Directed by Brian Percival, it featured Damian Lewis as Benedick, Sarah Parish as Beatrice and Anthony O'Donnell as "Mr. Berry."

Critical Overview

Charles Gildon commented in 1710 that the fable upon which the play was based was absurd, and Coleridge is said to have pointed out that Shakespeare's motive in writing the play was merely a means of exhibiting the characters he was interested in. Nonetheless, in terms of staging, if not in terms of critical debate, *Much Ado* remains one of Shakespeare's most popular works. As already discussed above, the theme of appearance versus reality has been deemed central to the structure and tone of *Much Ado*. The play has been read as primarily about the potential for evil existing in people who have become self-absorbed in a society that reflects and supports that self-absorption.

Critics have long noted the presence of music in *Much Ado*, both in the text itself and in the form of the play. The play concludes with a dance; and

Balthasar's song, "Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more", has been commented upon often, in part because it is performed in a crucial point in the play. (Balthasar's song was, in fact, assigned a prominent, recurring role in Kenneth Branagh's film adaptation of the play.) Several important critics have written about the importance of music in Much Ado, including Bernard Shaw, W. H. Auden, and Paul N. Siegel; while composer Hector Berlioz based one of his most accomplished works on the play. Of music in Much Ado, Shaw wrote resentfully that "comparatively few of Shakespear's admirers are at all conscious that they are listening to music as they hear his phrases turn and his lines fall so fascinatingly and memorably; whilst we all, no matter how stupid we are, can understand his jokes and platitudes, and are flattered" (Siegel 1968) . Siegel demonstrates how love in the context of the play, might be likened to a dance, in which there is an unending succession of dancers who complete their movements with each couple united as they ought as the musicians strike up music for a new dance, the wedding number.

For years, much critical attention has been focused upon the reason why the Hero-Claudio plot seems so colorless alongside the romance of Beatrice-Benedick. Messina being a society of wit, the conventional Hero and Claudio are in a setting in which their shortcomings, particularly Claudio's, stand out. Hero and Claudio exist in a society in which their conventionality stands out as 'dull' and where Claudio's shortcomings are revealed - his peak in the play comes at the nadir in the portrayal of his character - his accusation of Hero. Feminist criticism has focused upon this particular scene for obvious reasons. Beatrice's command "Kill Claudio" is important, in that it represents "the climax of the development of Beatrice's and of Benedick's character." (Smith, 1967) The command stands at the climax of the plot of *Much Ado* - indicating that both Beatrice and Benedick have reached a point beyond their immediate selves and are no longer a pair of duelists; but already united. It emphasizes that honor and truth must be inextricably bound up with love. By putting the Hero/Claudio and Beatrice / Benedick plots in *Much Ado about Nothing* on equal footing, Shakespeare focused our attention on the conflicting motifs of the play (Nevo, 1980). Among the gender conscious / feminist readings of the text, it has been noted that the expansion of certain feelings and attitudes, the clearest expressions of compassion, generosity, and fidelity that constitute an important part of Shakespeare's theatrical canon is most clearly articulated by the female

characters. (Crick, 1961) The characters' usage of patriarchal speech in *Much Ado* demonstrates the way in which this type of speech establishes social dominance through the transformation, dismissal, or oppression of the words and thoughts of others.

SAQ

Why do you think is Imogen, Leonato's wife in *Much Ado*, absent? (An examination of the point will necessitate a reevaluation of the play's characters, especially the immediate members of Leonato's family. Try to make the connection with the other 'missing' wives in Shakespeare's corpus.) (60 words)

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In terms of form, *Much Ado about Nothing* has been analyzed as an integration of the Italian novella and the English comedy. Through his linking of these two genres, Shakespeare could be seen to be exploring the contradictions within comic conventions and the problems inherent in combining non-comic and non-dramatic materials with comedy. (Osborne 1961) The play is also often read as a comedy of manners and that like other plays of this genre its central theme is the examination of a morally flaccid aristocratic class that accepts the established social codes without question.

Constable Dogberry is among the many extraordinarily unforgettable characters in Shakespeare. The verbose constable functions as a deliberate caricature of his 'betters' in Messina what with their emphasis upon superficiality and appearance. Despite their apparent stupidity, Dogberry, Verges and the Watch are the key to the resolution of the play for their role in divulging the truth about Don John's plot against Hero. Dogberry is significantly the interpreter and conveyer of messages crucial to the play's outcome, akin to Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who seeks to play all the roles. He is involved in investigation, in seeking out the truth. His language is interspersed with malapropisms, which distort language as, analogously, Bottom distorts dramatic convention. (Dawson 1982)

Among other influential later twentieth century readings are those by John Drakakis who presents an interpretation of *Much Ado about Nothing* that is informed by post-structuralist theoretical principles; Nova Myhil, whose reading focuses on the problems related to knowledge and perception, arguing that the depiction in the play of numerous deceptions, highlights Shakespeare's methodology for creating different modes of interpretation; Camille Wells Slights looks at the social nature of language and its relationship to hierarchical social and political power as one of the main concerns of *Much Ado about Nothing*; Anthony B. Dawson discusses how messages and their interpretation (or, more often, misinterpretation) not only propel the plot in *Much Ado about Nothing*, but also act as signs, or clues, to the play's major themes. Thomas W. Ross compares *Much Ado about Nothing* to Shakespeare's problem plays and notes the play's elements of disharmony and ethical ambiguity. Ross contends, however, that the play is not a failure, but that it succeeds brilliantly in conveying its bitter-sweet power.

4.6 ACT-WISE READING OF THE PLAY

Act I

In Messina, the governor Leonato, his daughter Hero, and her cousin Beatrice (Antonio's daughter) learn from a messenger that Don Pedro has won victory in a battle and is returning home. He arrives with Claudio, Benedick, and Pedro's bastard brother, Don John. Claudio falls in love with Hero at first sight. Benedick and Beatrice chide one another and trade witticisms. In private, Claudio tells Benedick of his love, but Benedick only teases him. Don Pedro, however, vows to help Claudio by disguising himself as Claudio and making advances to Hero. Leonato's brother Antonio overhears Don Pedro and Claudio's conversation, but believes Don Pedro is in love with Hero, rather than Claudio. Informing Leonato of this, both rejoice at Prince Don Pedro's supposed intentions and plan to tell Hero. Don John's servant Conrade informs Don John of Claudio and Pedro's plans to woo Hero for Claudio, but John, who enjoys being grouchy and spreading gloom, plans to attempt to foil the plans.

Act II

At dinner, while discussing husbands, Beatrice vows to never marry, echoing Benedick's earlier vow. The men arrive in masks: Don Pedro and Hero

dance; Benedick and Beatrice dance, and she makes fun of Benedick in general, possibly not knowing she is in fact dancing with him. Don John appears to Claudio, who identifies himself as Benedick, even though Don John knows he's Claudio. Don John tells him Don Pedro is actually in love with Hero, causing Claudio to become depressed. Benedick carries the ruse further, depressing him more. To his relief, though, Don Pedro unites Hero and Claudio in future marriage. Further, Don Pedro plans to convince Beatrice and Benedick to marry one another, even though both have vowed to never marry. Soon, Don John learns of Claudio's engagement to Hero. Still hoping to foil their marriage, he and his servant Borachio plan to brand Hero as a prostitute and thus compromise the marriage. In the orchard/ garden, Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio discuss Beatrice's 'love' for Benedick. Although Benedick is hiding, they know he is there and lead him to believe she loves him; Benedick takes the bait.

Act III

Similarly, Hero and her servant Ursula discuss how Benedick is "in love" with Beatrice, while Beatrice herself hides in the trees and listens; she too takes the bait. Separately, Don Pedro and Claudio tease Benedick for being quiet. Don John appears and tells Pedro and Claudio that Hero is a whore/ prostitute and will give proof of it the evening before the wedding. At nightfall, Dogberry and Verges instruct the night watch to watch over the city. In hiding, they hear Borachio (drunk) tell Conrade how he heath let Margaret woo him from Hero's bedroom, and thus deceive Don Pedro and Claudio into believing Hero is a whore. The next day, at the wedding, Claudio plans to denounce Hero and will not marry her. The watch arrests Borachio and Conrade, then Dogberry and Verges come to Leonato to tell him of the arrest, though he impatiently shrugs them off.

