PG EG S1 03 (DSC)

TWO YEAR MASTER'S DEGREE COURSE

(CBCS in Accordance with NEP 2020)

SEMESTER - I

ENGLISH DRAMA: ELIZABETHAN TO RESTORATION

ENGLISH

Padmanath Gohainbaruah School of Humanities

KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

The Discipline Specific Core (DSC) Course 3 of the MA English Programme deals with English Drama from the Elizabethan to the Restoration period with reference to five great English dramatists—Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, William Shakespeare, John Webster and William Congreve. While Shakespeare is represented through three plays selected from three different representative periods of his dramatic career; Marlowe, Jonson, Webster and Congreve are represented through their well-known plays. Thus, this Course introduces the learners to the great dramatic culture of the 16th and 17th century England.

For the convenience of the learners, this Course is thematically arranged into three Blocks.

Block 1 shall deal with **Renaissance Drama** with reference to Marlowe and Jonson. This B**lock** comprises five units, i.e. Units 1-5.

Unit 1 shall introduce the learnerstoEnglish drama, especially of the time called the Renaissance. This unit shall take them through some of the themes and conventions of drama, which shall help them to consider how drama, right from the medieval age, was an important part of the religious and daily life of the people. Finally, an understanding of the development of drama from the time of Renaissance shall also help them to explain the fact that drama is also interwoven with the life of the spectators. From this unit, the learners will understand the facts that dramatic texts also offer a record, mediated through the dramatist, of the period's perception of itself, of events or series of events.

Unit 2 & 3 discusses *The Jew of Malta* a 'Renaissance tragedy' written by the famous 16th century English playwright Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe was a member of the famous "University Wits" and a contemporary of William Shakespeare. The learners will find that this play is based on the tragic plight of a very wealthy Jew Barabas who lived in the Mediterranean Island of Malta with his beautiful daughter Abigail. They will also notice that the importance of money and business in this play reflects the changes that had occurred in the 16th century English society. Malta as the locale for the play is important in the sense that it helps to comprehend the international business endeavours of the 16th century world to a great extent.

Unit 4 & 5 discusses Ben Jonson's famous play *Volpone* or *The Fox*. Set in Renaissance Italy, it is a scathing satire on human greed in general. The emerging capitalist tendencies in the Jacobean England can be seen as the playwright's immediate focus in this play. Jonson's choice of the Venetian setting is also important since Renaissance Italy was the centre of trade in Europe with all the attendant problems of an acquisitive society with moral degradation. By the end of the unit, the learners will note that the subject of *Volpone* is money or greed for money, and the corruption it breeds in man.

Block 2 of DSC Course 3 deals with William Shakespeare and his plays. Shakespeare was one of the few Renaissance playwrights to write both successful comedies and tragedies. However, unlike his comedies, tragedies are more difficult to define, but are usually easily identified, in that they tell the story of a single character's downfall. They concentrate on an essentially good, yet importantly flawed, person

to invite the audience to identify with his or her troubles (a classic Shakespearean example of this is *Hamlet*). Modern critics usually divide his plays into tragedies, comedies, and histories. Sometimes these same critics refer to Shakespeare's "romances" and "problem plays," which are works that combine elements of all three genres. Other dramatists tried their hand at both genres but were generally successful in only one of them. Ben Jonson, for example, is known for comic masterpieces like *Volpone* (1606), but when he turned his attention to tragedy, he produced stilted failures like *Sejanus* (1603). Shakespeare not only wrote successful comedies and tragedies, he also helped redefine each of these categories. "From first to last each play of Shakespeare's," the scholar Derek Traversi observes, "represents not only a development from what has gone before, but a new beginning, a fresh attack on problems involved in the very decision to write a particular kind of play." In *The Tragedy of Richard III* (1592–93), for instance, Shakespeare restructures actual events of English history so as to create a history play that follows a simpler story. He presents key episodes of Richard's reign in a more digestible form. This practice was not unique to Shakespeare, as the history play as a dramatic form was in fact gaining popularity by the year. It can, however, be said that Shakespeare was a key contributor to this movement in the culture and tradition of English drama. This Block comprises six units, i.e. Units 6-11.

Unit 6 William Shakespeare: Life and Works,which isthe first unit of the Block, is dedicated entirely to the life and works of Shakespeare. The dramatic genius of William Shakespeare gave a new orientation to the practice of drama in the Elizabethan period. There is perhaps no area of human concern that has not been explored and creatively exploited in the plays by Shakespeare. This unit shall act as the Introduction to the plays that shall be discussed in the following units of this Block.

Unit 7 & 8 William Shakespeare: *King Lear* (Part I & II) deal with a discussion of Shakespeare's tragedy*King Lear,* the other three great being *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Macbeth. King Lear* is based on the individual tragedies of Lear himself and his three daughters, and on the tragic dimension of the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons. From these units, the learners will get to acknowledge that one of the basic philosophical formulations by William Shakespeare was that pain and suffering are inseparable parts in human life.

Unit 9 provides an intense discussion of one of Shakespeare' finest comedies—*Twelfth Night* an important play in the development of Shakespeare's dramatic art. The learners will soon realise that the play *Twelfth Night* celebrates the triumph of love, and yet it is distinguished by a troubling undertone of melancholy, which suggests the playwright's tendency to enter into the deeper realms of the human psyche.

Units 10 & 11 *TheTempest* (Part I & II) deal with William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* which is the fourth, final, and the finest of Shakespeare's late romances. It is a complex work whose original plot structure serves to draw attention to wider aesthetic and philosophical themes. King Alonso of Naples and his entourage sail home after attending his daughter's wedding in Tunis, Africa. They encounter a violent storm, or tempest. The ship in which they are sailing is wrecked, and the crew are washed ashore on a strange island inhabited by the magician Prospero who has deliberately conjured up the storm and who happens to be the banished Duke of Milan. As the learners finish reading the unit, they get to know that Prospero is the rightful Duke of Milan, and that the course of events in between his banishment and regaining of Dukedom at the end of the play constitutes the plot of this great play called *The Tempest*.

Block 3: Jacobean to Restoration shall deal with the practices of the drama in the Jacobean and Restoration periods in terms of two plays by John Webster and William Congreve. In the Jacobean period, there was a sharp decline of morality resulting in adultery, lust, death, sickness, hypocrisy etc. as the order of the day. Tragedy degenerated into melodrama and comedy into farce. In addition to subject matter and theme, post-Shakespearean drama experienced sharp fall in dramatic technique and language. The dramatists working within the ambit of the period were many including Thomas Dekker, Ben Jonson, Thomas Heywood, John Marston, John Fletcher and Francis Beaumont, Cyril Tourneur, Thomas Middleton, John Webster, among a few others.

With the Stuart rule that made its grand start with King James I, the Renaissance spirit of robust optimism, exuberance, enthusiasm and idealising the world gave way to high pragmatism and self-importance. Widespread political uncertainty and instability in the later years of Elizabeth's reign made people disillusioned, which continued even after the accession of King James I. As he was unable to rule unto the expectations of people, stark erosion of faith in monarchy came into effect. Besides, the rise of the Puritans turned out an important development in orienting the religious attitude of people. Although the Puritans never liked the authority of the Church of England, Queen Elizabeth with her shrewd administrative skill somehow managed their hostility. Hence, the notion of Elizabethan compromise became a popular concept. However, the concept ended in the 17th century, and taking advantage of this the pious Puritans trumpeted their reign. Things that were not permitted in the preceding decades started making their presence felt, indeed with impunity. Sensationalism and melodrama were the recurring motifs in the period. With the decline of morality, the society found adultery, lust, death, sickness, hypocrisy, cruelty as normal course of life. Indeed these practices were not absent from the Elizabethan stage altogether.

Much of major writing produced in the period dealt with such issues, and their impact upon concerned individuals. However, the social norm did not allow them, and would like to see them punished. In literary renditions too, they are punished at the hands of the noble and the good. The Jacobean socio-literary scene did not follow the path, and would express satisfaction at adorning the practice of mischief and cruelty at the earliest. With marked diversion from the Elizabethan period, the Jacobeans did not take upon subjects of national interest. What they were interested in was the accumulation of the French, Italian, and Spanish models in their pursuit of writing. Unrestrained licentiousness, melodrama, and cynicism were the order of the day, and there a growing sense of misguidance being conditioned by the dramatic performances. If the Renaissance people gave major thrust upon deep insight into human nature, their succeeding allies were very keen in light-heartedness and superficiality. The theatregoers were seen viable to the immoral lessons, intended by the writers. Considering all this, the theatres were formally closed down in 1642. As the drama reached the zenith of popularity and perfection in the earlier decades, it failed to maintain the same position in the 17th century. As such, tragedy degenerated into melodrama, and comedy into farce. Apart from fast deterioration in subject matter and theme of interest, the post-Shakespearean drama also experienced sharp fall in dramatic technique and language as well. In contrast to the heyday of magnificent blank verse, widely practiced, most specifically, by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare, the Jacobean drama came out completely alien to the form. The highly majestic rhetoric of the preceding period dried out and the prosaic everyday speech gained much proliferation. Of course, the period made wide-ranging use of the masque as a distinctive dramatic device.

On the other hand, the term *manners* is most frequently employed in the phrase 'comedy of manners', usually referring to Restoration comedy (as practised by Etherege, Wycherley, Congreve), and sometimes by analogy to the work of writers like Oscar Wilde. These plays explore a universe where all values are bound up with appearances, where honour is synonymous with reputation, and truth identified with a glib tongue and a steady eye. The veil of conventions shields the action from anarchy and despair. By their success or failure at society's intricate play, the characters separate into true wits or gulls. They learn to live with the precarious balance of forces which govern the way of their worlds, as one can see in Congreve's play *The Way of The World.*

This Block comprises four units, i.e. Units 12-15

Units 12 & 13 will introduce the learners to John Webster's play *The White Devil.* Webster's *The White Devil* is a remarkable study of a famous Italian courtesan, which constituted one of the most preferred options for dramatists in the Jacobean period. In *The White Devil,* Webster has taken the life of Vittoria, an Italian courtesan, with a view to unfolding the rampant practices in the Italian court. Though Vittoria is the heroine of the play, she is also a villain, a devil, who develops incestuous relationship with the Duke of Brachiano. The growing relationship results in the murder of her husband, Camillo, and Brachiano's Duchess, Isabella. When the trial is commenced for her adultery, the corrupt nature of the judges is also brought into limelight. However, Vittoria appears influential with her superb oratory and defence, and she handles the proceeding efficiently.

Units 14 & 15 deal with William Congreve and his play *The Way of the World.* Though not well received during its time, this play is the most finished of William Congreve's comedies. The play in question is centred on the two lovers Mirabell and Millamant. In order for them to marry and receive Millamant's full dowry, Mirabell must receive the blessing of Millamant's aunt, Lady Wishfort. Unfortunately, Lady Wishfort is a very bitter lady who despises Mirabell and wants her own nephew, Sir Wilfull, to wed Millamant. Another character, Fainall, is having a secret affair with Mrs. Marwood, a friend of Mrs. Fainall's, who in turn once had an affair with Mirabell. In the meantime, Mirabell's servant is married to Foible, Lady Wishfort's servant. Waitwell pretends to be Sir Rowland and, on Mirabell's command, tries to trick Lady Wishfort into a false engagement. Therefore, the play, as the learners will learn, is concerned with the problem of social living, and Congreve exposes those problems so beautifully.

While going through a unit, you may also notice some text boxes, which have been included to help you know some of the difficult terms and concepts. You will also read about some relevant ideas and concepts in "LET US KNOW" along with the text. We have kept "CHECK YOUR PROGRESS" questions in each unit. These have been designed to self-check your progress of study. The hints for the answers to these questions are given at the end of the unit. We advise that you answer the questions immediately after you finish reading the section in which these questions occur. We have also included a few books in the "FURTHER READING" list, which will be helpful for your further consultation. The books referred to in the preparation of the units have been added at the end of the block. As you know, the world of literature is too big and so we advise you not to take a unit to be an end in itself. Despite our attempts to make a unit self-contained, we advise that you should read the original texts of the writers as well as other additional materials for a thorough understanding of the contents of a particular unit.

UNIT 1: INTRODUCING RENAISSANCE DRAMA

UNIT STRUCTURE

1.1 Learning Objectives

1.2 Introduction

1.3 History of Drama

1.4 Drama in the Renaissance Period

1.5 Renaissance Playwrights

1.6 Let us Sum up

1.7 Further Reading

1.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

1.9 Possible Questions

1.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- have some basic information about English Renaissance Drama
- trace the intellectual contexts in which the plays were written
- evaluate the importance of the theatres and the acting companies of the time
- identify the important themes and contemporary issues that are repeated in several plays.

1.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the Course. In this unit, we shall try to introduce you to English drama, especially of the time called the Renaissance. You will see how Renaissance drama had its roots in Christian rituals. This unit shall take you through some of the themes and conventions of drama, which shall help you to consider how drama, right from the medieval age, was an important part of the religious and daily life of the people. Finally, an understanding of the development of drama from the time of Renaissance shall also help you to explain the fact that drama is also interwoven with the life of the spectators. Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Renaissance Self-*

Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980], and other new-historicists show that we must be aware that the social milieu, cultural forms of genre and characterisation, the collective endeavours and the material realities of the companies and theatres shaping a dramatist's representation of the world in his plays. From this unit, you will understand the facts that dramatic texts also offer a record, mediated through the dramatist, of the period's perception of itself, of events or series of events. Against this background, in this unit, we shall try to relate drama to a complex period of the Renaissance that spans almost a hundred years.

1.3 HISTORY OF DRAMA

You all must have read that drama and religious ritual are innately connected. Ancient Folk celebrations, ritual miming on themes of death and resurrection, seasonal festivals and folk activities—like the maypole dance with appropriate symbolic actions, all these can be seen as the background from which drama evolved. Besides these, Christmas, Easter, and the celebration of Christ's life and career from birth to Resurrection, have been important backdrops for the development of religious drama. This type of dramatisations of celebrations was known as **tropes** meaning simple but dramatic elaborations of parts of the liturgy. This is how medieval drama is stated to have begun. The "**Quem Quaeritis?"** trope is often identified as the earliest instance of medieval drama. It depicts a dialogue between the three Marys and the angel at Christ's tomb. It asks the question "Whom do ye seek?" the reply to which is:

"Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified."

"He is not here. He is risen."

The **Trope** eventually paved the way for **Liturgical Drama** in the 12th century, which rose from or developed in connection with church rites or services. These plays were initially presented in Latin, and played within the church. In the 13th century, the first **Passion Play** depicting Christ's passion or crucifixion started to develop. The dialogues, as you find in the example of the trope called "Quem Quaeritis?" developed into small plays, and as the staging of the plays became more elaborate, the performances left the

confines of the church and moved to the porch. With increasing popularity, they were presented in the vernacular. Eventually, dramatic representations moved out of the church leading to massive changes in the presentation of drama. First, they were produced in the churchyard itself, and then later, they moved into an even larger space, traditionally the marketplace or a convenient meadow.