Act IV

At the wedding, Claudio and Don Pedro accuse Hero of being a whore. Leonato vows to determine if the accusations are true. Further, the Friar suggests they pretend that Hero has died from the accusation, so that if a lie is being propagated, the source may admit the lie out of remorse. Privately, Benedick and Beatrice profess their love for one another. She asks him to

prove his love by killing Claudio for wronging Hero. In prison, Dogberry interrogates Borachio and Conrade; the Sexton (recorder) plans to tell Leonato of their crimes.

Act V

In a courtyard, Benedick charges Claudio to a duel. Before this can occur, Dogberry brings Borachio who admits of his wrongdoings to slander Hero. Leonato, still dissembling that Hero is dead, instructs Claudio to come to his house in the morning, so that he can marry a "cousin" of Hero, who is nearly identical to her (and actually is her). Beatrice and Benedick continue to fall in love. At the tomb, Claudio delivers and epitaph to Hero. Then, in the morning, Benedick asks Leonato for Beatrice's hand in marriage. Further, Hero and Claudio are again engaged to be married. Lastly, it is reported that Don John has been arrested for his deceit and will be punished.

Leonato, a kindly, respectable nobleman, lives in the idyllic Italian town of Messina. Leonato shares his house with his lovely young daughter, Hero, his playful, clever niece, Beatrice, and his elderly brother, Antonio. As the play begins, Leonato prepares to welcome some friends home from a war. The friends include Don Pedro, a prince who is a close friend of Leonato, and two fellow soldiers: Claudio, a well-respected young nobleman, and Benedick, a clever man who constantly makes witty jokes, often at the expense of his friends. Don John, Don Pedro's illegitimate brother, is part of the crowd as well. Don John is sullen and bitter, and makes trouble for the others.

When the soldiers arrive at Leonato's home, Claudio quickly falls in love with Hero. Meanwhile, Benedick and Beatrice resume the war of witty insults that they have carried on with each other in the past. Claudio and Hero pledge their love to one another and decide to be married. To pass the time in the week before the wedding, the lovers and their friends decide to play a game. They want to get Beatrice and Benedick, who are clearly meant for each other, to stop arguing and fall in love. Their tricks prove successful, and Beatrice and Benedick soon fall secretly in love with each other.

But Don John has decided to disrupt everyone's happiness. He has his companion Borachio make love to Margaret, Hero's serving woman, at Hero's window in the darkness of the night, and he brings Don Pedro and Claudio to watch. Believing that he has seen Hero being unfaithful to him, the enraged Claudio humiliates Hero by suddenly accusing her of lechery on the day of their wedding and abandoning her at the altar. Hero's stricken family members decide to pretend that she died suddenly of shock and grief and to hide her away while they wait for the truth about her innocence to come to light. In the aftermath of the rejection, Benedick and Beatrice finally confess their love to one another. Fortunately, the night watchmen overhears Borachio bragging about his crime. Dogberry and Verges, the heads of the local police, ultimately arrest both Borachio and Conrad, another of Don John's followers. Everyone learns that Hero is really innocent, and Claudio, who believes she is dead, grieves for her.

Leonato tells Claudio that, as punishment, he wants Claudio to tell everybody in the city how innocent Hero was. He also wants Claudio to marry Leonato's "niece"-a girl who, he says, looks much like the dead Hero. Claudio goes to church with the others, preparing to marry the mysterious, masked woman he thinks is Hero's cousin. When Hero reveals herself as the masked woman, Claudio is overwhelmed with joy. Benedick then asks Beatrice if she will marry him, and after some arguing they agree. The joyful lovers all have a merry dance to celebrate the double wedding.

Check Your Progress

1.*Much Ado About Nothing* is supposedly a comedy: Beatrice and Benedick trade insults for professions of love, and Claudio and Hero fall in love, out of love, and back in love again. But the play contains many darker, more tragic elements than a typical comedy. In what ways does this play problematize the notions of comedy?

2. A central theme in the play is trickery or deceit, whether for good or evil purposes. Counterfeiting, or concealing one's true feelings, is part of this theme. Good characters as well as evil ones engage in deceit as they attempt to conceal their feelings: Beatrice and Benedick mask their feelings for one another with bitter insults, Don John spies on Claudio and Hero. Who hides and what is hidden? How does deceit function in the world of the play, and how does it help the play comment on theater in general?

3. In some ways, Don Pedro is the most elusive character in the play. He never explains his motivations-for wooing Hero for Claudio, for believing Don John's lie, even for setting up Beatrice and Benedick. He also seems to have no romantic interest of his own, though, at the end of the play, without a future wife, he is melancholy. Why is he so melancholy? Why does he woo Hero for Claudio? Is he joking when he proposes to Beatrice, or is he sincere? Why would Shakespeare create a character like Don Pedro for his comedy about romantic misunderstandings?

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Unit 5
The Tempest

Contents:

5.1 OBJECTIVES

You should read the play carefully before and during the perusal of this unit. You will, by the end of this unit, be able to:

- *analyse* the social and historical contexts of *The Tempest*
- *read The Tempest* as a play that belongs to the genre of Romance
- *appreciate The Tempest* in relation to the ethical, ideological and political systems of the time.
- *see* how Shakespeare dealt with issues of colonization in *TheTempest*.
- *comprehend* the complexities of Shakespearean stagecraft.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

The Tempest is generally regarded as Shakespeare's last play, first performed in 1611 for King James I and again for the marriage festivities of Elizabeth, the King's daughter, to Frederick, the Elector Palatine. Scholars attribute

the immediate source of the play to the 1609 shipwreck of an English ship in Bermuda and travelers' reports about the island and the ordeal of the mariners. The period in which it was written - the seventeenth-century age of exploration, the circumstances of its performance at court, and the context of the playwright's writing career suggest immediately some of its rich themes and ambiguities.

The play can be read as Shakespeare's commentary on European exploration of new lands. Prospero is banished from Milan by his brother; he lands on an island with a native inhabitant, Caliban, a being he considers savage and uncivilized. He teaches this "native" his language and customs, but this nurturing does not affect the creature's nature, at least from Prospero's point of view. But Prospero does not drive Caliban away, rather he enslaves him, forcing him to do work he considers beneath himself and his noble daughter.

Stop to Consider

As modern readers, sensitive to the legacy of colonialism, we need to ask if Shakespeare sees this as the right order; what are his views of imperialism and colonialism? What are our twentieth century reactions to the depiction of the relationship between the master and slave, shown in this play?

The theme of 'utopianism' is linked to the explorations of new lands. Europeans were intrigued with the possibilities presented for new beginnings in these "new" lands. Was it possible to create an ideal state when given a chance to begin anew? Could humans hope to recreate a "golden age," in places not yet subject to the ills of European social order? Could there be different forms of government? Would humans change if given a second chance in an earthly Paradise? These are some of the questions that Shakespeare's play makes the contemporary audiences ask as they watch a performance of the play.

The play emphasizes dramatic effects. Music, dance and masque-like shows are used to great effect. One of the reasons for this was probably because it was performed at court. The role of the artist is explored through Prospero's use of his magic, and parallels can be drawn to Shakespeare's own sense of his artistry.

Finally, knowing that this is Shakespeare's last play, it is intriguing to explore autobiographical connections. Does he see himself in Prospero? Does he feel somehow isolated, in need of reconciliation? How is this play a culmination of other themes he has explored?

The Tempest shows Shakespeare's final treatment of themes that have run through the other plays, e.g. good and evil, justice and mercy. For students of world history this play provides a primary source perspective on 17th-century attitudes about imperialism. Also, the low humor and pageantry in the play heightens its appeal to a wider audience.

Interpretations of the *Tempest* tend to be shaped quite strongly by the particular background, which the interpreter brings to it. This play, more so than many others, tends to bring out in interpreters what their particular interests are in a way that other plays often do not (at least not to the same degree). In part, this happens because this play can be treated allegorically. The answers to questions like, what is Prospero's magic? What does Caliban represent? Is the island a depiction of the new world or a world of the imagination or something else, tend often to depend upon the major interests of the person seeking to understand the play?

Readers with a lively interest in theatrical productions of Shakespeare tend to emphasize the extent to which the main focus in the *Tempest* is on the nature of art and illusion, especially theatrical art. This tendency is powerfully reinforced by the fact that this play is almost certainly Shakespeare's last full work, so that the *Tempest* is, in effect, his farewell to the stage.

People with a strong interest in politics, however, often take a different slant, and see the play as having less to do with an exploration of theatre than with a probing artistic analysis of important political issues, especially those relevant to the oppression of the inhabitants of the new world (that is, the issue of colonialism) or to the relationship between the intellectual and the political world. So, for example, the play has been presented as a statement about colonial attitudes in North or South America or as an exploration of the role of the intellectual in post-glasnost Eastern Europe.

Other interpreters see in the play a vital exploration of education (the nature-versus- nurture dispute) or theories of politics or knowledge.

5.3 DATE AND TEXT

The only authoritative printed text of *The Tempest* is in the First Folio of 1623, where it appears as the first play, at the head of the comedies. The text seems to have been prepared carefully. It includes a list of characters (Names of the Actors) printed at the end of the play and provides act and scene divisions. There are also unusually full stage directions; this has led scholars to wonder whether they were written entirely by Shakespeare.

The play was probably written in 1611 and it was first performed on 1 November 1611 at Whitehall. According to a rare surviving record of performances, Shakespeare's acting company 'presented at Whitehall before the kinges Majestie a play called 'The Tempest'. *The Tempest* had a second royal performance as part of the celebrating Princess Elizabeth's betrothal to the Elector Palatine. *The Tempest*, like the other plays chosen for the celebrations, was probably written originally for performance at one of the King's Company's playhouses - probably the indoor Blackfriars Theatre. *The Tempest* was played by the King's Company at the Globe Theatre during the summer months and at The Blackfriars from October to May.

5.4 SOURCES

As long ago as in the New Variorum edition of 1892, Horace Howard Furness saw any search for a source for *The Tempest* as inevitably ending in 'a blind' (Furness 1964, 307), and the latest Arden editors claim that twentieth century editors have not claimed any direct sources for the play (Vaughan 1999, 54).

The Vaughans agree with the conclusion reached by their Arden predecessor, Frank Kermode: 'Ultimately the source of *The Tempest* is an ancient *motif*, of almost universal occurrence, in saga, ballad, fairy tale and folk tale' (Kermode 1954, lxiii). At the other extreme, Kermode also declared that 'The only undisputed source for any part of *The Tempest* is Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals"' (Kermode 1954, xxxiv). If one adds that the play's essential constituents of storm and shipwreck and miraculous rescue, and some of the deeper issues the play raises, have been found in contemporary accounts of a voyage undertaken in 1609 to the Virginia Colony, but temporarily halted off the Bermudas, one more or less exhausts the recognised discoveries. The significant bearing of the dispatches from the

would-be colonists, in the Virginia Pamphlets - on various aspects of the play has been shown by Philip Brockbank (Brockbank 1966, 1989).

The *Mirror of Knighthood* by Diego Ortuñes de Calahorra (1562, translated 1578...1601), and the fourth chapter of the untranslated *Noches de Invierno* by Antonio de Eslava (1609) have been cited as providing some material for the play but the Vaughans admit it as 'no more than a tangential source' (Vaughan 1999, 55).

Shakespeare could have used the pastoral tale, The Enamoured Diana by Gaspar Gil Polo's. Although it does not have a Prospero or Ariel or Caliban to recommend it, does have an island, and enough other points of similarity to *The Tempest* for it to merit inclusion among Shakespeare's sources. Gil Polo's work was also very popular at that time and it was available in English translation.

Stop to Consider

Shakespeare, in writing *The Tempest*, did not use any one source. This gave him the freedom to use material from essays, pamphlets and literary romances for his play. Since he was not bound by one source his imaginative re- creations of the island and its inhabitants could include a spirit along with a bestial Caliban.

5.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION

An understanding of the history of criticism of *The Tempest* will help the reader to see how the text has been subjected to very different interpretations. This will open up for the reader the complexities that are embedded in the text.

Eighteenth century productions of the play underlined a neoclassical emphasis on human rationality and morality. Most eighteenth century representations of Prospero portrayed him as a grey bearded magus who controlled the disorderly political forces in Antonio and Sebastian and the corrupt moral forces embodied in Caliban. The audience of the eighteenth century would probably have accepted Prospero's wisdom and authority and interpreted the play through his eyes.

The characteristic response to the play until well into the Victorian period was that it was a *Shakespearean flight of fancy, a holiday from more problematic reflections on human duty and social kinship*. Samuel Johnson regarded Prospero as an enchanter, and this meant that Ariel and his partner were: "evidently of the fairy kind, an order of beings to which tradition has always ascribed a sort of diminutive agency, powerful but ludicrous, a humourous and frolick controlment of nature…" This lack of seriousness might be partially explained by the operatic versions of the play that were firmly installed in the eighteenth century repertory.

The focus on *The Tempest*'s changed significantly with the dawn of the nineteenth century. Romantic poets led by Wordsworth and Coleridge, emphasized creative imagination and rejected neoclassical rules. This change in perspective led them to praise Shakespeare's plays as the ultimate perfect example of the creative imagination, and the dramatist himself as the untutored genius who followed nature rather than the ancient rules of the classicists. Shakespeare's plays were no longer considered as acting scripts for a public theatre but as expressions of his personal feelings. *The emphasis on the text as poetry rather than as theatre led to a split between the literary analysis of Shakespeare's text and assessments of Shakespeare in performance*. Critics like Charles Lamb felt that Shakespeare's genius could only be appreciated in the reader's imagination, and that plays like The Tempest could not be come to life on the stage: "Spirits and fairies cannot be represented, they cannot even be painted". *Romantic poets like Shelley identified Ariel with the poet, and the spirit's songs with poetry, and this led to the identification of Prospero with Shakespeare himself*. This identification of the magus with the dramatist culminated in the claims of Edward Dowden in 1875 that the romances reveal biographical information about Shakespeare's later life. The romantic age also marked a revival of interest in Caliban. Several nineteenth century critics found some merit in his claims to ownership of the island and others saw in him reflections of the Noble Savage.

In the late nineteenth century productions of *The Tempest* Prospero and Miranda were eclipsed by Caliban. This was a direct result of major interpretations of *The Tempest* that first appeared in the late nineteenth century and flourished in the twentieth. There was an emphasis on reading the play as essentially about the new world and for some critics the play

symbolized European or United States imperialism. This radical shift emerged from different circumstances in Latin American and Anglo-American scholarship. For the Latin Americans the rise of an intellectual class whose ethnic and cultural ties were dominated by their Native American and African heritage made them see their situation in a different light. In England and Europe on the other hand there was an emerging skepticism about European imperialism and its impact on colonized people - dispossession and often death, and on the colonizers - insensitivity and brutality. After 1950 postcolonial interpretations of *The Tempest* dominated the stage and literary studies around the world.

Postcolonial approaches

Postcolonial critics as a whole can hardly be understood as being devoted to locating a binary opposition between oppressor and oppressed, and celebrating the latter. Yet this is the image of postcolonial criticism that is often evoked within Renaissance studies, which is ironic given that in the last two decades, some early modern scholars have made important contributions to postcolonial debates about power relations.