You will note that the development of drama is closely connected with the development of the fairs, the increase of wealth, the rise of the burgher class, and the development of the English language. Gradually, drama lost the links with the church and the clergy who used to provide all the actors initially. These changes were prominent by the second half of the 13th century. 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).



LET US KNOW

Corpus Christi:

The establishment of the feast of **Corpus Christi** in 1264 provided a suitable day for play presentation of plays. However, such plays were dependent on the weather as they were presented outdoor, and could no longer be acted on all of the different church festivals. 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 outdoor, trade or craft guilds took over in sponsoring the plays, making them more secular. Thus, the Liturgical drama previously confined to the church and designed to embellish the ecclesiastical ritual, came to be replaced by new kinds of plays known as M**iracle** or **Mystery plays**. The transition from simple liturgical drama to miracle and mystery play cannot be accurately dated or documented. It is believed that miracle plays developed rapidly in the 13th century; and there are records of cycles of miracle plays in many regions of England during the 14th -15th centuries.

Along with the M**iracle** or **Mystery plays,** another medieval dramatic form–the **morality play**–also emerged in the 14th century and flourished in between 15th–16th centuries. The morality plays, although seem less lively, mark a necessary stage, and in a sense, helped 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 earliest complete extant morality play is *The Castle of Perseverance*, which was written circa 1425.

Towards 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. Interludes marked the transition from medieval religious drama to the secular drama of the Renaissance, although the transition cannot be documented adequately because of the paucity of such texts. Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres*

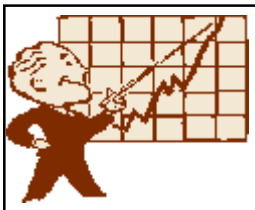
written at the end of the 15th century is the earliest extant purely secular play in English. He had already written a morality play entitled *Nature*. Medwall was one of a group of early Tudor playwrights that included John Rastell and John Heywood, who ended up being the most important dramatist of 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.

At the same time, classical influences started providing new themes and structures, first in comedy and later in tragedy. Taking its theme from the *Milos Gloriosus* of Roman playwright **Plautus**, in about 1553, **Nicholas Udall** wrote a comedy called ***Ralph Roister Doister***. This play brought the braggart soldier for the first time into English drama. Udall's characters function both as traditional vices and virtues, and as traditional characters in Latin comedy, an example of which is the Parasite, as found in Ben Jonson's play *Volpone*. Another comedy, ***Gammer Gurton's Needle***, was written by William Stevenson of Christ's College. Here, the themes and characters combine with the comedy of English rural life.

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 far more sophisticated than *Ralph Roister Doister* or *Gammer Gurton's Needle*. Although we rarely read any of these early works, they are important because they brought to English drama some important elements that would influence the master playwrights of subsequent times.

However, in the context of tragedies we cannot but remember the names of Sophocles or Euripides. However, the favourite classical writer of tragedy among the English playwrights was neither Sophocles nor Euripides, but Seneca. 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. ***Gorboduc*** also known as ***Ferrex and Porrex***, written by **Thomas**

Sackville and **Thomas Norton** and produced around 1561-2, is considered to be the **first successful English tragedy** in the Senecan style:



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How was drama linked to the Church initially?

Q 2: Which elements became important, once drama had moved out of the precincts of the church?

Q 3: Attempt to enumerate the different forms of drama from the 13th to the 15th century.

Q 4: In what sense, does the morality play mark a stage in the progress of English drama?

Q 5: What makes the Interlude a distinctively important form of drama?

1.4 DRAMA IN THE RENAISSANCE PERIOD

Now let us have a discussion on Drama in the Renaissance Period in terms of the following headings.

The English Society of the Time:

The social structure of Elizabethan and Jacobean England was based partly on wealth and partly on the concept of status. As the century was progressing, it became increasingly possible for men to buy status with newfound wealth. Important to note that in 1611, James I institutionalised this practice by creating a new hereditary title, the order of baronets, and then the selling of these baronetcies for £1,095 each. These changes diminished the prominence of the nobility. The 16th and 17th centuries saw a transition from a feudal economy to a predominantly capitalist economy. A kind of economic individualism, as you can see in Jonson's *Volpone*) brushed aside the regulations of the craft guilds and the feudal order was threatened by the speculators. [Here, please try to recollect the growing prominence of craft guilds from your reading of the Unit entitled Towns and Urbanisation in Block I of Course I]

Until the 16th 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 16th 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 16th and early 17th centuries, there was large-scale migration of people from the provinces to London seeking economic opportunity. The theatre companies began to concentrate their activities to London because that was where the paying audiences were.

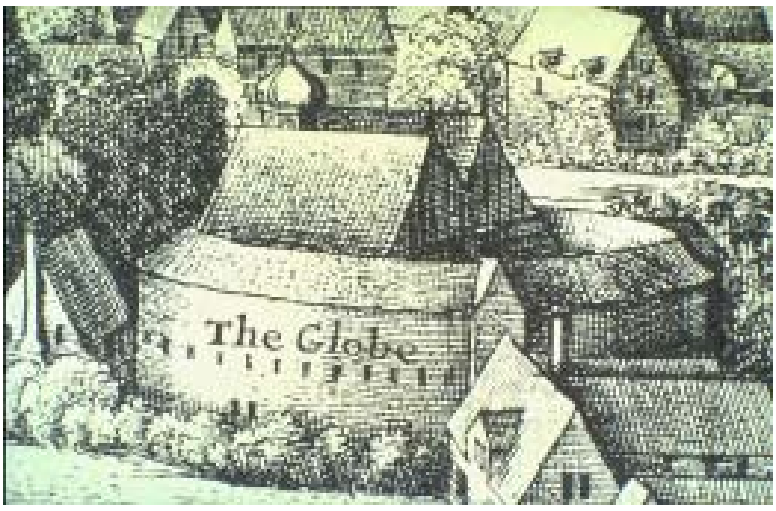
Subsequently, there was a substantial increase in the number of university educated secular professional playwright. The first ones to exploit this situation was a group of writers known as the **University Wits**, young men who had graduated from Oxford or Cambridge with no patrons to sponsor their 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 had an important influence on both private and public theaters because they worked for both. They set the platform for later Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

Condition of Staging Plays and Playhouses:

Conditions of staging, acting and production underwent tremendous changes during this period. In the period from 1558 to the end of the reign of Charles I, theatre in England was transformed beyond recognition. 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, termed "Rogues, Vagabond and Sturdy Beggars" according to a statute of 1598. 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 such 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 by Shakespeare. The Red Bull (1605) was the last open air theatre to be built apart from **The Hope** (1614). 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. By the end of the 16th century, Elizabethan theatre offered lavish and brilliant spectacles that were created with the use of elaborate costumes, hangings and stage properties.



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org

Private Playhouses:

Queen Elizabeth, in the early years of her reign, had relied on the boys of the choir and grammar schools of St Paul's cathedral and the choirboys 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**, one of the University Wits, and performances continued to be put up until 1584.

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 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. 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 gentlemen. The boys acted by candlelight and provided music between acts of a play.

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** (1576). The building of a permanent public theatre in London guaranteed the professional status to both the playwright and the acting companies. 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. Following, the willingness of the new theatre companies to pay for the plays, a paying market for literature emerged for the first time in England. 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. When the 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.

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 commercialisation 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 following the Renaissance.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: Why did the professional playhouses come into being in the 16th century?

Q 7: How did private theatre emerge in the context of the Renaissance drama?

Q 8: Write a note on the development of Public theatre in London.

Q 9: What changes occurred following the commercialisation of theatres in Elizabethan and Jacobean period?

1.4 RENAISSANCE PLAYWRIGHTS
[Adapted from Edward Albert's History]

In this section, we shall have a look at the important Renaissance playwrights. However, for the convenience of our reading, we shall divide these playwrights into Pre-Shakespearean and Post-Shakespearean playwrights.

Pre-Shakespearean Playwrights:

You have read about the influence of Seneca on English drama in Section 1.3 of this unit. As you know, English tragedy derives much from the classical models of the Latin dramatist Seneca, who wrote for a sophisticated, aristocratic audience, and who had produced tragedies notable for the horrors, which filled them, for their exaggerated character drawing, their violently rhetorical language coupled with emotional hyperboles. His influence was first felt in the Latin plays of the Cambridge University, where he had become the first classical dramatist to have all his works translated into English. From the universities, through the Inns of Court, the Senecan influence reached the popular stage. You will note that in many of the dramatists, such as Marlowe, Peele, and Greene, who studied at the universities, the influence of Seneca was very strong. These were young men, popularly known as ***The University Wits*****,** and associated with Oxford and Cambridge Universities, did much to found the Elizabethan school of drama. They were all more or less acquainted with each other, and most of them led irregular and stormy lives. Their plays had several features in common.

- There was a fondness for heroic themes, such as the lives of great figures like Mohammed and Tamburlaine.
- Heroic themes needed heroic treatment: great fullness and variety; splendid descriptions, long swelling speeches, the handling of violent incidents and emotions.
- The style also was 'heroic'. The chief aim was to achieve strong and sounding lines, magnificent epithets, and powerful declamation.
- The themes were usually tragic in nature, for the dramatists were as a rule too much in earnest to give heed to what was considered to be the lower species of comedy.

Now let us have a quick look at the members of the **University Wits**

John Lyly: (1554-1606) He is best-known for court comedies, generally for private theatres, but also wrote a mythological and pastoral play *Endymion* & *Euphues*.

George Peele: (1558-98) He was born in London, educated at Oxford, became a literary hack and free-lance writer in London. His plays include *The Araygnement of Paris* (1584), a kind of romantic comedy; *The Famous Chronicle of King Edward the First* (1593), a rambling chronicle play; *The Old Wives' Tale* (1591—94), a clever satire on the popular drama of the day; and *The Love of King David and Fair Bethsabe* (1599). His style can be violent to the point of absurdity; but he could handle his blank verse with more ease and variety than was common at the time.

Robert Greene :(1558-92) He wrote much and recklessly, but his plays are of sufficient merit to find a place in the development of the drama. He was born at Norwich, educated at Cambridge (1575) and at Oxford (1588), and then took to a literary life in London. His literary work consisted of his quick, malicious wit, and his powerful imagination. His important plays are – *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (1587), an imitation of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine; Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay* (1589), that represented Elizabethan life so beautifully; *Orlando Furioso* (1591), adapted from an English translation of Ariosto; and *The Scottish Historie of James the Fourth* (acted in 1592), founded on an imaginary incident in the life of the Scottish King.

Thomas Nash: (1567-1601) He was born at Lowestoft, educated at Cambridge and then went to London to make his living by literature. He was a born journalist, but in those days, the only scope for his talents lay in pamphleteering. He took an active part in the political and personal questions of the day and his truculent methods actually landed him in gaol (1600). He finished Marlowe's *Dido,* but his only surviving play is *Summer's Last Will and Testament* (1592), a satirical masque. His *The Unfortunate Traveller, or the Life of Jacke Wilton* (1594), is important in the development of the novel.

Thomas Lodge: (1558–1625) He was the son of a Lord Mayor of London, was educated in London and at Oxford, and studied law. His dramatic work is small in quantity. He probably collaborated with Shakespeare in *Henry VI,* and with other dramatists, including Greene. The only surviving play entirely his own is The *Woundes of Civile War,* a kind of chronicle play.

Thomas Kyd: (1558-94) He is one of the most important of the University Wits. Of the surviving plays *The Spanish Tragedie* (1585) is the most important. Its horrific plot, involving murder, frenzy, and sudden death, gave the play a great and lasting popularity. The only other surviving play known to be Kyd's is *Cornelia* (1593), a translation from the French Senecan playwright Garnier.

Christopher Marlowe: (1564-93) Marlowe is the greatest of the pre Shakespearean dramatists. He was born at Canterbury and educated there and at Cambridge. He adopted literature as a profession and became attached to the Lord Admiral's players. Marlowe's plays, all tragedies, were written within five years (1587-92). All the plays, except *Edward II,* revolve around one figure drawn in bold outlines. *Tamburlaine the Great, The Jew of Malta, Doctor Faustus, Edward II, The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage, The Massacre at Paris* are his finest works.

William Shakespeare: (1564-1616)

Next to the University Wits, we must first refer to William Shakespeare. You will get to read about life and works of Shakespeare in Block II of this course. In this section, we shall only look at some of the important aspects of his plays. All the manuscripts of the plays have perished. Shakespeare himself printed none of the texts; and though sixteen of them appeared singly in quarto form during his lifetime, they were all unauthorised editions. It was not until 1623, seven years after his death, that the **First Folio edition** of his plays was printed. It contained 36 plays as *Pericles* was omitted. It is customary to group the plays for the convenience of our study.

The Early Comedies: In these immature plays the plots are less original, the characters less finished, and the style lacks the power of the

mature Shakespeare. They are full of wit and word play, usually put into the mouths of young gallants. Of this type are *The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

The English Histories: These plays show a rapid maturing of Shakespeare's technique. He now begins to busy himself with the developing character, such as Richard II or Prince Hal. He shows clearly the importance attached in his day to the throne, and the contemporary desire for stable government. Figures like Falstaff illustrate his increasing depth of characterisation, and the mingling of low life with chronicle history is an important innovation. The plays in this group are *Richard II, Henry IV (Part I), Henry IV (Part II),* and *Henry* V.

The Mature Comedies: The comic spirit of Shakespeare can be best perceived in plays like *Much Ado about Nothing, Twelfth Night, The Merchant of Venice,* and *As You Like It.* These plays are full of vitality, contain many truly comic situations, and reveal great warmth and humanity.

The Sombre Plays: In this group are *All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, and Troilus and Cressida.* The characters in these plays reflect a cynical, disillusioned attitude to life, and a fondness for objectionable characters and situations.

The Great Tragedies: *Hamlet**, Othello, Macbeth, and King Lear*** are the greatest of Shakespearean tragedies.

The Roman Plays: These plays are based on North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives,* and, though written at fairly wide intervals, are usually considered as a group. Plays like *Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus* follow the great tragic period.

The Last Plays: This group contains plays like *Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale,* and *The Tempest.*

Post-Shakespearian Drama:

Though playwriting marks a decline from the Shakespearian standard after the Bard's death, the following are the best exponents of Post-Shakespearean drama.

Ben Jonson: (1573-1637) Jonson's numerous works, comedies, tragedies, masques, and lyrics, are of widely varying merit. To him the chief

function of literature was to instruct. His plays divide conveniently into comedies and tragedies, for Jonson, true to his classical models, did not combine the two. In his comedies, he aimed to return to the controlled, satirical, realistic comedy of the classical dramatists, and the inductions of his plays make it clear that he hoped to reform the drama on these lines. In nearly all his comedies, Jonson concentrated on the comedy of London life and humours, reflecting the manners of the day. His early comedies, *Every Man in his Humour* (1598), *Every Man out of his Humour* (1599), *Cynthia's Revels* (1600), and *The Poetaster* (1601), show his ingenuity of plot, his hearty humour, his wit, and they are full of vivacity and fun. The middle group of comedies, *Volpone, or the Fox* (1605), *Epiccene, or the Silent Woman* (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610), and *Bartholomew Fayre* (1614), are seen as his best works. Jonson also wrote tragedies: *Sejanus his Fall* (1603) and *Catiline his Conspiracy* (1611). But they are too mechanical to be reckoned as great tragedies. As for his masques, *The Masque of Beauty* (1608), *The Masque of Queens* (1609), and *Oberon, the Fairy Prince* (1611) are his best.