Late twentieth century criticism has, however, opened up different ways of assessing the play. Earlier approaches to a text had conceived of the text as autotelic - "an entity which always remains the same from one moment to the next". In recent years, however, an alternative criticism often referred to as 'structuralist and 'poststructuralist', has displaced the primacy of the 'autotelic' text by arguing that a text "cannot be limited by or to…the originating moment of its production, anchored in the intentionality of its author". This insistence has opened up the text to Marxist, new-historicist and feminist readings of the play. The interesting aspect of these 'alternative Shakespeares' is that no one reading cancels out another, they all can exist simultaneously enriching our reading of the plays. Students should try and acquaint themselves with the criticism of Stanley Fish, Stephen Greenblatt, Alan Sinfield, Juliet Dusinberre and Catherine Belsey to understand the invigorating way *The Tempest* can be read.

SAQ

1. How did Romantic criticism influence the reading of theplay? (50 words)

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2. In which period were Shakespeare's plays no longer seen as acting scripts? Why did this happen? (20 + 50 words)

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3. What were the major shifts in 20th century criticism? (50 words)

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5.6 ACT-WISE READING OF THE PLAY

Students will note that *The Tempest* is a short play and that it roughly conforms to the unities of time place and action. As Prospero's instructions make clear, the plot consumes the hours between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. (the events that take place in the past and on other locales are narrated, not enacted). Except for the storm scene all the events take place on the island. *The Tempest* is extremely tightly structured, roles and events parallel and reflect each other - a good example is to see how the theme of usurpation that is first introduced by Prospero is echoed though the play.

Act I

The scene opens with a ship at sea in a terrible storm. The King Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Ferdinand, Gonzalo, and other courtiers enter looking

for the ship's Master but they simply impede the work of the crew. Traditional authority is challenged in the storm. The Boatswain is in charge; he orders the king and the other aristocrats off the deck. He gives his order to the sailors with confident authority and speaks to his social superiors with little or no respect. But symbolically, the storm and Boatswain's behavior represent the various challenges towards authority, which will recur again and again throughout the play.

The storm is representative of a disruption in the scheme of things and we are left clueless regarding the fate of the ship and its passengers and the crew. The abruptness and violence at the beginning and at the end of the opening scene create a theatrical shock of great power.

The staging of this particular scene is a matter of concern for the directors. In some productions, the scene is played in a bare stage, without props or scenery. Only lighting, sounds, and the actors' movements create the illusion of a ship caught in a tempest. Can you think of possible ways by which the naturalism that Shakespeare has employed can be retained?

Why is it significant that the play begins with a storm at sea?

In the next scene the location changes to an island where Miranda is seen pleading with her father Prospero to abate the storm. She feels for the suffering of the shipwrecked people and is full of pity for them. It is evident that it is none but Prospero who had caused the tempest but the reasons are yet to be clarified. However, he immediately assures her that no harm has been done and the people on board the ship are safe. In this long scene, Prospero explains to his daughter the reasons for their being on the island, their history, the origins of his magical powers, and the cause of the tempest. He questions her about what she remembers of the past. At the same time he reveals that he was the Duke of Milan before his brother, Antonio robbed him off his dukedom. He had entrusted the government of Milan to his brother as he himself wanted to pursue his studies. Enjoying the benefits of playing the duke, Antonio aspired to become the duke, and plotted with Alonso, the King of Naples. He treacherously admitted Alonso's army into Milan, which led to the capture of Prospero and his infant daughter. The conspirators dared not kill Prospero because of his popularity. Instead,

one good Neapolitan counselor Gonzalo abandoned him and Miranda in a tiny boat. Prospero thus continues to tell his story and Miranda questiond him repeatedly.

We also meet Ariel who reports how he has carried out his master's orders with regard to the storm and ensured the safety of the passengers who are now distributed around the island. He also adds that the sailors are asleep on board and the rest of the fleet is returning to Naples, mourning the death of Alonso their king. Having said this Ariel demands his freedom which Prospero had promised to give him. This enrages Prospero who reminds Ariel of the debt he owes him and threatens terrible punishment.

Prospero's dictatorial image needs to be explored from this point itself. Prospero claims to have saved Ariel from Sycorax the infamous witch who enraged by Ariel's refusal to obey her orders had imprisoned him inside a tree for twelve years. Now Prospero also threatens him with another twelve years of imprisonment, this time wedged into an oak tree. Can you really say that he is a better tormentor than Sycorax? His gentleness and love towards Miranda is contrasted to his harsh treatment of his slaves. Moreover, his attitude towards his spirit servant is ambiguous.

Ariel, frightened by thoughts of further imprisonment goes away to take the shape of an invisible sea-nymph. Then we happen to meet his other slave Caliban, the son of Sycorax. He curses Prospero and in response to the threats of punishment complains that Prospero and Miranda are the outsiders who have taken possession of his island.

Stop to Consider

Can the conflicts between Prospero and Caliban be seen as that of a colonizer and native inhabitant respectively? Apart from general views of Caliban being the symbol of wickedness - the son of a witch and the devil - can he be viewed as a victim of an exploiter who takes over his island, forcing him to slavery? It is interesting to note that 'Caliban' is almost an anagram of 'cannibal'.

Prospero too states his reason for making him a slave. Caliban had tried to violate Miranda's honour and Prospero punished him for daring to do such an act. Miranda reminds him how she had patiently taught him language and Caliban replies that the only benefit of that is that he can now curse.

Shakespeare's time was the high time of European expansion. They set out in their mission of the discovery of the New World carrying their torch of enlightenment to the 'dark' corners of the universe. Caliban's inability to express himself in the European language was a sign of his savagery and uncivilized behavior. Miranda's teaching him language is necessary for him to be able to know his own meaning and the meaning of the world he lives in.

Ariel enters singing followed by Ferdinand the King's son who is in a trance like state, affected by the music, which speaks of his father's possible death. Miranda sees him and thinks him to be another spirit while her father assures her that he is a human like them. She is at once attracted towards him and Ferdinand too thinks her to be some goddess. Watched by Prospero who reveals that he wants them to fall in love, Miranda and Ferdinand talk to one another. Prospero intervenes, decides to be rude to Ferdinand, fearful of too rapid a courtship. He makes Ferdinand a prisoner accusing him of a plot to usurp him and orders him to a cell.

Check Your Progress

1. What is your reaction to Prospero's treatment of Caliban?
2. How significant is the fact that the play begins with a storm sea?
3. Why does Miranda have such immediate empathy for the men in the ship?
4. What crimes does Antonio, Prospero's brother, commit?
5. In Prospero's questioning of Ariel, we learn that the storm is part of Prospero's design. Does he want to punish the conspirators or lead them to repentance?
6. What connection does Shakespeare establish between outward appearance and inner spirit?

Act II

The act opens in an isolated part of the island where the royal family is to be seen. They are surprised that their clothes smell and feel as fresh as if they had just been bought at a market However, Ferdinand is missing, presumably drowned. Alonso, his father is in a state of deep depression. Gonzalo, the faithful royal servant comforts him by reminding him of their miraculous escape in which even their clothes are unharmed. From Gonzalo's speech, it is revealed that the voyagers were back from the wedding of the king's daughter Claribel and the King of Tunis when the tempest struck them. During the course of their petty talk, the courtier's debate among themselves and Gonzalo's knowledge regarding Widow Dido of Carthage becomes the butt of everyone's joke. Antonio and Sebastian mock the manner in which Gonzalo brought about a comparison between Claribel as the new Queen of Tunis and Widow Dido.

> Dido was the queen of Carthage and a famous figure of Roman mythology. In one version of the myth recounted in Virgil's Aeneid, she had a passionate affair with Aeneas, the Trojan Prince who founded Rome. When he later abandoned her, she killed herself.