Francis Beaumont: (1584-1616) & John Fletcher: (1579-1625): Beaumont and Fletcher excelled in comedy, especially in the comedy of London life. They felt the influence of both Shakespeare and Jonson, but their plays are generally more superficial. They are mainly tragi-comedies, full of striking incident and stage effect. Their typical comedies are *A King and No King* (1611), *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607), and *The Scornful Lady* (1613-16). They also wrote tragedies, such as *The Maid's Tragedy* (1610), *Philaster* (1611), and *The Faithful Shepherdess* (written by Fletcher alone).

George Chapman: (1559-1634) His first play, *The Blind Beggar of Alexandria* (1596), was followed by many more, both comical and tragical. Among them are *Bussy d'Ambois* (1604), *Charles, Duke of Byron* (1608), and *The Tragedie of Chabot* (1613). These are historical plays, dealing with events nearly contemporary with his own time. Chapman's comedies include *All Fools* (1605) and *Eastward Hoe!* (1605). His translation of Homer has been very important. You should note that the Romantic poet John Keats wrote a famous poem entitled "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer".

John Marston: (1575-1634) Marston, a member of the Senecan school specialised in violent and melodramatic tragedies. His important tragedies are *Antonio and Mellida* (1599) and *Antonio's Revenge* (1602).

Thomas Dekker (1572-1632) His plays, chiefly comedies, have an attraction quite unusual for the time. They reflect a kind of sentimentality and an intimate knowledge of common men and things. He has also been called *the Dickens of the Elizabethan stage*. The best of his plays are *Old Fortunatus* (1599), *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599), and *Satiromastix* (1602). He collaborated with other playwrights, including Ford and Rowley, with whom he wrote *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), and Massinger, in *The Virgin Martyr* (1620).

Thomas Middleton: (1570-1627) His most powerful plays are *The Changeling* (1624); *Women beware Women* (1622), *The Witch,* which bears a strong resemblance to *Macbeth,* and *The Spanish Gipsy* (1623), a romantic comedy suggesting *As You Like It.*

Thomas Heywood: (1575-1650): Like so many other dramatists of the time, he excelled in his portrayal of London life and manners. He was a rapid and light improviser and an expert contriver of stage situations. His best plays are *A Woman Killed with Kindnesse* (1603), *The English Traveller* (1633), *The Royall King and the Loyall Subject* (1602), *The Captives* (1624), *King Edward the Fewth* (1594-97),

John Webster: (1580-1634) He flourished during the first twenty years of the 17th century, and is known as the greatest post-Shakespearian dramatist. The most striking follower of the Senecan Revenge tradition, Webster turns from the mere horror of event to the deep and subtle analysis of character. His plots are not well constructed and there is still some crudeness of incident, but his horrors are usually controlled. He deals with gloomy, supernatural themes, great crimes, turbulent emotions, and largeness of tragic conception. He produced his two great tragedies: *The White Devil* (1609-12) and *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613-14).

Cyril Tourneur: (1575-1626) His two plays *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1600) and *The A theist's Tragedy* (1607-11) are melodramatic to the highest degree.



1.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that the drama had its roots in Christian ritual. Ancient Folk celebrations, ritual miming on themes of death and resurrection, seasonal festivals and folk activities like the maypole dance with appropriate symbolic actions—all these can be seen as the background from which drama evolved. However, during the Renaissances the society underwent diverse changes following which drama too had to change according to the changing time. That is why; the history of Renaissance drama should be studies in terms of The English Society of the Time, Condition of Staging Plays and Playhouses, Private Playhouses and Playwrights and the Conditions of Production. As London at that time was seething with new ideas and commercial activities, playwriting and playacting too became increasingly important. For the convenience of your study, we have also tried to make a survey of Renaissance drama in terms of a chronology of dramatists under the subheadings Pre-Shakespearean and Post- Shakespearean drama. This must have helped you to do a kind of mapping of the Renaissance dramatists, which shall further help you to conduct a study of English drama in a more engaging way.



1.7 FURTHER READING

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1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Christmas and Easter and the celebration of Christ's life and Resurrection led to development of religious drama… …tropes meaning simple but dramatic elaborations of parts of the liturgy eemerged… …The "Quem Quaeritis?" is an important trope which depicts a dialogue between the three Marys and the angel at Christ's tomb…. …Trope eventually led to Liturgical Drama… …emergence of the first Passion Play depicting Christ's passion or crucifixion.

Ans to Q 2: Drama began to be presented in the vernacular… …drama moved out of the church leading to massive changes in the presentation of drama… …they were produced in the churchyard itself… …later, they moved into the marketplace or a convenient meadow.

Ans to Q 3: Passion Play… …Miracle Play… …Mystery Play… …Morality Play… …Interlude

Ans to Q 4: The morality like the miracle play did not deal with a biblical or pseudo-biblical story but with personified abstractions of virtues and

vices… …presented struggle for man's soul, man's search for salvation… …morality plays had a more intellectual character.

Ans to Q 5: Interludes marked the transition from medieval religious drama to the secular drama of the Renaissance… …Henry Medwall's *Fulgens and Lucres* written in 15th century is the earliest example of such drama… …while Heywood's interludes were often written as part of the evening's entertainment at a nobleman's house.

Ans to Q 6: The theatre companies were all licensed by the patronage… …those not having a license were termed "Rogues, Vagabond and Sturdy Beggars" according to a statute of 1598… …the players in such theatres were held responsible for promoting disorder in society… …The common Council of London banned such performances in taverns and inns… …these restrictions stimulated some entrepreneurs to borrow money and set up the first professional playhouse outside the jurisdiction of the city authorities.

Ans to Q 7: Private theatres emerged offering to a select audience a sophisticated alternative to the dramatic fare provided at the adult public theatres… …Blackfriars playhouse between 1576 and 1584 made a breakthrough in private theatre… …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.

Ans to Q 8: Public theater in London started with Burbage's first public commercial theatre (1576) during the reign of queen Elizabeth… …public theatre in London guaranteed the professional status of both the playwright and the acting companies… …The companies were independent on patronage for finance… …the willingness of the new theatre companies to pay for the plays created, for the first time in England a paying market for literature… … playwrights like Shakespeare was employed by the acting companies like the Chamberlain's Men, and King's Men.

Ans to Q 9: The commercialisation 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 following the Renaissance.



1.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How did classical influences affect the shaping of drama?

Q 2: Try to outline the different categories of characters who appeared in the early plays until the 15th century.

Q 3: How do conditions of staging a play affect its mode of representation?

Q 4: Evaluate the role of religion in the development of English drama.

Q 5: Show how drama begins to incorporate folk elements after moving out of the church.

Q 6: What kind of connection can you draw between the themes in the plays and the history of Renaissance drama?

Q7: How is increasing commercialisation an important part of English theatre?

Q 8: Describe how the history of drama is integrally connected to the Christ and the Church.

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UNIT 2: CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

2.1 Learning Objectives

2.2 Introduction

2.3 Christopher Marlowe: The Playwright

2.3.1 His Life

2.3.2 His Dramatic Career

2.4 Sources of the Play *The Jew of Malta*

2.5 Critical Reception of Marlowe

2.6 Let us Sum up

2.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

2.8 Possible Questions

2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the life and works of Christopher Marlowe
- examine the centrality of the Jew in the 16th century
- make connections between the play *Jew of Malta* and the Renaissance world of trade
- make an assessment of Marlowe as a great Renaissance playwright

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to the great Renaissance playwright Christopher Marlowe whose play *The Jew of Malta* has been prescribed for your study. As a playwright, Marlowe began his career by writing for the Admiral's Men at the Rose Theatre, quickly becoming the city's most popular playwright. Famous among Marlowe's numerous plays are *The Jew of Malta* (1590) and *Doctor Faustus* (1593). In *The Jew of Malta,* he presents a Jewish villain Barabas who is a brutal stereotype of a miser and hideous criminal whose crimes constitute revenge against Christian discrimination. In *Doctor Faustus,* Faustus is a scholar who sells his soul to the devil,

Mephistopheles, for years of power and knowledge. The play focuses on his vain pursuits as he confronts the pleasures and the mysteries of the world. Marlowe's other works include *Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1586), *The Massacre at Paris* (1590), and *Edward II* (1592), the tragedy of a homosexual king, *Tamburlaine,* a tragedy in which a "Scythian shepherd." During his age, Marlowe was greatly admired, and his works influenced other, greater writers who followed, including Shakespeare, Jonson, Chapman, and Drayton. In this unit, we shall deal with the life and works of Marlowe in some detail, which will help you to discuss the play *The Jew of Malta* in the next unit.

2.3 CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: THE PLAYWRIGHT

This section introduces you to some of the main facts about the life and works of the playwright Christopher Marlowe.



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

2.3.1 His Life

Christopher Marlowe was born in Canterbury in 1564, the same year as that of Shakespeare. His father was John Marlowe, a cobbler by profession, and his mother's name was Katherine. Research conducted on the life history of Marlowe tells that his father was a member of a somewhat turbulent family, which quarrelled with law. He studied in the King's School, Canterbury, from where he gained knowledge about Latin and Greek Grammar and some ancient literatures. Canterbury was also a place where plays were regularly performed. Following an award of scholarship in 1580, he came to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, which had connections with the Kings' school through the benefaction of Archbishop Matthew Parker. Here, Marlowe got a chance to study the Bible as well as philosophy and history. Marlowe must have been expected to take holy orders. Instead, he left Cambridge in 1587, and decided to go to London to become a

playwright. He had also fallen foul of the university authorities for not being able to maintain regular attendance and subsequently, he was refused his degree.

It is possible that Marlowe began writing plays after leaving Cambridge. His first plays were composed in blank verse. It is assumed that the first part of his *Tamburlaine the Great* was acted in London in 1587. His career as a dramatist was successful and his plays *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta* and *The Massacre at Paris* were all exceptionally popular. Regarding the non-professional side of his life, we have only a few glimpses. In 1589, there was a street fight following which Marlowe was arrested. It is also known that a week or so before he died he was summoned to report to the Queen's Council. How Marlowe died is still a mystery. Research conducted on Marlowe's death refers to many names who might have allegedly murdered the playwright. We owe a lot to Leslie Hotson's research that provides an account of the alleged manner of his death in 1593. A dispute among four friends arose after a supper in a tavern. Marlowe is said to have suddenly attacked one of them named Ingram Friser who, during the struggle, killed him in defence. Marlowe's mysterious death in the tavern, in Eleanor Bull's house following the feud as to who should pay the bill, may have had political undercurrents. This is because he was accused of being an atheist and was ordered to be arrested.

This is perhaps not the end of the mysteries connected with Marlowe's death. When he was killed, the mystery was intensified by the arrest of another playwright Thomas Kyd who, in fear of his own life, made accusations against Marlowe. Accusations like–he was 'intemperate and of a cruel heart' or he would 'jest at the divine Scriptures, gibe at prayers, and strive in argument to frustrate and confute what hath been spoke or writ by prophets and such holy men' – tend to degrade the good qualities of Marlowe. He is also blamed to have had the disagreeable habit of 'attempting sudden privy injuries to men' for which Kyd said he had used to 'reprehend

him'. There are even certain jokes in circulation at that time. For example, the readers of *The Times,* September 18, 1963, were told that 'Marlowe was a well-known homosexual'. The answer to such accusations is no more or no less than the evidence allows. However, a present reader like you may dismiss all these as 'Elizabethan Rumours' and the accusations as 'the Marlowe myth'.

2.3.2 His Dramatic Career

David Daiches, the eminent literary historian, argues that with the emergence Marlowe as the leading playwright of the later 16th century, the tradition of English tragedy found the eloquence of blank verse and the themes of the drama became more homely to suit an Elizabethan audience. However, those who appreciate Marlowe often feel that his plays are essentially not the work of a man 'expressing himself' but of a 'practitioner of the poetic drama'. As J. B. Steane also discusses in his introduction to Marlowe's plays, the Renaissance sense of poetic drama is one 'of an objective discipline to be mastered through the exercise of rhetorical imitation', and Marlowe must be read in that light. Observations like these are quite acceptable.

However, for our analysis, his plays are to be considered historically rather than from purely aesthetic point of view. This is important because the plays have encapsulated the essential Renaissance view of the world. His first play *Dido Queen of Carthage* was probably written in 1586. However, his first major play was *Tamburlaine* which marks an important step in the development of English drama. Marlowe had probably written *Doctor Faustus* by 1589. Both *Tamburlaine* and *Doctor Faustus* are directly concerned with God and are Marlowe's most famous dramatic works. With *Doctor Faustus* and its depiction of the agonizing nature of the hero's choice, the consequences of the choices the hero makes and the

quality of his anguish, English tragedy first comes to realise its full potentials.

Therefore, you have found that Marlowe started his highly impressive literary career with ***Tamburlaine the Great*** (Probably first produced during 1587-88) – a play in two parts. It is the story of a conquering Scythian shepherd, the dramatic rendering of which brought new life to the English theatre of the 16th century. This is also an amazing tale of lust for power and military achievements. The excitements of new geographical discoveries, the new glory of Elizabethan poetic utterance, the Renaissance feelings of *virtu*, the fascination with what a man can achieve along a single line of endeavour, the obsession with pride, the mastering of one's own destiny, challenge against the benevolence of the gods—all these join hands to exhibit the boundless ambition in a man possessing a matchless determination and self confidence inherent in an ambitious man's psyche.

Tamburlaine is followed by ***The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*** (Probably completed between 1588-89)–another interesting play around the Faustus Myth. However, in Marlowe's hand this myth reaches a truly tragic dimension. Like Tamburlaine, Faustus is also ambitious though intellectually. His ambition is for ultimate knowledge, which means 'power to control.' But, Faustus does not seek the practical fruits of knowledge. His thirst for ultimate understanding, finally leads him to sell his soul to the Devil, in exchange for forbidden knowledge. Thus, *Faustus* symbolises the 'Fall of Man' through eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge. This play also shows how 'the corruption of the best becomes the worst'–an underlying concern for the great tragic heroes of Shakespeare who was to hit the Elizabethan theatre next to him.

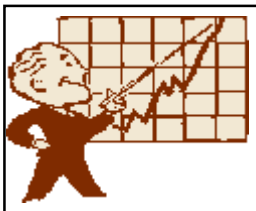


LET US KNOW

Faustus Myth: It refers to the German legend of a magician named Faust, or Faustus, who sold his soul to the devil in exchange for youth, knowledge, earthly pleasures, and magical powers. Some would like to argue that this legend is based on a historical figure, a wandering German scholar who lived between about 1480 and 1540. In order to get greater wisdom, power, and pleasure, Faust turned away from God and made a secret pact with the devil, Mephistopheles. Finally, he received eternal damnation. This legend warns us against fulfilling all our earthly desires without the help of God. It is important to note that this legend became the basis for Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus,* for the German poet Johann von Goethe's *Faust,* and for the German author Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus.*

Machiavelli: Niccolo di Bernardo die Machiavelli (1469-1527) was an Italian political theorist and historian famous for *The Prince* (1513). He caught the imagination of the 16th century English writers. The word Machiavellian stands for someone cynical, cunning and unscrupulous. Machiavelli in *The Prince* said that it was necessary to employ immoral methods to attain power and success.

The next important play *The Jew of Malta* was originally produced sometimes between 1589 and1591. This play presents a 'Machiavellian' man, full of greed and cunning, who will stop nowhere to attain his ends. The central character, Barabas, the Jew of Malta, and the play's black humour appealed to the audiences of the time and helped to establish Marlowe's reputation as a leading dramatist among his contemporaries. Marlowe's two final dramatic works *Edward II* and *The Massacre at Paris* were probably written in 1592. It is likely that during this time Marlowe also wrote *Hero and Leander,* a book of poem dealing with the story of Hero and Leander. Leander was drowned while trying to swim across to meet his lover Hero at night. However, he died before he could complete it.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is the mystery connected with the death of Marlowe?

Q 2: How does J. B. Steane want us to read Marlowe's plays?

Q 3: What is the main theme of Marlowe's *Docor Faustus*?

Q 4: Mention the main themes of Marlowe's greatest plays?

2.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *THE JEW OF MALTA*

It is difficult to trace the source of the play *The Jew of Malta* as it is filled with allusions and engaged with contemporary issues and discourses. The famous 1565 siege of Christian Malta by the Turkish forces loosely provides the setting. The failed siege of Malta was understood as a victory of Christianity over Islam, but it also occasioned rumours about the financial complicity between the Jews and the Turks. Some critics even seek to find relationship between Barabas and a historical Jew, either Joseph Nasi, a Jewish financier or David Passi, a self-serving double agent from Constantinople. Marlowe seems to have fashioned the 'Jewish Christian Equation' from elements of orally transmitted tales traditionally attached to the Jew as usurer and murderer of Christ. Therefore, Marlowe relied more upon popular perceptions of the Jew. On the one hand, he counted on the 'stage Jew'—a stock-character of those days; on the other hand, he must have been inspired 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 as the Queen Elizabeth's personal physician. He was later tried for treason (for an attempt to poison the Queen) and was sentenced to death. Other than these, Marlowe may have had chances to meet Jews in person. This was possible because Marlowe was employed as a spy in the Queen's secret service, following which Marlowe was to stay for a long time in Holland where the congregation of the liberated Jews was beginning to flourish. So, naturally this experience was to influence the writing of the *The Jew of Malta.* Regarding the portrayal of Malta, Marlowe may have relied heavily on an account of the visit to Malta

undertaken by the Lord of Aramont, the French Ambassador to the Porte in 1551.

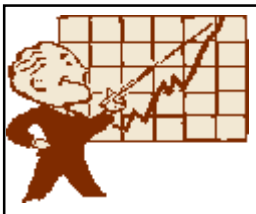
Marlowe scholars would like to agree that the earliest surviving text of the play is the 1633 Quarto. The entrepreneur behind the play's revival was Thomas Heywood. This 1633 Quarto forms the basis of the Penguin edition of 2003. The editors, Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey, argue that Heywood had little reason to interfere with the text, and the several minor anomalies in spelling and style suggest that the surviving version was manipulated by different hands at different times. While the extent of Heywood's revision remains vague, it is clear that he added a dedication, prologue, and epilogue in addition to Marlowe's original prologue as is visible in newer edition like — the New Mermaid Edition published in 2009.



LET US KNOW

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 politics. This provided another possible source for *The Jew of Malta.*

Malta: It is a Southern European country situated in the centre of the Mediterranean and surrounded by small countries like Sicily, Tunisia, Libya, Gibraltar and Alexandria. Throughout history, its location has given it great strategic importance to the other countries of the world.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: How did Marlowe perceive the Jews in this play?

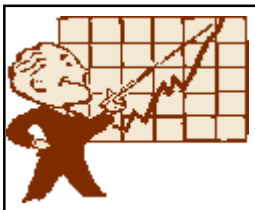
Q 6: Do you think that the sources of the play are historically authentic?

2.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF MARLOWE

Marlowe's plays were well received when they were first staged, but in the years that followed his death, poets and dramatists remembered him more for his poetry than for his plays. Both Shakespeare and Ben Jonson praised Marlowe's "mighty line" and Michael Drayton said: "his raptures were all air and fire". The Puritan writers, who were intent on attacking the corrupting influences of the theatres, shifted the emphasis to Marlowe's unnatural death as a punishment for his atheism and his flamboyant writing. The interest in Marlowe's life and death still continues, and researchers are constantly trying to unravel the circumstances that led to his death. The focus, however, has shifted, as critics now are more interested in discussing how Marlowe's life and contemporary events could have shaped his plays. Clifford Leech provides interesting insights into the reception of Marlowe in recent times. Starting with his immediate influence on the playwrights like Shakespeare, Leech writes that after Marlowe's death, Shakespeare and his contemporaries started using much 'freer' manner of writing instead of 'formal rhetoric'. He also writes that the critical recognition of Marlowe has inevitably induced a wide range of interpretations. For some, Marlowe the dramatist is always a Christian writer as seen through the popular explanation of the play *Dr. Faustus* as a morality play. However, others seek to read Marlowvian plays in the light of their relevance in the contemporary 20th century cruelty and insanity. However, the third important movement in Marlowe criticism is the consideration of Marlowe's relation to the stage during his dramatic career.

You will find it interesting to note that the critical response to Marlowe and his play *The Jew of Malta* has taken a number of different directions in the 20th century. For example, Eugene M. Waith (1952) considered Marlowe as a writer concerned with drama as a means of exploring greatness of a tragic hero. L. C. Knights (1965) claimed that Marlowe's creative fantasy did not meet the resistance necessary for affirmation, growth and understanding. Harry Levin, on the other hand, examined Marlowe as a restless sceptic and independent thinker, in his interesting book *The*

Overreacher (1952). More recent studies, particularly under the influence of New Historicism, have looked at the political, social and cultural context of the plays, the Renaissance voyages to East and West, the beginnings of colonisation 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. Subsequently, Greenblatt asserts 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"). Kenneth Friedenreich in the essay "*The Jew of Malta* and the Critics: A Paradigm of Marlowe Studies" writes that criticism of *The Jew of Malta* has persistently sought a satisfactory explanation for the apparent change in Marlowe's conception of his hero, Barabas, who seems cast in the first two acts in the familiar mould of a Marlovian superman, but who is somehow transformed in the last three acts into a comical avenger. Such criticisms help in reading the text in a meaningful way.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How the critical opinions on Marlowe have changed from time to time?

Q 8: State how the 20th century critics have examined Marlowe's texts?



2.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have learnt that Marlowe was a writer who could bring new forms, experiences and modes of expression into the art of playwriting of his period. But, in his moral thinking, he was a devout Christian holding up before his audiences examples of the ways and fates of the sinful men. The play *The Jew of Malta* is positioned right at the beginning of a critical moment of world politics. Although money and wealth determine the action and fate of the different characters of his plays, Marlowe's use of

a wide range of characters that represent important aspects of society adds more impetus to his greatness in using his imagination as we can see from the play *The Jew of Malta*. Thus, this unit must have implicitly informed you that in order to know Marlowe's plays you must be having a clear idea of the society and culture to which he belonged and from where he got the inspiration to write his plays.



2.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The mystery relates to Marlowe's alleged murder… …Leslie Hotson refers to a dispute among four friends as to who should pay the bill for a supper… …Marlowe is thought to be killed by one of the four friends.

Ans to Q 2: J. B. Steane discusses that the Renaissance sense of poetic drama is one 'of an objective discipline to be mastered through the exercise of rhetorical imitation', and Marlowe must be read in that light.

Ans to Q 3: Marlowe's Dr. Faustus is based on the Faustus Myth… …this myth tells about how the ambition for ultimate knowledge becomes the cause of the damnation of the character called Faustus… …the play also symbolises the 'Fall of Man' through eating from the forbidden tree of knowledge.

Ans to Q 4: *Tamburlaine the Great* is an amazing tale of lust for power and military achievements… …*The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* shows how Faustus's thirst for ultimate understanding, finally leads him to sell his soul to the Devil, in exchange for forbidden knowledge… …*The Jew of Malta* presents a 'Machiavellian' man, full of greed and cunning, who will stop nowhere to attain his ends.

Ans to Q 5: Marlowe adhered to the popular perceptions of the Jew as a stock-character… …but he might also be inspired by the real-life figure of Doctor Rodrigo Lopez, a 'New Christian' immigrant from Portugal, who was later tried for treason.

Ans to Q 6: It is not easy to ascertain a historically authentic source of the play… … but we can refer to the siege of Christian Malta by the Turkish forces in 1565 which loosely provides the setting of the play…. …according to some critics even Barabas resembles actual Jews like Joseph Nasi or David Passi… …again while presenting the Jew, Marlowe must have been inspired by the real-life figure of Doctor Rodrigo Lopez, a 'New Christian' immigrant from Portugal

Ans to Q 7: Shakespeare and Jonson praised Marlowe's "mighty line" but the Puritan writers shifted the emphasis to Marlowe's unnatural death as a punishment for his atheism and his flamboyant writing…. …but Clifford Leech writes that Marlowe helped Shakespeare and his contemporaries to use 'freer' manner of writing instead of 'formal rhetoric'.

Ans to Q 8: Eugene M. Waith hailed Marlowe as a writer concerned with drama as a means of exploring the greatness of a tragic hero… … L. C. Knights (1965) claimed that Marlowe's creative fantasy did not meet the resistance necessary for affirmation, growth and understanding…. … Harry Levin examined Marlowe as a restless sceptic and independent thinker… …the Neo Historicist Stephen Greenblatt asserted that Marlowe was typical of his age in that he questioned all ideas and above all his own identity.



2.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Compare and contrast Christopher Marlowe with Ben Jonson and William Shakespeare as Renaissance Playwrights.

Q 2: Who is an 'Overreacher' in the Marlovian sense? What is the difference between Marlowe's tragic hero and the Greek?

Q 3: What are the important features of Renaissance drama? Discuss its influence on Marlowe.

Q 4: Write a note on Christopher Marlowe as a Renaissance dramatist with particular reference to his greatest plays.

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UNIT 3: CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE: *THE JEW OF MALTA*

UNIT STRUCTURE

3.1 Learning Objectives

3.2 Introduction

3.3 Act wise Summary of the Play

3.4 Critical Commentary on the Play

3.5 Major Themes

3.6 Major Characters

3.7 Let us Sum up

3.8 Further Reading

3.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.10 Possible Questions

3.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss *The Jew of Malta* as a significant Renaissance play
- relate the text with the Machiavellian issues
- discuss the importance of the world of Malta in the play
- examine the centrality of the Jew in the 16th Century
- make connections between the play and the Renaissance world of trade

3.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will study *The Jew of Malta* a 'Renaissance tragedy' written by the famous 16th century playwright Christopher Marlowe. Marlowe was a member of the famous "University Wits" and a contemporary of William Shakespeare. This play was first produced at the Rose Theatre in London in 1592. You will find it interesting that this play is based on the tragic plight of a very wealthy Jew Barabas who lived in the Mediterranean Island of Malta with his beautiful daughter Abigail. He built his vast empire of business in Malta with the help of usury —the lending of money at

excessively high interest. All his possessions were confiscated by the Catholic Governor of the Island, in order to defend Malta from the Turks, and subsequently, he forced to convert to Christianity. The tormented Jew Barabas was swept into a whirlwind of revenge and he turned into a serial killer. He even assisted the Turkish army to conquer Malta, got himself appointed the Turkish Governor only to meet with his tragic death by falling into his own trap, a boiling cauldron. You should also note that the importance of money and business in this play reflects the changes that had occurred in the 16th century from a feudal to a capitalist society. Similarly, the location of Malta as the locale for the play is important in comprehending the international business endeavours of the 16th Century world. However, the reach of the play is not confined to Malta only as the Spaniards and the Turks seek to gain control over the small island known for its merchants and wealthy businessmen. By the time you finish reading the unit, you will see how money and wealth can corrupt an individual like Barabas who finally meets with his tragic death just because of his ambition to become the wealthiest man in Malta.

3.3 ACT WISE SUMMARY 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*. You must take this seriously, as there is a clear-cut reference to Machiavelli as we read it:

"Albeit the world thinks Machiavell is dead,
Yet was his soul but flown beyond the Alps;
…To view this land, and frolic with his friends." (Prologue, 1-4)

Or

"Admir'd I am of those that hate me most.
Though some speak openly against my books," (Prologue, 9-10)

With this Prologue Marlowe makes it clear to the readers/audience that the play would discuss issues of governance, political strategy and power which were synonymous with the name of Machiavelli, the well known 16th century

Italian political theorist, philosopher, historian, humanist, statesman and playwright of Italy.



LET US KNOW

The 'Prologue' was a popular and contemporary dramatic device. The dramatist addressed the audience directly through the Prologue 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 tradition by having the figure of Machiavel deliver the Prologue

Act I

The Jew of Malta opens with Barabas counting his wealth and hopes that his ships will do good business in their recent business endeavours. Soon, several merchants enter to tell Barabas that his ships are in the port, each laden with immense wealth. Barabas is pleased and credits God for his riches. He preferred to remain being a hated Jew to being a Christian. We come to know from the first scene that Malta, the Turkish Tributary, is being threatened for failing to pay its tribute. Calymath, who is the leader of the Turkish forces, gives Ferneze, the Governor of Malta, one month's time to arrange for the tribute money. Being helpless, Ferneze summons all the Jews, including Barabas, who is the wealthiest, and forcefully demand a levy of half of their goods. Ferneze orders that the Jews will have to pay "one half of his estate". If they refuse they will have to convert themselves to Christianity. If they refuse, further their entire wealth will be confiscated. While the other Jews agree, Barabas protests but in vain. When Barabas refuses, all his goods are confiscated and his house is turned into a nunnery. Clever Barabas already knew what would be happening to him, and so he concealed most of his riches under the floorboards of his house. He persuades his daughter Abigail to pretend to enter the nunnery so that she can get back his hidden treasure. On his insistence, Abigail professes conversion into Christianity and presents herself at the nunnery as a novice.



LET US KNOW

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 act provides the impetus for the future course of action. Such treatment of Barabas by the Christians also reminds us of the hatred and injustice faced by Shylock in Shakespeare's significant play *The Merchant of Venice.*

Act II

After getting proper instructions from Barabas, Abigail starts playing the role of a most obedient daughter and starts acquiring the money for him. In fact, this act opens with Abigail throwing jewellery and gold out of the window to Barabs who is waiting below. Martin Del Bosco, a vice-admiral from Spain, arrives in Malta to conduct a sale of slaves rescued from the sinking Turkish ships. Del Bosco convinces Ferneze that they need not pay the tribute to the Turks, claiming that Spain will help and protect Malta. Barabas is still claiming that he is as wealthy as he had been but he is determined to take revenge on Ferneze. Subsequently, for his future use, he buys a Turkish slave whose name is Ithamore and whom he acknowledges to be no less villainous than himself. Barabas even makes Abigail a part of his mission to take revenge. She is in love with Mathias, who returns her love but whom Barabas pretends to regard very much. Barabas forces Abigail into a relationship with Ludowick who is Mathias's friend and Ferneze's son. Actually, Barabas noticed Ludowick's attraction to his daughter and tried his best to turn that affair into his own profit. Having set the two young men against each other, he sends Ithamore to Mathias with a forged challenge from Ludowick. In the mean time, the political situation in Malta undergoes a change. Ferneze, encouraged by the Spaniayard Martin Del Bosco, decides to use the money already levied from the Jews to make war on the Turks.