Alonso who was already in grief for having left is daughter in Tunis after her marriage, now feels that his son too is lost forever. Francisco, however, assures him that Ferdinand probably survived, as he was last seen swimming efficiently. Sebastian blames the King himself for the shipwreck and the loss of Ferdinand as the marriage that he had fixed required a sea voyage. Alonso was firm in his resolution of giving his daughter's hand in marriage to King of Tunis. With barely concealed racism, Sebastian claims that all the courtiers begged Alonso not to permit the marriage of Claribel to the King of Tunis. He also asserts that Claribel herself did not want to marry the African King but, as a dutiful daughter, she obeyed her father's wishes. Gonzalo reprimands Sebastian for his lack of gentleness in such a delicate situation. He attempts to cheer the king with an account of an ideal world that he would like to build in the very island, which saved their lives, where everything is owned in common.

Gonzalo's picture of a society in which ownership of everything is shared ('commonwealth') is influenced by an essay entitled 'On Cannibals' written by Michel de Montaigne (1533-92). The essay gave rise to the belief in the 'noble savage' for whom harmonious, peaceful and equal relationships were completely natural.

In the meantime, Ariel enters invisible to all of them playing on a solemn tune. With his magical powers, Ariel induces sleep in all but Antonio and Sebastian who offer to stand guard. While the king is asleep, Antonio encourages his brother Sebastian to usurp the throne and improve his fortune. Antonio provokes him to think of himself as the next heir to the throne of Naples as Ferdinand is without doubt dead and Claribel being the Queen of Tunis resides too far away. Gradually Sebastian induces him to think that destiny has provided him with the best opportunity to fulfill his greatest ambition by murdering the king in his sleep. He urges that it is the time for them to act quickly. He decides to kill Alonso so that Sebastian can become king and Sebastian will have to kill Gonzalo to silence further criticism on the matter. Sebastian at this point recalls the manner in which Antonio had supplanted his brother Prospero. The two are about to kill Alonso in his sleep but Ariel seeing that the king's life was in danger sings in Gonzalo's ear and awakens him and he in turn wakens the king. Antonio and Sebastian explain that their swords are drawn to protect the king from wild animals. All of them are confused with the peculiar happenings and Alonso urges them to search for Ferdinand.

In yet another part of the island, Caliban who has been ordered by Prospero to gather wood, is seen carrying his load and uttering curses for his master. He describes the ways in which Prospero and the spirits controlled by him torment him for every minor offence. Trinculo, the king's jester, enters the scene and Caliban thinking it to be another one of Prospero's spirits falls flat on the ground and covers himself with a cloak. Trinculo was in fact looking for shelter from yet another storm when he stumbles across Caliban. He wonders as to what kind of a creature Caliban is and wonders if he could carry it to England and earn a fortune from him. Stephano, the king's butler also joins them in a drunken state and together they force Caliban to drink. Caliban too begins to worship them as gods who could rid him of Prospero's torments. He promises to work for them sincerely just as he had promised Prospero initially.

SAQ

1. What type of person is Gonzalo? What was his role in the plot against Prospero? (50 words)

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2. How can the characters of Sebastian and Antonio be visualized? (50words)

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3. What is Gonzalo's idea of the type of government or life style that could be possible on this island? (60 words)

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4. See how the theme of usurpation is carried over from the first Act. (80 words)

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5. See how the playwright uses popular conceptions that Europeans had about people belonging to other races. (50 words)

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Act III

The action takes place outside Prospero's cell. Ferdinand enters carrying one of the many heavy logs, which Prospero has ordered him to pile up. Unlike Caliban, however, Ferdinand has no desire to curse. Instead, he enjoys his labors because they serve the woman he loves, Miranda. As Ferdinand works and thinks of Miranda, she enters, and after her enters Prospero unseen. Miranda tells Ferdinand to take a break from his work, or to let her work for him, thinking that her father is bussy at studies. Ferdinand refuses to let her work for him but does rest from his work and asks Miranda her name. Miranda disobeying her father tells him her name. Ferdinand declares how he admires her more than any woman he has met and Miranda too declares her love for him. With promises of devotion they agree to become betrothed and then leave the stage in different directions. Prospero who is watching them reveals his pleasure in 'asides' to the audience. He then hastens to his book of magic in order to prepare for remaining business

This scene revolves around different images of servitude. Ferdinand is literally in service to Prospero, but in order to make his labor more pleasant he sees Miranda as his taskmaster. Prospero makes both Ferdinand and Caliban work for him but whereas Caliban is a slave both to Prospero and to his own anger, Ferdinand, is a willing slave to his love. This is the only scene of actual interaction we see between Ferdinand and Miranda.

Near Caliban's cave Stephano, Caliban and Trinculo again meet. The three of them are in a drunken state. Stephano promises to make Caliban his deputy. Caliban accuses Trinculo of cowardice and Stephano supports him. Caliban begins to tell Stephano more about his slavery to Prospero and urges him to kill his master. Stephano agrees to help Caliban kill Prospero, burn his books and take away his beautiful daughter. They provide a comic parody of one of the main themes of the play: usurpation. Caliban's plot to overthrow Prospero is a comic reflection of the way in which Antonio seized the throne from Prospero and of the conspiracy to kill Alonso.

Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, Gonzalo, and their companion lords become exhausted, and Alonso gives up all hope of finding his son. Antonio, still hoping to kill Alonso, whispers to Sebastian that Alonso's exhaustion and desperation will provide them with the perfect opportunity to kill the king

later that evening. At this point strange music fills the stage and a procession of spirits enters, bringing a banquet of food. The men disagree at first about whether to eat, but Gonzalo persuades them it will be all right. Just as the men are about to eat, however, a noise of thunder erupts, and Ariel enters in the shape of a harpy. He claps his wings upon the table and the banquet vanishes. Calling himself an instrument of Fate and Destiny Ariel goes on to accuse Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio of overthrowing Prospero and calls on them to repent. Saying this he vanishes, and the procession of spirits enters again and removes the banquet table. Ariel's appearance as an avenging harpy represents the climax of Prospero's revenge, as Antonio, Alonso, and the other lords are confronted with their crimes and threatened with punishment. Prospero, still invisible, applauds the work of his spirit and announces with satisfaction that his enemies are now in his control. He leaves them in their distracted state and goes to visit Ferdinand and his daughter.

Alonso, meanwhile, is quite desperate. He has heard the name of Prospero once more, and it has signaled the death of his own son. He runs to drown himself. Sebastian and Antonio, meanwhile, decide to pursue and fight with the spirits. Gonzalo, ever the voice of reason, tells the other, younger lords to run after the three of them.

Stop to Consider

Is the love between Ferdinand and Miranda diluted for the audience because everyone is aware that Prospero is manipulating the two young people?The confusion and sorrow of the survivors of the 'shipwreck' added to what Prospero had been subjected to in Milan bring elements into the play that are not in keeping with comedy.

SAQ

1.How has Ferdinand's and Miranda's love deepened from their first attraction? What is Shakespeare suggesting about the true nature of love? (100 words)

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2.What does Caliban hope to accomplish by his plot against Prospero? Why does Shakespeare include this subplot mirroring the conspiracy of the nobles? (80 words)

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3. What does Caliban hope to accomplish by his plot against Prospero? How does the apparition of the banquet affect Alonso and his retinue? How is the banquet used as a symbol? Why aren't the men allowed to eat the food? Is this an effective moment for Ariel to accuse them of their sins? (120 words)

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Act IV

Prospero gives his blessing to Ferdinand and Miranda but warns Ferdinand not to break Miranda's "virgin-knot" before the wedding has been solemnized as it will only bring misery. Ferdinand promises to comply. Prospero then calls in Ariel and asks him to summon spirits to perform a masque for Ferdinand and Miranda.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, masques were popular forms of entertainment in England. Masques featured masked actors performing allegorical, often highly ritualized stories drawn from mythology and folklore.