Act III

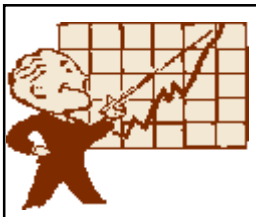
This act begins with Ithamore having feelings for Bellamira who later turns out to be a prostitute. This act also introduces the audience to the sub-plot of Billamira and Pilia Borza. Mathias and Ludowick kill each other in the dual originally planned by Barabas. Their friendship had been so close that Ferneze decides to discover and avenge himself on the villains who induced enmity between them. Ferneze and Katherine mourn the death of their beloved son. Abigail is shaken by her father's treachery as Mathias's death led Abigail think sincerely on re-entering the nunnery. Enraged by this act of disobedience of the daughter, Barabas decides to kill all the nuns in the nunnery, manages to leave a poisoned pot of rice porridge outside the nunnery with the help of Ithamore, and succeeds in killing all its inhabitants. The Turks arrive in Malta to collect tribute but Ferneze refuses to pay them. Abigail has sent for Friar Jacomo and before her death she confesses her part in the death of two intimate friends Mathias and Ludowick to Friar Bernadine.

Act IV

The Friars Barnardine and Jacomo, who originally sponsored Abigail's genuine religious vocation, visits Barabas and informs him about Abigail's confession. Barabas seems to have repented and tells them that he intends to enter a religious house because there is a change in his heart. The two Friars, who belong to two different religious orders, quarrel as to who will have the honour of receiving the repentant sinner. Barabas, very cleverly plays them off one against the other. With the help of Ithamore, Barabas strangles Bernardine to death and frames Jacomo as the murderer. Now only Ithamore is aware of the actual act of murder. Bellamira invites Ithamore to her house because she loves him. He is thus taken up by Bellamira, an infamous prostitute, and by Pilia Borza, her pimp both of whom have an eye on Barabas's riches. They encourage Ithamore to blackmail Barabas, using Pilia Borza as the go-between. Ithamore falls into the trap and he begins to blackmail Barabas as he threatens to "confess all' if Barabas does not comply with his demands. Somehow Barabas manages to expose the plot against him and visits all the three disguised as a French musician and manages to get them poisoned.

Act V

The act opens with Bellamira and Pilia-Borza confronting Ferneze with what they know about Barabas's crime. The poisoned flowers are slow in taking effect and Bellamira and Pilia Borza who are now aware of Barabas's crimes, betray him and Ithamore to Ferneze. The Governor orders that Ithamore and Barabas be arrested, and the two are quickly brought in. As the victims of the poison finally die, Barabas too feigns death and his body is abandoned by the authority. Now Barabas determines to avenge himself on the whole city by betraying Malta to the Turks. He, bent on exacting vengeance for unpaid tribute, becomes instrumental in leading the army of Calymath, secretly into the city. As the Turkish victory is secured, Barabas's fortune again starts to swing dramatically in his favour. Calymath makes him the Governor of Malta. However, he was so hated in Malta that he began to feel his position to be insecure. Now, he talks to Ferneze who is in prison, and he outlines a scheme for destroying the Turks. He proposed a plan which is like this: Calymath's men will be invited to a feast in a monastery which will then be blown up; Calymath himself will die in a burning cauldron into which, at a signal from Barabas to Ferneze, he will be pitched by means of a machine of Barabas's contrivance. Predictably, Ferneze takes the opportunity of avenging himself on Barabas, who murdered his son, by casting Barabas into the cauldron instead. Ferneze receives a great satisfaction in watching the Jew Barabas dying. Calymath, who has now lost his entire army in the blazing monastery, is held prisoner by Ferneze until a time when his father Grand Seignior, agrees to repair the damage caused by the latest happenings to Malta. The play ends with Ferneze retaining his position, Barabas dead and Calymath neutralised.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Why does Marlowe start the play The Jew of Malta with a Prologue to Machiavelli?

3.4 CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE PLAY

By now, you must have realised that this play is a representative Renaissance play. The reference to Machiavelli at the beginning is not without significance. Machiavelli's famous political treatise *The Prince* fascinated and horrified generations of readers and became the intellectual property of every well-read European during the 16th century. Marlowe too was well acquainted with Machiavelli's writings. Like other intellectuals of his time, he found Machiavelli useful in understanding the important changes that were taking place in the Elizabethan society. But, there are two obvious difficulties to understand Marlowe's 'Machevill' who opens the play. First, Machiavelli treats religion as vital to statecraft, while 'Machevill' in the play dismisses it as a 'childish toy'; Secondly, Machiavelli says nothing about economics, while 'Machevill' claims that Barabas has amassed a great fortune by Machevill's 'means'. Please note such contradictions, which, perhaps, refer to anti-Machiavellian polemics in Marlowe's contemporary times.

You have already read that during the Renaissance, the Jews were considered responsible for the crucifixion of Christ. *The Jew of Malta* alludes directly to this idea by having its hero named Barabas. Marlowe's Jew is certainly wicked and gives us quite a remarkable history of himself in Act II, Scene III. Unlike Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, the Jew Barabas is interested in power which is not to be achieved through any conquest. He is, in fact, a true representation of the tradition of the Jews, whose wealth is known to all and who always imagine 'Infinite riches in a little room'. (Act 1, Scene I) Wealth for Barabas is a sign for divine favour and like a true Renaissance figure; Barabas sets out to master the universe with more and more wealth. The larger framework of the play hinges on the arrival of an outside force that will disrupt Malta's internal peace. When the Turks do manage to invade the island temporarily, it is only with the help of Barabas, who has been thrown *outside* the city walls.

Barabas's lust for money is entirely in keeping with the spirit of the commercial mercantile society of which he is a part. By making Barabas

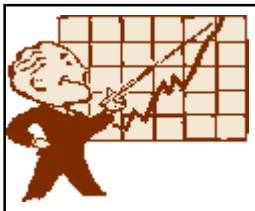
say: “who is honour’d now but for his wealth?”, Marlowe was representing how the commercial aspect of an urbane society was gradually becoming a feature of the Renaissance. Barabas tops this remarkable career by poisoning an entire convent of nuns just to be revenged on his daughter Abigail for her conversion to Christianity. Moreover, though Barabas offers this account as his own personal history, it is equally possible to read it as a kind of composite overview of the ways the Jews might have become involved in it, and indeed Barabas has been compared to a number of historical Jews. Harry Levin’s discussion of Marlowe in his book *Christopher Marlowe: The Over Reacher* bears tremendous significance. Like Marlowe’s other heroes Barabas too is an over-reacher. He too has his ‘tragic flaw’. He is characteristic of the Marlovian form of over-reaching himself—of being too clever and expecting other people to acknowledge his otherness. Finally, he falls into a trap of his own making.

However, this play serves the purpose of both a revenge tragedy and a satirical comedy. From Kyd’s famous *The Spanish Tragedy* Marlowe learnt the benefits of excitements and tension to be aroused in the minds of the spectators. Throughout the play, Barabas is dependent on other people—Abigail, Ithamore, and finally Ferneze, and it is this dependence that sets the plot of the play going and this is what finally brings Barabas’ downfall.

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. In order to let the audience see Barabas’s 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. For example, Barabas reminds the audience of his homicidal intentions in his words with strategic asides: “As these have spoke so be it to their souls./ I hope the poisoned flowers will work anon.” (V.i.40-1)

You are likely to notice how in this play Marlowe exploits popular stereotypes to achieve a comic effect. The audience is not allowed to dwell

on the crimes Barabas is committing – like engineering the deaths of Ludowik, Mathias and his daughter, killing the two Friars, Pilia Borza, Ithamore and Bellamira and so on. The fast-paced events underplay the serious nature of Barabas's crimes. The audience does not even sympathise 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. Such a caricature produces comic laughter.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: What difficulties do you face while understanding Marlowe's use of Mechiavelli?

Q 3: If you consider *The Jew of Malta* a tragedy, what is the 'tragic flaw' in Barabas' character?

Q 4: How does the character of Barabas represent the commercial mercantile society of the Renaissance period?

3.5 MAJOR THEMES

The following are some of the most important themes in the play *The Jew of Malta.*

Machiavellism:

The culmination of Barabas' Machiavellian policy is seen in the Act V 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.

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)

Just when the audience feel 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 satirised Elizabethan England's stereotyped perception of Machiavelli. There is also the possibility that *The Jew of Malta* may be a satire on the methods used by those in, or aspiring for, positions of power. Rather than being the *advocate* of either the individualistic pursuit of power or a practical politics devoid of ethical considerations, by bringing back Machiavelli, Marlowe might have acted as their critic, who is exposing the corrupt practices of the ruling classes. The machinations of Ferneze would probably support such a reading. One of the central themes in *The Jew of Malta* is the difference between what is real and what only appears to be 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. But actually, Ferneze uses religion when it is convenient. He ignores the Christian admonition of kindness toward all men and lacks any compassion for the Jews. When he needs money, the Jews are suddenly made outsiders, although there is every evidence that the governor has made use of them earlier. 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.

The Jewish Christian Equation:

Some issues that you might be curious to know relates to whether Marlowe is here dealing with issue of the Jews as the 'other' or 'outsider' in a Christian society. In course of the action, Marlowe provides a negative depiction of two major religious groups namely 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 emphasises the corruption and hypocrisy of the church. A good deal of the play can be seen as a struggle between what is inside and outside, or what is familiar and unfamiliar. While the

Jews of Malta are well accustomed to the land, they consider themselves to be “strangers” and they are treated as such by Ferneze and his ilk.

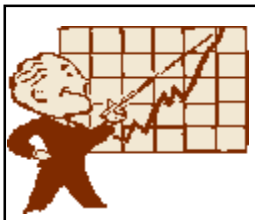
Power and Wealth:

Marlowe in this play observes how power and wealth are connected with the world of Renaissance business. This is a direct reference to the rise of the merchant classes and they often financed wars that were undertaken by the kings during this time. However, Barabas is only concerned with safeguarding his own wealth. As he claims, none to be ‘honoured now but for his wealth’ (I, i. 112). Marlowe also shows that the desire for wealth is not confined to the Jews only. Ferneze and the Friars are equally driven by the desire for gold. Through the tragic tale of Barabas, Marlowe also exposes the Christians and the various corrupt practices in monasteries and nunneries. Marlowe uses the struggle over Malta among the Turks, the Spaniards and the besieged knights of Malta as part of a political interest. 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 first to one bidder, then to another.



LET US KNOW

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 had been committed.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: What is Machiavellism?

Q 6: How does Marlowe portray the Jew in a Christian society?

Q 7: What connections do you make between power and wealth?

3.6 MAJOR CHARACTERS

If compared to his other plays, in *The Jew of Malta,* Marlowe presents a wider range of characterisation along with the sense that one is dealing with ordinary rather than extraordinary human beings. Perhaps, this is what is so striking about Marlowe's characterisation in this play. Let us briefly discuss some of the major characters of the play.

Macheville:

The speaker who delivers the Prologue. This character is based on an actual figure called Niccolo Mechiavelli the author of the famous book *The Prince* (1513). Marlowe presents Mechiavill as an ironic character as he sets the context of the play filled with intrigue, duplicity, hatred, murder and ambition the traits which were mistaken by Marlowe's contemporaries as essentially Machiavellian.

Barabas:

The protagonist of the play, father of Abigail. In the New Testament, Barabas is the murderer who is released from prison instead of Jesus. He is a miserly Jewish merchant careful only about his daughter and infinite wealth. But, when his wealth is confiscated, the notion of revenge consumes him, and he starts killing everyone whoever becomes a threat to him. He as a strategist, is both power-thirsty and cunning. It is to be noted that Barabas does not match the character of Machiavelli although in the Prologue the speaker (assumed to be Machiavelli himself) implies that Barabas is Machiavellian although his "money was not got without my means." However, Barabas personifies all the characteristics, which the Elizabethan audience could readily identify with Machiavelli. Barabas completely lacks mercy for his targeted victims. However, Marlowe's portrayal of Barabas is ambiguous as the latter does express his intense love for Abigail, his daughter and yet remains loyal to his insatiable desire for vengeance despite all difficulties.

Abigall:

Barabas's daughter. She is in love with Mathias, Ferneze's son. In Hebrew, *Abigail* means "father's joy". Known for her love, loyalty and dutifulness, she is perhaps the only character in the play who is least concerned about money and wealth. Marlowe however fully exploits her

character to expose the corruption of the Catholic clergy. She takes pity on her father's sufferings at the hands of the Christians, undertakes to redress his 'wrongs', becomes entangled with his 'policy', and finally suffers mortal consequences. As she utters: "I was chained to follies of the world:/ But now experience, purchased with grief,/Has made me see the difference of things." (III, iii.60-3). Although initially she is loyal to her father, she soon discovers that Barabas is the actual murdered of Mathias. She finally shows that true salvation lies in Christian redemption.

Ferneze:

The Governor of Malta and Barabas's greatest enemy. He is out and out a Christian. But situation makes him morally bankrupt as he uses undue force against the Jews and is equally Machiavellian as Barabas. It is not an overstatement that he is a religious hypocrite hiding under the notion of Christian morality.

Ithamore:

A Turkish slave captured by the Spanish navy, bought by Barabas to carry out his evil plots. The interesting point is that Ithamore takes a sadistic pleasure in killing and becomes a serial killer just to gain the favour of his master Barabas. Another example of how easily he gets persuaded is his coming under the influence of Bellamira, the prostitute, who dupes him into bribing Barabas.

Friar Jacomo & Friar Barnardine:

These two Friars represent two different monasteries. Through these two characters, Marlowe exposes the rampant corruption prevalent in the Church system during Marlowe's time. Friar Jacomo is the Dominican Friar who converts Abigail. However, he also sleeps with nuns and lusts for money. He represents a hypocrite Catholic clergy. Friar Barnardine, on the other hand, quarrels with Jacomo on matters of whether Barabas' money should go to his own monastery.

Salim Calymath:

The Turkish leader and the son of the Sultan. He seeks to capture Malta with the help of Barabas as the conflict between Ferneze and Barabas presents him a golden opportunity to fulfill his political gain.



3.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit you have learnt that *The Jew of Malta* is a play that provides insights into the various aspects of the Renaissance world. This play of Marlowe also represents the development of the formal design of playwriting besides reflecting the state of international affairs and the development of commercial enterprise in the 16th century. On the one hand, the play reflects on the composite state of geo-political 'balances of power' during a particular time as well as on the increasing significance of extended global trade. On the other, it presents a complex mix of characters like Barabas and others who find themselves knowingly or unknowingly caught under the corrupting forces of society. You will do well if you read the original text from any available standard edition and enjoy your reading.



3.8 FURTHER READING

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3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: With this Prologue Marlowe makes it clear to the readers/ audience that the play would discuss issues of governance, political strategy and power which were synonymous with the name of Machiavelli, the well known 16th century Italian political theorist, philosopher, historian, humanist, statesman and playwright of Italy.

Ans to Q 2: There are two obvious difficulties in our understanding of Marlowe's use of Machiavelli… …one, Machiavelli treats religion as vital to statecraft, while 'Machevill' in the play dismisses it as a 'childish toy'… … second, Machiavelli says nothing about economics, while 'Machevill' claims that Barabas has amassed a great fortune by Machevill's 'means'.

Ans to Q 3: Barabas's 'tragic flaw' is perhaps his ambition to 'overreach' as Harry Levin has pointed out… …he is guilty of being too clever and expecting other people to acknowledge his cleverness… …this finally leads to his tragic doom.

Ans to Q 4: By exposing Barabas's lust for money, Marlowe was perhaps showing how the commercial aspect of an urbane society was gradually becoming a feature of the Renaissance mercantile culture.

Ans to Q 5: Machiavellism can loosely be defined as a strong adherence to the ideas of Niccolo Machiavelli… …In the context of the play Barabas is presented as a perfect Machiavellian is in control of the situation… …But by connecting the Jew to Machiavelli, Marlowe has actually discredited Machiavelli and satirised Elizabethan England's stereotyped perception of Machiavelli.

Ans to Q 6: The Jew was an 'other' or 'outsider' in a Christian society… …but through the portrayal of the Jews, Marlowe also exposes the ill practices of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of

England……In both cases, such portrayals reflect the general attitude of his serious English audience toward these religious faiths.

Ans to Q 7: Power and wealth are connected with the world of the Renaissance business… …this idea is also derived from the assumptions that the merchant classes often financed wars… …this thirst for power and wealth, according to Marlowe, is a drawback in both the Jews and the Christians.



3.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Barabas is both oppressed and oppressor, victim and villain. Discuss.

Q 2: Do you believe that Barabas' evil actions are to be justified as the reactions to crimes committed against him?

Q 3: How, according to you, Marlowe's varied characters represent his age?

Q 4: Discuss the significance of Machiavelli in the play. In what ways, are the characters in *The Jew of Malta* Machiavellian?

Q 5: Who are the main characters of the play? What role do they play in the development of the plot of the play?

Q 6: Discuss the major themes of the play *The Jew of Malta?* How is the theme of power and wealth related to the Renaissance world of business?

Q 7: Discuss how the main plot and the sub plot revolve around the theme of power and wealth.

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UNIT 4: BEN JONSON: *VOLPONE* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

4.1 Learning Objectives

4.2 Introduction

4.3 Ben Jonson: The Playwright

4.3.1 His Life

4.3.2 His Dramatic Career

4.4 Jonsonian Comedy

4.5 Critical Reception of Jonson

4.6 Let us Sum up

4.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

4.8 Possible Questions

4.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss Ben Jonson as an important English playwright of the 16th century
- make an assessment of Jonson and his works
- explain the nature of Jonsonian type of comedy
- provide a critical reception of Jonson.

4.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with the life and works of Ben Jonson whose play *Volpone* has been prescribed for your study. Jonson had his first success as a playwright with *Every Man in His Humour* (performed 1598, printed 1601), in which William Shakespeare himself acted. Jonson's intent in this play and the ones that followed was to mock, or satirise, the folly of his audiences so they would be shamed into improving their behaviour. The play *Volpone* was written within the period of a few weeks for its performance at the Globe in 1606. Its positive reception by the first audience at the Globe led to its performance at Oxford and Cambridge Universities where it was

received so well that Jonson dedicated the published Quarto of 1607 to the two Universities-"to the two most noble and most equal sisters, the two famous Universities." The play is a scathing satire on human greed in general, although its setting is in Renaissance Italy.

4.3 BEN JONSON: THE PLAYWRIGHT



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

Ben Jonson suffers from the singular misfortune of belonging to the same age as Shakespeare. Being next to Shakespeare in dramatic talent, Jonson is often compared with the Bard only to be seen as an inferior dramatist with limited vision and poetic gifts. Jonson's contribution to the Elizabethan drama is no less significant, especially in his comedies written with an avowed didactic purpose. Let us discuss his life and works in greater detail.

4.3.1 His Life

Though the time and the place of Jonson's birth are not exactly known, it is more or less accepted that he was born in Westminster, a London suburb, on June 11, 1572. His father, a Protestant clergyman died before his birth. Educated at Westminster School he was brought up by his stepfather who was a bricklayer and whom his mother married two years after his father's death. For his education, Jonson got immense help from William Camden, a scholar and teacher whose influence on his development has been gratefully acknowledged by the dramatist in the poem "To William Camden." Being deprived of university education at Oxford or Cambridge because of poverty, Jonson had to settle down as a bricklayer – a job he was singularly unsuited for but he soon enlisted himself as private soldier in the British Expeditionary force in the Dutch Wars against the Spanish. Jonson returned to England in the year 1592 and at the age of twenty he married, though his married life has not too happy.

Around 1595, Jonson joined the theatre as an actor and playwright. In 1597, he joined Philip Henslowe's theatrical company, but when he killed in a duel a fellow actor in 1598 he was sent to prison. After his release from prison, Jonson achieved in significant success as playwright with the play *Every Man in His Humor* (1598), a comedy performed by Shakespeare's company with Shakespeare himself in the cast. The period from 1598 to 1616 is remarkable for his producing his best works and at the end of 1616, a big Folio volume called *The Works of Benjamin Jonson* containing nine plays, four entertainments, eleven masques and two collections of poems was published. Then he took a break as a public playwright during the period from 1616 to 1625 when he served as a Court poet. A group of poets known as 'Sons of Ben' gathered around him. During three years, Ben Jonson wrote court masques, poetry, criticism and history. With the death of King James I and the succession of Charles I, Jonson's position at the Court had declined and he returned to the public stage and wrote four plays for it. These plays, regarded by John Dryden as 'mere dotages', were not successful. From 1625, Jonson's life took a turn for the worse with decline in health, poverty and debt. He died on August 6, 1637.

4.3.2 His Dramatic Career

Jonson could boast of a prolific literary career for thirty-six years in which he wrote a few outstanding plays besides some fine prose and poetry. Before we start discussing his dramatic career, let us make a brief survey of his prose and poetical works. Jonson's prose is relatively unimportant among his numerous works. He wrote notes for English grammar, which are of minor importance. However, his more important prose work is *Timber* or *Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter*. It is also known as *Discoveries*. Published in the posthumous Folio edition of 1640, it is a collection of notes, observations on human behaviour, morality and short essays dealing with various subjects. Jonson was England's first

neoclassical critic and as such, his critical tenets as expressed in this work are of special value. Though primarily a dramatist, Jonson was also a poet of some note. He had exerted considerable influence on the young poets known as "Sons of Ben". His three collections namely *Epigrams* (1616), *The Forest* (1616) and *Underwoods* (1640) contain all his poems. He was also appointed "Poet Laureate". His songs and poems are also to be found in the masques. Grace and melody of verse had never been the strongpoint of Jonson as a poet. However, sometimes, as in "Drink to me, only with thine eyes", he could really be seen as possessing some poetic talent.

Jonson's contribution to English drama is only next to that of Shakespeare. He distinguished himself by writing a series of comedies, which were clearly anti-romantic and satiric in spirit presenting social criticism in realistic manner. His dramas can be divided into tragedies, comedies and masques.

Comedies: Jonson's first comedy was *The Case is Altered*, a half-romantic play that had little to boast of as a drama. However, his real success as a writer of comedies came with *Everyman in His Humour*, a play staged in 1598 and printed in 1601. Both in style and content it is a departure from Shakespearian kind of romantic love comedy and it created a brief vogue for 'humorous' comedy. *Every Man Out of His Humour* (acted in 1598 and printed in 1601) and *Cynthia's Revels* (1600) were two satirical comedies displaying Jonson's classical scholarship. These plays satirised the follies of his contemporaries. The next play *The Poetester* (1601) directed its satire against two of his contemporary playwrights, Marston and Dekker while Ben Jonson portrayed himself in the play as Horace whose *Ars Poetica* (*Art of Poetry*) he translated. Jonson's reputation as a writer of comedies rose further with four comedies: *Volpone* or *The Fox* (1605), *Epicoene* or the *Silent Woman* (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610) and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614). These plays were written between 1605 and 1614 and they all display Jonson's great comic sense and inventive power. The plays are peopled with dupes and deceivers having a field day while the virtuous characters are largely

ineffective. *The Devil is an Ass* (1616) along with the last four plays *The Staple of News* (1625), *The New Inn* (1629), *The Magnetic Lady* (1632), and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633) make a definitive decline in his dramatic power and they can be remembered only for dealing with contemporary manners and fashion of his times.

Tragedies: Jonson wrote two tragedies, *Sejanus* (1603) and *Catiline* (1611). The first performance of *Sejanus* was given by the king's men at the Globe Theatre with Richard Barbage and Shakespeare in the cast. This play deals with the life of Lucius Aelius Sejanus who was a favourite of Roman Emperor Tiberius. Rome was left to the care of Sejanus while the king was spending more time in Capri. Sajanus poisoned the emperor's son Drusus and seduced and hoped to marry Livia, the widow. However, his design did not succeed as the emperor became suspicious of his moves and denounced him to the Senate. Sejanus was killed by the mob. The play, inspired by Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, was clearly a failure as a tragedy. However, the play shows Jonson's classical learning and energy of mind. The other Tragedy *Catiline*, first produced and published in 1611, follows the events of Roman history during the Republic in 63 BC. Catiline, the proctor and governor of Africa, ruined himself by leading a dissolute life but aspired to overthrow the government with the secret encouragement of Caesar. The Senate sentenced Catiline and other conspirators to death. Catiline was killed in battle by Petrius, the general. As a drama, it is inferior to *Sejanus*. Jonson was perhaps following Seneca in it.

Masques and Entertainments: Jonson was emerging as a Court poet and masque-writer of James I and wrote a number of entertainments of which the first was *The Satyr*, or *Althrop Entertainment* (1603). This first masque was *The Masque of Blackness* (1605) followed by a number of other masques the total being twenty-six. Full of folklore, and classical learning, the masques show Jonson's skill as a masque writer not equalled by any of his contemporaries. Jonson also wrote an unfinished pastoral, *The Sad Shepherd*.



LET US KNOW

The English Masque was a popular form of entertainment in the Court of James I (1560) and Charles I. It involved dance, drama and music. Ben Jonson in collaboration with Indigo Jones produced many fine court masques from 1605 to 1630. The origins of masque can be traced to the primitive folk-rural traditions of disguised quest bringing gifts to their wealthy host (king or nobleman).



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: In which play of Ben Jonson was Shakespeare in the cast? Write what you know about the play.

Q 2: What were the two 'Humour' comedies of Jonson? How are they related to each other?

Q 3: What is a masque? What is Jonson's contribution to this genre?

4.4 JONSONIAN COMEDY

In writing comedies, Jonson was clearly at an opposite point of Shakespeare whom he could never rival as a playwright. Jonson belonged to the European tradition of comedy and was closer to Moliere than to Shakespeare. His comedies can broadly be termed as socio-satirical comedies based on the realism of his times. His type of comedy is also called 'Comedy of Humour'. Jonson followed the classical models like Plautus and Terence of the Roman comedy and Aristophanes of the Greek comic drama. The classical comedy followed three unities of time, place and action. The unity of time demands that the action of a play should not extend over more than twenty-four hours while the unity of place requires the action to be confined to one place and that of Action forbids more than one plot or a single story. Following the classical type, Jonsonian comedy also deals with realism depicting the everyday life of the people of his times. Finally, Jonsonian comedy is avowedly moralistic stressing correction and

its satire is directed against human folly. In the famous "Prolouge" to *Every Man in His Humour,* Jonson professed that his aim of writing comedy was to expose follies.

Jonson based his comedies in the theory of "Humours". In the medieval age, the physicians thought that the universe was compounded of four elements- the earth, water, air, and fire. The same elements were supposed to be present in the human body. Earth possessed the qualities such as cold and dry. It was also thought that these two qualities produced black bile in a human body and any one being predominated by black bile will be of melancholic nature. Water was supposed to produce phlegm and any excess of this element in a man would make him phlegmatic, that is sluggish, apathetic and not prone to anger. The hot and moist qualities of air present in excess in blood would make one characterised by a courageous, hopeful and amorous disposition. Fire produced yellow bile or choler and a person possessing an excess of this element would be hot tempered or choleric in nature. Thus, melancholy, phlegm, blood and choler are known as "Four Homours" and any predominance of one or the other would show a person's temperament and behaviour.



LET US KNOW [Adapted from Wikipedia]

Plautus: Titus Maccius Plautus better known as Plautus, was a Roman playwright of the Old Latin period of 254 BC–184 BC. His comedies are perhaps the earliest surviving works in Latin literature. Very often, the word "Plautine" is used to refer to his own works or works similar to or influenced by him.

Terence: Publius Terentius Afer popularly known as Terence, was a playwright of the Roman Republic and his comedies were performed around 170–160 BC. Terence apparently died young, probably in Greece or on his way back to Rome. All of the six plays Terence wrote have survived.

Aristophanes: Aristophanes of 446 BC – 386 BC was a comic playwright of ancient Athens. His plays provide the early examples of a

genre of the comic Old Comedy. Often labelled as *the Father of Comedy* Aristophanes very convincingly recreated the life of ancient Athens. He mainly wrote political satire such as *The Wasps*, *The Birds* and *The Clouds*. Each of these plays and the others that Aristophanes wrote are known for their critical political and societal commentary.

Moliere: His real name was Jean-Baptiste Poquelin. He was a French playwright and actor who is considered one of the greatest masters of comedy in Western literature. Among his best-known works are *Le Misanthrope* (*The Misanthrope*), *L'École des femmes* (*The School for Wives*), *Tartuffe ou L'Imposteur,* (*Tartuffe or the Hypocrite*), *L'Avare* (*The Miser*), *Le Malade imaginaire* (*The Imaginary Invalid*), and *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme* (*The Bourgeois Gentleman*).

In all his comedies, Jonson has shown his major characters as possessing some of the "Humour" elements. In the "Prologue" to *Every Man in His Homour,* he has given his conception of humours in the following lines:

"That whatso'ver hath fixture and humidity.
As wanting power to contain itself.
Is homour. So in every human body
The choler, melancholy, phlegm and blood,
By reason that they follow continually
In some one part, and are not continent
Receive the name of humours."