Soon, three spirits appear in the shapes of the mythological figures of Iris (Juno's messenger and the goddess of the rainbow), Juno (queen of the gods), and Ceres (goddess of agriculture). This trio performs a masque celebrating the lovers' engagement. Prospero's masque features Juno, the symbol of marriage and family life in Roman mythology, and Ceres, the symbol of agriculture, and thus of nature, growth, prosperity, and rebirth, all notions intimately connected to marriage. The united blessing of the union by Juno and Ceres is a blessing on the couple that wishes them prosperity

and wealth while explicitly tying their marriage to notions of social propriety and harmony with the Earth. In this way, marriage is subtly glorified as both the foundation of society and as part of the natural order of things, given the accord between marriage and nature in Ceres' speech. One reason Shakespeare might shift the focus of the play to marriage at this point is to prepare the audience for the mending of the disrupted social order that takes place at the end of the story.

The spectacle awes Ferdinand and he says that he would like to live on the island forever, with Prospero as his father and Miranda as his wife. Juno and Ceres send Iris to fetch some nymphs and reapers to perform a country-dance. Just as this dance begins, however, Prospero is startled, and suddenly sends the spirits away.

Prospero, who had forgotten about Caliban's plot against him, suddenly remembers that the hour nearly has come for Caliban and the conspirators to make their attempt on his life. Prospero's apparent anger alarms Ferdinand and Miranda, but Prospero assures the young couple that his forgetfulness is largely a result of his age; he says that a walk will soothe him.

When Ferdinand and Miranda leave him Prospero immediately summons Ariel, and asks Ariel to tell him again what the three conspirators are up to. Ariel tells him of the men's drunken scheme to steal Prospero's book and kill him. He reports that he used his music to lead these men through rough and prickly briars and then into a filthy pond. Delighted, Prospero now orders Ariel to hang gorgeous clothes on a line by his cell. Caliban, Trinculo, and Stefano enter, wet from the filthy pond. The fine clothing immediately distracts Stefano and Trinculo to the fury of Caliban. Soon after they touch the clothing, Prospero's spirits in the shape of hounds chases them away.

SAQ

1. How does Shakespeare use the masque to emphasize the theatricality of the play? (80 words)

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2. How is Ferdinand different from Caliban in his relationship to Miranda? Why does he pledge to keep her honor safe? (60 words)

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3. Why is Miranda's virginity so important to Prospero? (50 words)

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4. What is the overall impact of the Masque? How is it supposed to affect the two young lovers? What is its message about the sanctity of the marriage bond? (70 words)

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Act V

Near Prospero's cave Ariel reminds him that the time has arrived when Ariel is allowed to stop working. Prospero acknowledges Ariel's request and asks how the king and his followers are faring. Ariel reports the troubled state of the king and courtiers, and expresses compassion for them. Moved by Ariel's feelings, Prospero tells Ariel to release the men, his reason and not his passion takes control. He realizes that "the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance," and since they are sorry for their crimes, he has accomplished his purpose. Now alone on stage he delivers his famous soliloquy in which he gives up magic. He says he will perform his last task and then break his staff and drown his magic book.

Ariel now enters with Alonso and his companions, who have been charmed and obediently stand in a circle. Prospero praises and weeps with Gonzalo, criticizes Alonso and Sebastian, and though recognizing Antonio's evil nature, forgives him. He promises to grant freedom to his loyal helper-spirit and sends him to fetch the Boatswain and mariners from the wrecked ship. Prospero releases Alonso and his companions from their spell and speaks with them. Alonso now tells Prospero of the missing Ferdinand. Prospero

tells Alonso that he, too, has lost a child in this last tempest-his daughter, then draws aside a curtain, revealing behind it Ferdinand and Miranda, who are playing a game of chess. Alonso is ecstatic at the discovery. Meanwhile, Miranda marvels at the sight of the king and courtiers. Alonso embraces both of them and begs Miranda's forgiveness for the treacheries of twelve years ago. Prospero silences Alonso's apologies, insisting that the reconciliation is complete. Accusing his enemies neither more nor less than they deserve, and forgiving them instantly once he has been restored to his dukedom, Prospero has at last come to seem judicious rather than arbitrary in his use of power.

After arriving with the Boatswain and mariners, Ariel is sent to fetch Caliban, Trinculo, and Stefano, which he speedily does. The three drunken thieves are sent to Prospero's cell to return the clothing they stole and to clean it in preparation for the evening's reveling. But Caliban is sufficiently changed by the experiences of the play to recognize his gullibility and his need for freedom. Prospero then invites Alonso and his company to stay the night and hear his tale of the last twelve years. And in the morning, they can all set out for Naples, where Miranda and Ferdinand will be married. After the wedding, Prospero will return to Milan, where he plans to contemplate the end of his life. He promises a favorable voyage to Naples, and sets Ariel free. The play ends with a calm and quietness in direct contrast to its opening.

The other characters exit, and Prospero delivers the epilogue. He describes the loss of his magical powers and says that, as he imprisoned Ariel and Caliban, the audience has now imprisoned him on the stage. He says that the audience can only release him by applauding, and asks them to remember that his only desire was to please them. He says that, as his listeners would like to have their own crimes forgiven, they should forgive him, and set him free by clapping.

SAQ

1. Why does Prospero decide to show mercy to his enemies? Why is Ariel the first to speak of mercy? Do you think Prospero had planned to forgive them from the beginning? (50 words)

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2. Why does Prospero decide to give up magic? What does his choice show about what he thinks happened in the past? How does he plan to live in the future? What has Prospero learned? Has he changed in any fundamental way or had the change already occurred before the beginning of the action? (100 words)

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3. Are Caliban and Prospero reconciled? (40 words)

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4. Are Alonso, Antonio, and the other conspirators truly sorry for their plot against Prospero? Has their ordeal on the island changed them? (50 words)

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5.7.1 THE THEATRICAL ASPECTS OF *THE TEMPEST*

The Tempest is an intensely self-conscious play - it is, in many ways, theatre about the theatre. Many of the actions and events in it are explicitly and implicitly referred to as theatrical ones. Miranda's response to the shipwreck is a response to a tragedy, full of pity and fear:

0, I have suffered
With those that I saw suffer: a brave vessel-
Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her-
Dashed all to pieces! 0, the cry did knock
Against my very heart-poor souls, they perished. (I, ii 5-9)

The shipwreck is described by Prospero as a theatrical show staged by himself. "The direful spectacle of the wreck" (1.2.26,) - where the predominant meaning of "spectacle", as defined by Orgel, is "theatrical display or pageant". Similarly, Ariel is commanded to assume the "shape", or role of a "nymph o'th sea". Prospero orchestrates the events in *The Tempest* and much of the play is a play-within-a-play, directed by Prospero, with Ariel as his assistant-director and stage manager. This aspect of the play has led critics to link the figure of Prospero with that of Shakespeare himself. This play, accordingly, can be read as Shakespeare's farewell to the stage.

The Tempest is also Prospero's attempt to undo the past by restaging it. In this respect, Prospero is comparable to Hamlet, Richard II and Lear who also employ a reenactment of the past as a means of exerting symbolic power over it. Hamlet restages his father's assassination, and 'The Mousetrap', in a sense, is the replacement of actual revenge. Richard II turns his dethronement into a theatrical spectacle, and Lear calls his daughters to a mock trial. All resort to drama because reality is out of their reach, beyond their control. Metadrama, in Shakespeare, seems to function as a symbolic weapon, a substitute for reality, a staged repetition of the past an assertion of control on the site of loss and defeat.

Prospero's theatrical art serves as his weapon of power, his instrument of control. *Theatricality and power converge most strongly, and reach their apotheosis, in the wedding masque in Act 4, scene 1.*

It is clear that The Tempest does depend for much of its effectiveness on a wide range of special effects - sound, lighting, fantastic visions, a whole realm of "magic" (it may well have been written in response to the changing theatrical tastes of an audience that was requiring more theatrical effects in the presentation of dramatic productions). But there's more to the theatricality of the play than just its style. A central issue of the *Tempest* is an exploration into the nature of theatre itself.