In the same "Prologue" he gives us the orthodox neoclassical theory, taken from Aristotle, that the function of comedy is to "sport with human follies not with crimes". Whether comedy should concern itself with Jonson's theory is itself a matter of debate among Jonson critics because a play like *Volpone* deals with frauds, perjury, prostitution, conspiracy to murder etc. which do not fall in the class of follies. Two popular concepts of comedy are that a comedy makes us laugh and that it is also a play with a happy ending. Jonson, however, suggested that the end of comedy not always joyful and his plays were unlike Shakespearian comedies famous for a joyful note and a happy ending. No other dramatist has been so criticised for not being Shakespeare as Jonson. John Dryden admired Jonson in his *Essay of*

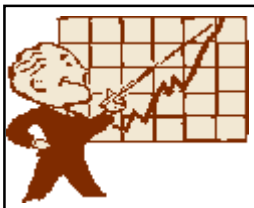
Dramatic Poesy (1668) for the virtues of correctness, judgment, satirical power and technical excellence. Jonson wrote realistic comedies, which held the English stage for a long time. Harry Levin wrote in the *Introduction to Selected Works of Ben Jonson* (1938) that the comedy of humours was "seized upon as a polemic weapon to answer the Puritan attacks on the stage". But, Jonson's merit lies not in the fact that he popularised the ancient Comedy of Humours or that he brought to the English drama the spirit of Plautus and Terence but in the fact that he applied realism to the portrayal of characters by presenting the classes and the follies of contemporary London. Nearly all his comedies are set in contemporary London with the only exception of *Volpone*.



LET US KNOW

a. The first version of *Every Man in His Homour* has its scenes set in Italy. Only in the Folio version of 1616 did he change the names of the characters, giving them English names and the play an English setting to make the action appear more realistic.

b. T.S. Eliot points out that there is a close parallel between Jonson and Marlowe. While the former wrote 'humour comedies', Marlowe's tragedy is a 'tragedy of humours'. In both of them, there is a controlling passion-whether it is love of money, love of power or love of knowledge and it becomes an obsession. Jonson satirises the vices and depicts a post-Renaissance world characterised by greed and individualism in his play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What are the three unities followed by the classical comedy? Did Jonson entirely follow these unities in *Volpone*?

Q 5: What is known as the theory of 'Humour'?

Q 6: What does T. S. Eliot state about Jonson and Marlowe?

4.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF JONSON

[Adapted from http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/pages/3832/Jonson-Ben-c-1572-1637.html]

Jonson's popularity as a writer demonstrates that not everyone shared views the way he did during his time. But, his prominence and his outspoken personality made him the target of many attacks as well as much praise throughout his lifetime. Much of the criticism of Jonson after his death emphasises areas of comparison with Shakespeare. The reputed personal feud between Shakespeare and Jonson seems largely to have been fabricated, but beginning in the 1630s, numerous critics have engaged in battles disputing the relative merits of the famous friends and contemporaries. Jonson has often been considered to be an inferior writer when the two are compared; nevertheless, many writers emphasise his unique contributions to literary history. When the comparison is set aside, the value of Jonson's writings becomes indisputable. John Dryden's extensive criticism provides the most prominent 17th century response to Jonson, but many other writers also debated the merits of Jonson's canon, including Aphra Behn in 1673, who apparently favoured the works of Shakespeare. Thomas Shadwell, in contrast, announced in 1668 that Jonson "is the man, of all the World, I most passionately admire for his Excellency in Drammatick *Poetry* ".Alexander Pope, Samuel Johnson, and Henry Fielding are among those in the 18th century who commented upon Jonson's writing. 19th century writers prepared the way for the criticism that predominated in the early part of the 20th century. A. C. Swinburne and others posed, once again, the contrast between Jonson and Shakespeare. They also devoted significant attention to Jonson's classicism and his theories of poetry and drama. Subsequently, Jonsonian studies were profoundly influenced by T. S. Eliot's essay on the playwright in 1919 and by the publication of the Herford and Simpson edition of Jonson's collected works, which began appearing in 1925. Over the next few decades, critics, including Douglas Bush, Cleanth Brooks, and L. C. Knights, debated topics such as Jonson's social realism, his originality, his classicism, the nature of his dramatic and poetic art, and his didacticism.



4.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read that Jonson was an Elizabethan playwright who wrote comedies, tragedies, masques and a good deal of prose and poetry. He is chiefly known for his comedies branded as 'Humour Comedies'. *Volpone* (1606) was staged at the Globe after being written within a period of five months in 1606. Jonson's intent in this play and the ones that followed was to mock, or satirise, the folly of his audiences so they would be shamed into improving their behaviour. To Jonson's credit goes Comedies, Tragedies, Masques and Entertainments. You have learnt that Jonsonian comedy is avowedly moralistic stressing correction and its satire is directed against human folly.



4.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Shakespeare was in the cast in Jonson's *Sejanus*, a Roman tragedy. Its first performance was given by the King's Men at the Globe Theatre in which Shakespeare had played a role.

Ans to Q 2: The two humour comedies of Jonson were *Every Man in His Humour* (1601) and Every *Man Out of His Homour* (1601). These two plays are dominated by humour elements.

Ans to Q 3: The masque is a kind of drama… …the characters are always in disguise… …masques were performed at the court of Queen Elizabeth… … Jonson mixed folklore and classical imagery in his masques.

Ans to Q 4: The three unities followed by the classical comedy were the unity of time, unity of place and unity of action… …no, Jonson did not entirely follow the three unities in *Volpone*… …he violated the unity of action by introducing the subplot.

Ans to Q 5: Physicians in the medieval period believed that the universe consisted of four elements- the earth, water, air, and fire…. …these

elements were supposed to be present in the human body… … earth possessed the qualities such as cold and dry, water produced phlegm, air present in excess in blood would make one courageous, hopeful and amorous, fire produced yellow bile or choler and a person possessing an excess of this element would be hot tempered or choleric in nature.

Ans to Q 6: T.S. Eliot points out that there is a close parallel between Jonson and Marlowe… …Jonson wrote 'humour comedies', Marlowe's tragedy is a 'tragedy of humours'… … both playwrights had a controlling passion… …Jonson satirises the vices and depicts a post-Renaissance world characterised by greed and individualism in his play.



4.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Ben Jonson is one of Shakespeare's greatest successors. Justify your answer.

Q 2: Comment on the nature of Jonsonian comedy with reference to the play *Volpone*.

Q 3: What is Ben Jonson's contribution to Renaissance drama? Discuss critically.

Q 4: How does Jonson mock at the folly of his audiences so they would be shamed into improving their behaviour? Give a reasoned answer.

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UNIT 5: BEN JONSON: *VOLPONE* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

5.1 Learning Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Sources of the Play *Volpone*

5.4 Act wise Summary of the Play

5.5 Critical Commentary on the Play

5.6 Major Themes

5.7 Major Characters

5.8 Let us Sum up

5.9 Further Reading

5.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

5.11 Possible Questions

5.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss the play *Volpone* in terms of its different aspects
- explain the sources of the play
- make act wise summary of the play
- analyse the play in terms of its theme, dramatic structure, characterisation and style
- provide a critical commentary on the play.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit, which is also the last unit of this Block, is based on Ben Jonson's famous play *Volpone* or *The Fox*. This play is a comedy written by Jonson and is often called his darkest comedy. The emerging capitalism in the Jacobian England of James I could be seen as the playwright's immediate focus, directing a merciless moral scrutiny on the values and customs of contemporary English society. Jonson's choice of the Venetian setting is also not without significance since Renaissance Italy was the

centre of trade in Europe with all the attendant problems of an acquisitive society with moral degradation. After you finish reading this unit, you will note that the subject of *Volpone* is money or greed for money, and the corruption it breeds in man. The unit thus seeks to analyse this great play in terms of its theme, dramatic structure, characterisation and style.

5.3 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *VOLPONE*

[Adapted from Johana Procter edited *The Selected Plays of Ben Jonson: Vol I*]

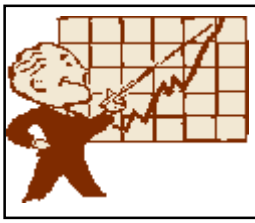
In the play *Volpone*, Ben Jonson fuses a wide range of different materials–classical, humanist, medieval and contemporary—much of which are satirical in origin. The basic motif of legacy hunting is derived from three classical works—Horace's *Satires,* Parts of Petronius's *Satiricon*, and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*. These sources variously set out the lengths to which hopeful heirs go in vice and flattery, and the satisfying comic 'biter-bit' situation when their intended victim outwits them. One hint for the unscrupulous lawyer, and the unnatural husband and father, is to be found in Horace; Lady-would-be is a brilliant creation from the insufferably garrulous wife in Labanius of Antioch's *The Loquacious Woman*. The Fool's Song is derived from Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly* (1511); Mosca is drawn from Juvenal's *Satire* X.

The Predatory world of Legacy hunters in the play, is set pervasively under the influence of the Medieval beast epic—*The History of Reynard the Fox*. Volpone is Reynard's human counterpart, and shares not only his cunning, but some of his adventures—The basic device of the fox playing dead to feed off would-be scavengers, the fox as physician, fable preacher and seducer. Aesop too is recalled in Volpone's reference to the *Tale of the Fox*. The setting of the play too embodies and endorses the popular view of Venice—associated with mercantile importance, great wealth, allure of high sophistication, and subtle dealings and corruption.

Although in "The Epistle", Jonson stresses his adherence to the principles of ancient comedy, it is not a major influence on plot and characterisation. Intrigue and characters defined by professional and social

ranks and age, had long been regular feature of English comedy, and indeed, Mosca the parasite points out how far he outgoes his classical originals. (III, i). A stronger influence of the *Commedia Dell'arte* is clear. Corvino refers to some of the *Commedia* 'masks', in II (iii) when he breaks up the mountebank scene. The brilliant entertainment of Volpone with the constant multiplication of the plays-within-the-play created by Volpone and Mosca, dependent on the predictable responses of the characters, and on skilful improvisation reflects the repertoire and methods of Commedia. Finally, Jonson's twist to the morality structure results, not in the victory of good over evil, but the evil defeating themselves by typically Renaissance acts of overreaching, in the comic expose of greed, deception, and self-deception that Jonson sees at the heart of corruption in the individual society.

The play came to be written immediately after his Roman tragedy *Sejanus*. The grim nature of the comedy in *Volpone* can be attributed to the continued mode of somberness Jonson created in the tragedy. The characters in *Volpone* take their names from birds and animals and the plot is developed out of a beast fable in which the protagonist Volpone (Volpe meaning fox in Italian), and his assistant Mosca (fly in Italian). The play affords interpretation at various levels – as a satire, as a grim comedy that disturbs rather than pleases the audience, and as a classical comedy, which violates the unity of action by introducing a double plot.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What are some of the sources of the play *Volpone*?

5.4 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Act I

Act I of the play revolves round the central character Volpone who is a rich Venetian nobleman, childless and without an heir. He feigns sickness to play tricks with the help of his trusted and capable assistant Mosca on the greedy legacy hunters who present gifts to Volpone in order to inherit

his vast wealth. The three major gulls are Corbaccio, Corvino and Voltore—all birds of prey—who rivals one another in their ambition to be appointed as Volpone's heir. Voltore is a lawyer; Corbaccio is an old miser whose one foot is in the grave and Corvino is a rich merchant with a beautiful wife. Besides these three, there is another legacy hunter Lady Politic Would-be, wife of Sir Politic Would be who is an English knight. As the play opens, Volpone is seen worshipping gold as "the best of things" but he does not use the ordinary means like trade, agriculture, industry, money lending etc. to get rich; he rather uses the clever tricks of extracting rich gifts from the gullible legacy hunters. Each of them, harbours the hope of being Volpone's successor to inherit his wealth. Nano ('dwarf' in Italian), Androgyno (hermaphrodite) and Castrone (eunuch), the natural or deformed fools, entertain Volpone. Nano and Androgyno describe the transmigration of the soul of the Greek philosopher Pythagorus entering the body of Androgyno. Nano and Castrone sing a song in praise of fools. The fools are described when Volpone and Mosca hear a knocking at the door by Voltore (vulture) who bring up Volpone a gold plate. Voltore is followed by Corbaccio, an old man with insatiable greed, bringing a sleeping medicine for Volpone. But Mosca suggests that he should will his property to Volpone by disinheriting his son Bonario. Since Volpone is going to make him his heir, Corbaccio, sure to survive Volpone, would get the money back as well as that of Volpone. The gullible old man loses no time to hurry home to propose the will in favour of Volpone. Corvino, the rich merchant, comes next, whom Mosca tells that he has been made the heir. The visit of Lady Politic Would-be is announced but Volpone has no mood to receive her. Mosca mentions Corvino's beautiful wife Celia whom the jealous husband keeps shut up at home. Volpone's interest for Celia is instantly aroused and he plans to see her even at her window by disguise.

Act II

In Act II Scene I Sir Politic Would-be is introduced. He wants news about England from Peregrine, a fellow Englishman visiting Venice as a tourist. The Sir Politic confesses that he has been living in Venice in compliance with the wishes of his wife. The English knight is shown as

foolish in his insistence on Stone, the fool as a Machiavellian secret agent. As they were engaged in conversation Mosca and Nano came to set up a platform for Volpone, disguised as Mountback 'Scoto of Montana' to deliver a speech apparently to the crowd but actually to attract Corvino's wife Celia's attention appearing at the window. Volpone offers her not only oil but also a powder for maintaining her beauty and keeping herself young forever. Corvino's sudden entry interrupted Volpone's description of the virtues of the power. The jealous merchant beats away Volpone. In scene II, Volpone confesses to Mosca how he has been smitten by the beauty of Celia. In the next scene (III), Celia is severely rebuked by Corvino for having encouraged the Mountback. Mosca comes to Corvino's house to inform him that Volpone's health has improved with Scotto's oil brought by Corbaccio and Voltore and that the doctors attending on Volpone suggested that his best cure lies in the company of a young woman 'lusty and full of juice'. Corvino, to outdo the rivals in providing such as a woman to Volpone, offers his Celia and convinces her to accompany him to Volpone's house in her "best attire and choicest jewels."

Act III

Act III opens with Mosca telling Bonario, Corbaccio's son, about his father's plan to disinherit him as a bastard. He asks him to come to Volpone's house to see for himself. Bonario follows Mosca to Volpone's house where Volpone, waiting anxiously for Mosca's news of Celia, is being entertained by Nano and Androgyno. Lady Politic Would-be comes and inflicts verbal torture on Volpone whom Mosca at last rescues by telling the lady that her husband has been seen "rowing upon the water in a gondola with the most cunning courtesan of Venice". The Lady leaves the scene at once provoking Mosca to comment that "they that use themselves most license are still more jealous". Mosca keeps Bonario in hiding so that he could see his father's transaction. Instead of Corbaccio, Corvino comes with his wife before Mosca sends for him. Celia is shocked to know the intention of her husband to bring her there. When Celia is left alone in Volpone's chamber, Volpone leaps from his bed and after having failed to woo her he ventures to seduce her but Bonario appears from his hiding and rescues Celia and

leads her away. Corbaccio knocks at the door and is told by Mosca that his son Bonario had threatened to kill him and Volpone for the will. Voltore, following Corbaccio, overhears this talk of will but the wily Mosca has no problem in convincing the lawyer that Corbaccio's will is in fact in his own interest as he will inherit both Corbaccio and Volpone's wealth. The gullible lawyer is also convinced about Bonario's plan to frame Volpone in an attempted rape case against Celia and agrees to defend Volpone in the court.