For those who have read a certain amount of Shakespeare, the theatrical theme gets considerable impetus from the fact that *The Tempest* seems, in some ways, to revisit many earlier Shakespearean themes and characters, so that at times it comes across almost as a final summary look at some very familiar material, something Stephen Greenblatt calls "a kind of echo chamber of Shakespearean motifs".

Shakespearean motifs

The Tempest's story of loss and recovery and its air of wonder link it closely to the group of late plays that modern editors generally call "romances" (*Pericles, The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline*), but it resonates as well with issues that haunted Shakespeare's imagination throughout his career: the painful necessity for a father to let his daughter go (*Othello, King Lear*); the treacherous betrayal of a legitimate ruler (*Richard II, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Macbeth*); the murderous hatred of one brother for another (*Richard III, As You Like It, Hamlet, King Lear*); the passage from court society to the wilderness and the promise of a return (*A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It)*; the wooing of a young heiress in ignorance of her place in the social hierarchy (*Twelfth Night, Pericles, The Winter's Tale)*; the dream of manipulating others by means of art, especially by staging miniature plays-within-plays (*1 Henry IV, Much Ado About Nothing, Hamlet*); the threat of a radical loss of identity (*The Comedy of Errors, Richard II, King Lear*); the relation between nature and nurture (*Pericles, The Winter's Tale*); the harnessing of magical powers (. . . [*2 Henry VI], A Midsummer Night's Dream, Macbeth*).

SAQ

1. How is *The Tempest* an exploration into the nature of theatre itself? (50 words)

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2. In which scenes can you identify the conscious use of theatrical elements? (40 words)

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3. Can you link Prospero's actions of donning and removing his costume at different points of the play to the conscious use of theatre? (50 words)

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5.7.2 PROSPERO

The Tempest, it is clear, features an experiment by Prospero. He has not brought the Europeans to the vicinity of the island, but when they do come close to it, he has, through the power of illusion, lured them into his very special realm. The experiment first of all breaks up their social solidarity, for they land in different groups: Ferdinand by himself, the court group, Stephano and Trinculo by themselves, and the sailors remain asleep. The magic leads them by separate paths until they all meet in the circle drawn by Prospero in front of his cave. There he removes the spell of the illusions; the human family recognizes each other, and together they resolve to return to Italy, leaving behind the powers of the magic associated with the island.

What is the purpose of Prospero's experiment?

He never gives us a clear statement, but it seems clear that one important element in that purpose is Miranda. He wants to arrange things on her behalf, and of all the people in the play, her situation is the most transformed: she is going back to Europe a royal bride, filled with a sense of enthusiasm and joy at the prospect of living among so many fine people in a society that, quite literally, thrills her imagination. *It seems that Prospero's major intention includes a recommitment to civilized life in Milan*, so that his daughter can take up her rightful place in society. *As with As You Like It*, there is no sense here that any appropriate life could be based on remaining on the island when they no longer have to.

However, we must not forget that Prospero is also consolidating his own power by arranging the marriage of his daughter with Alonso's son. He is ensuring that there will be no repetition of earlier mistakes that led to his

loss of power. Shakespeare by introducing the plot hatched by Antonio and Sebastian keeps questions of power present in the minds of the audience.

The marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda and Alonso's change of heart is a direct result of Prospero's experiment. *The most complex change in the play, however, takes place within Prospero himself*. In considering his motives for undertaking the experiment, we cannot escape the sense that Prospero harbors a great deal of resentment about his treatment Milan and is never very far from wanting to exact a harsh revenge. After all, he has it in his power significantly to injure the parties that treated him so badly. What's very interesting about this is that Prospero learns that that is not the appropriate response. And he learns this central insight from Ariel, the very spirit of imaginative illusion, who is not even human. Speaking of the fact that all of Prospero's enemies are now in his power and are painfully confused, Ariel says: "if you beheld them now, your affections/ Would become tender." Prospero replies: "Does thou think so spirit?" to which Ariel responds: "Mine would, sir, were I human." At this point Prospero delivers one of the most important speeches of the play:

And mine shall.
Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th' quick,
Yet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part. The rarer action is
In virtue than in vengeance. (5.1. 18-28)

Here, the imaginative sympathy for the sufferings of others leads to an active intervention based upon "virtue" rather than "vengeance." *This is a key recognition in the play: virtue expressed in forgiveness is a higher human attribute than vengeance*. And in the conclusion of the play, Prospero does not even mention the list of crimes against him. He simply offers to

forgive and accept what has happened to him, in a spirit of reconciliation. Unlike earlier plays which featured family quarrels, the ending here requires neither the death nor the punishment of any of the parties.

Stop to Consider

How does one read Prospero's taking over the island? Can one see it as another usurpation or does Prospero have the right to rule over the island.

How powerful is Prospero? Remember that Caliban shows the island's secrets to Prospero and also reveals some of his mother's magic charms.

Prospero has arranged for his daughter and Ferdinand to fall in 'love', this marriage will help him to consolidate his power. Marriage was often used during this period as a political tool to ensure power.

These questions will help you to 'contextualize' the play because they bring out its connections to some ideas which were important to the Elizabethans --public issues relating to royal succession, usurpation, the nature of monarchical power, the institutional aspects of personal relations like friendship and marriage.

SAQ

1. How does Prospero direct the events of the play? (50 words)

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2. What is the role of Ariel in the ordering of the events? (30 words)

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3. How do you read Prospero's "change of heart"? Is it believable? (40 words)

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5.7.3 CALIBAN

The presence of Caliban presents two diametrically opposing ways of reading the play:

1.One reading would probably stress (as many productions have always done) Caliban's dangerous, anarchic violence which represents a clear and present danger, because he is not capable of being educated out of the state he was born into. Prospero's "civilizing" arts keep him in control, though with difficulty. Caliban might well be considered in some sense a natural slave (as D. H. Lawrence pointed out) because his idea of freedom from Prospero seems to involve becoming the slave of someone else, someone who will kill Prospero, i.e. Stephano and Trinculo. So Caliban throws in his lot with the two drunken Europeans, not having the wit to see them for what they are. Caliban is thus not so much interested in freedom as he is in rebellion; his violence is natural to him and is not an outgrowth of the way he is treated. Hence, Prospero's control of him through his magic is not only justified but also necessary. Does Caliban undergo any sort of significant change at the ending of the play? There's a suggestion that he has learned something from the mistakes he has made, and his final comment ("I'll be wise hereafter,/ And seek for grace") may be a cryptic acknowledgment of some restraint. But he doesn't go with the Europeans and remains on his island. Caliban's future life has always sparked interest among certain writers, for there is a tradition of sequels to the *Tempest* in which Caliban is the central character (notably Browning's long dramatic monologue "Caliban on Setebos").

2. However, the presence of Caliban also questions the legitimacy of Prospero's actions. Prospero as Caliban points out is not the natural ruler of the island, Caliban claims that the island belongs to him; Prospero's reasons

for enslaving Caliban then become untenable. Even Prospero's claim of educating Caliban are questioned: "You taught me language, and my profit on't /Is I know how to curse…". Caliban's accusations in away undercuts the entire European enterprise of enlightened education of the natives. Caliban's is a very strong voice against colonization.

5.7.4 MIRANDA

Miranda is the only female character who appears in the play. Other women are only referred to - Sycorax, Claribel and Miranda's mother are only referred to. Miranda too did not arouse much critical interest in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.. Mary Cowden Clarke omitted Miranda from her description of *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* (1852) and Miranda's most outspoken lines (1.2.352-63) were attributed to Prospero. Miranda's diminished roles reflect the nineteenth century's patriarchal perspectives.

We first meet Miranda, overwhelmed with the wonder and delight on seeing so many finely dressed civilized Europeans she cries out, "O brave new world/ That has such people in't!" to which the more sober minded and mature Prospero comments only, "'Tis new to thee." Those four words of Prospero undercut Miranda's joyous affirmation. It is obvious that she is completely a product of Prospero's education. He has moulded her to echo his own ideas; she really has no voice of her own. Even her 'love' for Ferdinand is arranged by her father. Miranda's marriage like that of Claribel is actually a political expedient; Shakespeare makes no attempt to elide over this fact.

By creating Miranda Shakespeare might have been reflecting contemporary attitudes towards women. Since she confirmed to Prospero's ideas on the place of women she was raised to the position of someone to be worshipped, whereas Sycorax who was powerful was banished and always referred to in derogatory terms. Miranda's position is that of a figurehead, she has no real power although she is the future Queen.

5.7.5 ARIEL

We should note how central Ariel is to Prospero's magic. And Ariel is not human but a magical spirit who has been released from natural bondage by Prospero. The earlier inhabitants of the island, Sycorax and Caliban, had no sense of how to use Ariel, and so they simply imprisoned him in the world, which governed them, raw nature. Prospero's power depends, in large part, on Ariel's release and willing service. In that sense, Ariel can be seen as some imaginative power, which makes the effects of the theatre (like lightning in the masts of the boat) possible. One of the great attractions of this view of the play as a celebration of the powers of theatre is that it makes the best sense of Ariel's character, something which, as we shall see, is not quite so straightforward in other approaches.

5.7.6 PROSPERO'S MASQUE

A masque was a celebration of royal power and glory and, in staging one; Prospero becomes a type of king, a royal mage whose ideals become reality in a courtly entertainment. The wedding masque in *The Tempest* is an allusion to the court masques performed at the Whitehall Banqueting House and brings into the play a broad range of Renaissance thought about royalty, its manifestations and the nature of royal power. The wedding masque in *The Tempest* is a materialisation of Prospero's will and power. Like the court masque, it is a visual spectacle: "No tongue! All eyes! Be silent!" (4.1.59). Whereas in the second scene of *The Tempest*, Prospero wanted his daughter to listen, and drink in his tale, this time he wants visual attention. The masque celebrates Prospero's paternal magnanimity and his ability to defy the laws of time and nature - "Spring come to you at the farthest, / In the very end of harvest!" (4.1.114-15): winter has been excluded from Prospero's seasonal cycle. Abundance emanates spontaneously from Nature's inexhaustible resources; the masque is a departure from the real world of *The Tempest*, in which Ferdinand has to labour for his wedding, Ariel for his freedom, Caliban for the liberation from bodily pain. These harsh, rigid transactions are replaced by a vision of unconditional plenty. It is, however, worth noting that Venus and her "waspish-headed son" have been safely excluded from the party; unbridled erotic lust - so much feared by Prospero - has been warded off.

Stop to Consider

This scene can be connected to the first scene of the play where Prospero is actually producing the storm. In both these scenes Shakespeare emphasizes the idea that Prospero is like a playwright moulding the reactions of the audience for a particular purpose.

In the court masque, when the masquers reveal their true identities (i.e. as persons of nobility, people of the court), the audience was meant to look through the image, at the ideals of kingship and courtly life it represented. "In such representations", Orgel and Strong write, "the court saw not an imitation of itself, but its true self." Likewise, the wedding masque in *The Tempest* offers Miranda and Ferdinand an image of their ideal, virtuous selves. It points to the ideals forged by Prospero's royal mind and stands for his project in general:

In one voyage
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,
And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wife
Where he himself was lost, Prospero his dukedom
In a poor isle, *and all of us ourselves*
When no man was his own. (5.1.208-13)

Prospero's noble, rational magic is contrasted to the black sorcery practised by Sycorax, Caliban's mother, and this, again, links him to the images of royal power we encounter in the court masque. Frank Kermode, in his New Arden Edition of *The Tempest*, writes that Prospero's art is:

"…the disciplined exercise of virtuous knowledge … it is a technique for liberating the soul from the passions, from nature; the practical application of a discipline of which the primary requirements are learning and temperance, and of which the mode is contemplation … it is the ordination of civility, the control of appetite, the transformations of nature by breeding and learning."

The Court Masque

The court masque played a crucial role in the way Renaissance monarchs chose to think about themselves. Masques served essentially as images of the order,

peace and harmony brought about by the monarch's mere presence, and expressed didactic truths about the monarchy. Lavishly spectacular and visual, designed to enchant the eye, they formed a genre fundamentally different from the drama performed on the public stage. Much of the action was taken up by the settings themselves, which did not merely form a passive backdrop to the action, but were an integral part of it and symbolised the controlling power of the king. In this sense, the masque is radically different from the plays that were performed in the popular playhouses, which lacked scenic machinery. Inigo Jones's ingenious settings, "his ability to do the impossible" were the prime manifestation of the royal will

Under James 1, the form of the masque developed into two contrasting parts. The first section, or antimasque, offered an image of vice and disorder, which, in the second section, the masque proper, was superseded by the workings of royal power, and an ordered, harmonious world, with the king at its centre, was established.

In a number of masques, the king was often represented as the controller and tamer of nature. The royal will created order and sophistication in "the wildness and untutored innocence of nature". At the climax of each masque, the masquers descended from the stage and chose a dancing partner from the audience, merging the worlds of the masque and the court into the ideal royal universe.

The court masque, then, manifested an important theatrical image of kingship; royalty's prime mode of expression was fundamentally histrionic, this is also confirmed by James I's personal treatise on royalty entitled Basilikon Doron (1599) and Elizabeth's assertion that "We princes, I tell you are set on stages, in the sight and view of all the world duly observed". The theatre served as an extension of the royal mind. Even watching a masque was a histrionic activity: the king's box was placed at the centre of the hall, for all the other spectators to see. The king had to be seen seeing. Inigo Jones' stage-effects were also designed in such a way as to give the king the best view of the stage - only from his seat could the action be seen properly.

SAQ

1. What is a masque? What use does Shakespeare make of the masque in the play? (20 + 50 words)

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2. How is the idea of 'theatricality' built into the use of the wedding masque? (50 words)

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5.7.7 The Ending of *The Tempest*

For all the potentially warm reconciliations at the end of the play, however, it is not without its potentially sobering ironies. And there is a good deal of discussion of just how unequivocal the celebration is at the end. For Prospero is no sentimentalist. He recognizes the silence of Sebastian and Antonio at the end for what it is, an indication that they have not changed, that they are going to return to Naples and Milan the same people as left it, political double dealers, ambitious and potentially murderous power seekers, just as Stephano and Trinculo are going back as stupid as when they left. Prospero's theatrical magic has brought them together, has forced them to see themselves, but it has had no effect on some characters.

One might argue that if Prospero's experiment is designed to make everyone better, then it's a failure in large part. And it may be, as I mentioned above, that Prospero recognizes that fact. It is not unusual to stage this play in such a way that the conventional comic structure of the ending is seriously undercut by the sense of sadness in Prospero, who is returning to Milan to die. The ending of this play *may not be the unalloyed triumph of the comic spirit that we are* tempted to see there. Prospero's sober awareness of what the silence of Sebastian and Antonio means qualifies our sense of joy by indicating that the eternal problem of human evil has not been solved or dismissed. One major interpretative decision any director of the play has to make concerns this ending. Just how evident and serious should those ironies be: non-existent, a light shadow under the communal joy, or a heavy reminder of what is in store back in Italy?

Stop to Consider

The ending of the play raises as many questions as it seems to solve. Audiences are not given any clues about what is going to happen to Caliban and Ariel. The silence of Sebastian and Antonio point to the fact that Prospero and Alonso

will always have to face the danger of usurpation. Critics have also wondered about the future of Ferdinand and Miranda. Their love has been engineered in a vacuum and one wonders whether it will weather the storms of real life.

SAQ

1. How does Shakespeare dispose of all the characters in the play? (50 words)

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2. Does the ending of the play raise more questions than it resolves? (50 words)

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