Act IV

This act begins with Lady Politic Would-be confronting her husband and Peregrine taking the latter to be the courtesan in disguise. The Knight at once leaves the scene making Peregrine suspicious of the plan. Mosca, however, clears the Lady's doubt about Peregrine being the street woman, following which the Lady offers her apology to Peregrine in the most ambiguous language-"Pray you, Sir, use me. In faith/the more you see me the more I shall conceive". Peregrine decides to avenge his insult. In the court scene that follows when the three gulls and Mosca appear before the Venetian officers of justice, Voltore defends Volpone against the charges of Bonario and Celia by saying about the adulterous relationship of Celia with Bonario who has been disinherited by his father for the same reason. Corvino calls his wife a whore and Lady Politic Would-be claims to have seen her with her husband. Volpone is carried to the courtroom. He is seen to be too sick to be able to commit rape. The court punished Celia and Bonario by sending them to jail.

On returning home Volpone and Mosca celebrate their success in the court. They now device a new plans to 'vex' the clients. Nano and Castrone are sent to spread the news of Volpone's death. Volpone makes Mosca his heir and stands behind the curtain to see the disappointment of his victims. Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino and Lady Would-be arrive one by one and discover that Mosca has been made the heir. In the meantime, Peregrine, in order to take revenge on Sir Politic, comes to Sir Politic's house in the guise of a merchant to inform Sir Politic about Peregrine being a Venetian agent who has reported that Sir Politic is plotting against the

Duke. As Sir Politic hears a knock he hides in a tortoise shell and some merchants disguised as search officers pull off the shell and Peregrine took off his disguise. Sir Politic and Lady Politic decide to leave Venice. Mosca inheriting Volpone's wealth now decides to become the master of the house. Volpone goes to the street to tease all the legacy hunters.

Act V

In the second court scene, Voltore confesses to the court that his earlier story was false. The judges are convinced that Volpone is dead and Mosca is the true heir. They regard Mosca as truly respectable now and regret sending their messenger to fetch him. The messenger is Volpone in disguise and in the street, on his way to fetch Mosca, he meets Nano, Androgyno and Castrone and sends them to tell Mosca to see him in the court. In the third court scene the judges reject Volpone's plea of impotence while Volpone himself (still in disguise) asks Voltore to tell the court that Mosca is coming. Voltore confesses to the court that Volpone is alive. On Mosca's entering the court, dressed as a Magnifico, the judges show their respect to him and one of them even offers him his daughter for marriage. Despite Volpone's asking Mosca to tell the court that he is alive; Mosca refuses to recognise him and tells the court that he came from his patron's funeral. In whisper to Volpone, he demands half of his wealth and then goes on increasing his demand. On Mosca's complaint, the court orders the 'messenger' (Volpone) to be whipped. Finding him in the most hopeless situation of being whipped and of losing all his wealth, Volpone decides to reveal himself as well as Mosca, to expose all other villains and asks the court to pass sentence. The judge's order different punishment for the offenders: Mosca to be whipped and sent to jail for life; Volpone's wealth to be given to a hospital and he is to spend the rest of his life in prison to become really "sick"; Voltore to be debarred from his profession; Corbaccio's property is to go to his son Bonario and he himself has to go to a monastery and Corvino is to be rowed around Venice wearing ass's ears. Celia would go to her father with her dowry trebled.

5.5 PLOT CONSTRUCTION

Jonson is commonly acknowledged as the master of dramatic structure in English drama. He allows a complex pattern of events to dominate his plays with classical Unities complied with some minor departure here and there. Aristotle prescribed a straightforward progression of events with direct evolution from one to the other; but in Jonson's plays, particularly in *Volpone*, the parts do not automatically grow in a sequence. These are separate scenes with each of the legacy hunters in the first act in *Volpone*, which can be seen only as a succession.

The play begins with the dedication made to the two Famous Universities namely Oxford and Cambridge where the play was staged and applauded. The Dedication throws light on Jonson's own views on the state of poetry and drama in the days. Jonson says that the poetasters of his time had too much license and thereby they have degraded poetry. He maintained that a good poet must be a good man, "A teacher of things divine no less than human, master in manners". His own satire, which was sharp and at times merciless, especially in *Volpone*, was directed not against individuals but at vice in general. According to the Dedication, Jonson's aim was to reform the stage by restoring the virtues of classical drama. The dedication is followed by the *Prologue*, which is spoken by an actor mediating between the author and the audience. Possibly the speaker was Nano, the dwarf. The author wants to mix "profit with pleasure". The play is written according to "the taste of our time" and there is nothing of the "low taste which pleases the mob so much". He presents "a living refined comedy according to the rules laid down by the best critics". The "Prologue" also makes it clear that it is free from "personal rancour" but it is "only a little witty". Besides the Dedication and the "Prologue "there is the **"Argument"** coming before the "Prologue" which briefly states the theme of the play to be developed by the plot and characters. It tells the story of Volpone the principal character who is rich and childless and attracts the people to covet his riches. Each of the candidates hopes to inherit Volpone's wealth but finally the play ends with undoing of both the victimiser and the victims.



LET US KNOW

The argument is in the form of an acrostic. Acrostic is a word arrangement of the first, last or some central letters, (usually the first letters) can be read down words. Acrostics are fashionable in French literature from the from the time of Francis I to Louis XIV, and in the Elizabethan period in English. Here in the play, the first letters of the lines in the argument spell out VOLPONE.

Plot Structure:

Jonson constructed his plot based on the classical theory, which emphasised the following of the unities of Time, Place and Action. *Volpone's* plot is tightly constructed complying with these unities, though there is some criticism about the Unity of Action because of his introduction of the sub-plot involving Sir Politic, Lady Politic and Peregrine. The action occurs in a single day. Thus, the Unity of Time is observed as Aristotle prescribes in his *Poetics*. However, the action is compressed into a single day so that Jonson can give his undoing with his action speed and inevitability. Though Act I moves slowly with the opening scene when Volpone worships gold and the legacy hunters appear in succession in Act II, there is the quickened pace of the play with Volpone changing from a passive invalid into the Mountback. Act III brings the culmination of Volpone's renewed vigour and makes the beginning of his attempted rape of Celia. Act IV shows Volpone and Mosca at the peak of their success. The Act takes place in the late afternoon. But, in the last Act (Act V), the evil is defeated. This also presents one of the main problems of the play—it's ending. In the dedicatory epistle Jonson himself anticipated it and admits that he has not been able to gain a happy ending. The five criminals-Volpone, Mosca, Corbaccio, Voltore and Corvino-have been punished in different ways. John Dryden found this act excellent because in it Jonson gained the proper end of comedy—the punishment of vice. But, the play's structure looks uneasy after the end of the 4^{th} Act. Dryden feels the presence of two actions in the play-the first action coming to an end in the Act IV and the second being forced from it in Act V. Dryden found "the unity of design…not exactly observed in it."



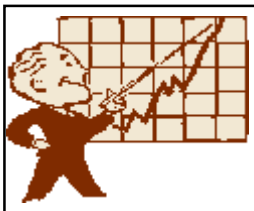
LET US KNOW

T.S. Eliot commented that Jonson's dramatic skill does not lie in writing a good plot but in doing without a plot. The plot in Volpone, he says, should rather be called 'action' than a 'plot.' The action takes place on a single day at Volpone's house. Unities of time and place have been observed in accordance with classical theory but the unity of action is violated with the introduction of the subplot comprising the English knight, his wife and the English traveller Peregrine.

The Subplot:

The sub plot consists of three characters—Sir Politic Would-be, Lady Politic Would-be and Peregrine. Because of its loose connection with the main plot, it is often dismissed as irrelevant and discordant. Like the characters in the main plot, these three characters also have a place in the beast fable with the Politic Would-be couple being seen as chattering parrots and Peregrine as a hawk. Besides the use of the common beast fable that binds the two plots, there is Lady Would-be who has a role in the main plot as one of the legacy hunters. In addition, Jonson wishes to draw a contrast between Italian vices and English folly. Professor Jonas A Barish ("The Double Plot in Volpone") does not find the Sir Politic Would-be sub plot irrelevant and discordant, and states that:

- "Sir Politic Would-be and Lady Politic Would-be function as mimic of the actions of the main characters and thereby the subplot performs the function of burlesque traditional to the comic subplot in English drama."
- "The Politic Would-be couple caricature the actors of the main plot, particularly Sir Politic figures as a comic distortion of Volpone."
- "Lady Would-be is one of the legacy hunters. Her antics caricature the more sinister gestures of Corvino, Voltore and Corbaccio. Her behaviour contrasts sharply with that of Celia.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: Who are the main characters in the subplot? What is the connection of the subplot with the main plot?

Q 3: Why do we sympathise with Volpone rather than the legacy-hunters?

Q 4: How does Jonson present Bonario and Celia?

Q 5: What is the significance of the religious language in *Volpone*'s opening address?

Q 6: Write a note on the 'Dedication' with which the play *Volpone* begins.

5.6 MAJOR THEMES

Volpone is called a 'rouge comedy' or a 'dark comedy' considering the nature of its comic action, which disturbs rather than pleases its audience. T.S. Eliot in his essay on Jonson in 1919 offers the terms 'burlesque' or 'farce' for the play conceding however that neither term will define Jonson in the play. In the harshness of the catastrophe and the criminal nature of the main characters, the play is nearer to *Sejanus* than to any other comedy of the playwright. Coleridge thought that 'there is no goodness of heart in any of the prominent characters' and the play, after Act III, became "a painful weight on the feelings" (Literary Remains, 1836). The major themes of the play have much to do with the implacability of the play. The major themes can be summarised as follows:

Folly and Crime:

In the "Prologue" to the revised version of *Every Man in His Humour,* Jonson rejected larger matters like the "Wars of the Roses" as subjects of his comedies in favour of everyday realities and advocated that while presenting characters the comedy should "sport with human follies, not with crimes". However, in *Volpone,* he deals mainly with crime rather than folly. The central theme of the play is the degeneration of human beings into beasts. Characters are accordingly broadly divided as belonging to two

categories-the knaves and the fools. He uses the beast fable in the manner of Aesop. But, while in the beast fable the animals behave like human beings, Jonson shows in *Volpone* how humans behave like animals. By presenting Lady Would-be in the company of the criminals Jonson shows that the dividing line between crime and folly is rather thin and it takes no time for folly to graduate into crime.

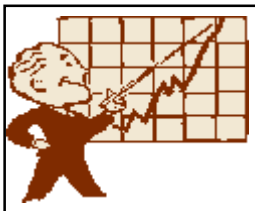
Gold Rush:

Jonson found in the old Roman institution of legacy hunting an easy material for his comedy whose basis is shown to be human greed. He chose Venice as the right place for his setting because it was a city based on trade and moneymaking. L.C. Knight in his stimulating work *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* writes about the rise of capitalism in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period and its relationship with gold. Wishing to dramatise the dangers of greed and individualism Jonson turned to the beast fable in which the fox, growing too old to catch his prey, pretends to be dying and attracts birds. A fly (Mosca) hovers over the body of the fox. Jonson presents the gold centred universe in the first scene, where Volpone worships gold. It represents the degradation of all moral, ethical and human values as ideals of life.

Disease and Transformation:

Disease along with abnormality is another theme. Similarly, transformation is also an important thematic strand in the play. Volpone pretends to be terminally sick. His pretended sickness becomes the metaphor of spiritual and moral decline. Jonson shows three deformed characters in the play-Nano, Castrone and Androgyno. The dwarf, the eunuch and the hermaphrodite are symbols of moral deformity of Volpone and others. The theme of transformation is shown first in the transmigration of the soul of the Greek philosopher Pythagorus that finally entered the body of Androgyno, thereby suggesting the gradual degradation of man. Volpone illustrates the other kind of transformation. He plays a number of roles-from the magnifico to sick man to Mountback doctor to a virile lover to a dying man brought to the court and to the commendator. Finally, he changes himself into the fox. In suggesting a link between his characters

and their animal identities, Jonson has a moral purpose to serve the undoing of the criminals.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: How does *Volpone* express the degradation of human beings into beasts?

Q 8: Why does Jonson present a gold-centred universe in the first scene of the play?

5.7 MAJOR CHARACTERS

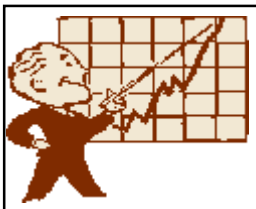
Jonson's method of characterisation is opposite to that of Shakespeare. Where Shakespeare's characters are human beings, objectively drawn 'round' characters, those of Jonson are flat and types. As Shakespeare's characters can come out of the world of the play to our midst, Jonson's are incapable of existing outside the play. Hazlitt says that they are more "like machines, governed by mere routine, or by the convenience of the poet whose property they are." Coleridge is another early critic to call Jonson's characters 'abstractions'. The Jonsonian method was to take some prominent features from the whole man and 'that single feature or humour' is made the basis upon which the entire character is built up.

Jonson's characters in *Volpone* cannot be labelled merely as types or mere "abstractions" (as Coleridge says) but are sharply individualised as the behaviour of Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino and the Lady Would-be would show. The characters fall into two broad categories-knaves and fools. All the major characters in the main plot like Volpone, Mosca, Corbaccio, Voltore and Corvino belong to the group called knaves while Sir Politic and Lady Politic of the subplot are fools. But, in presenting Lady Would-be as crossing over to the knaves group Jonson shows that the line separating them is very thin. However, harsher punishment has been reserved for the criminals at the end of the play while the Would-be couple have been allowed to sneak away from Venice. But, Bonario and Celia also represent the third

category of the virtuous which are, however, too timid and ineffectual to face the menace of avarice and self-aggrandisement of the morally crippled legacy-hunters.

Jonson uses four types of imagery-religious, classical, animal, and love. The images are used to present the values implicit in the culture of an emerging capitalist society. According to Eliot, the verse appears to be in the manner of Marlowe, but Marlowe's inspiration is missing. Coleridge was an early critic to comment on Jonson's "sterling English diction" though "his style is rarely sweet or harmonious." *Volpone* illustrates Jonson's great skill in using a style that can be manipulated as situation demands. The style in the opening scene with Volpone opening his chest and offering prayer to gold. The language is elevated and the style is largely mock epical. E.B. Patridge (in "The Broken Compass") observes four kinds of imagery in the verse in the opening scene. These are religious, classical, animal, and love. He suggests that Jonson uses these images to present values that dominated the culture of his times and in contrast with the past, which is ideal. The religious imagery serves as a powerful irony of Volpone's travesty of religious ideals. The love imagery recalls the great love affairs only to confirm the absence of love in present day Venice.

1. W.B. Yeats saw Jonson's version of the play in 1921. He went on to grasp both the difficulty and greatness of *Volpone* by observing that "this excites us because it makes us share in Jonson's cold implacability."
2. Hazlitt calls *Volpone* Jonson's best play—"prolix and improbable, but intense and powerful." However, he found the whole "worked up mechanically, and our credulity overstretched at last revolts into suspicion, and our attention flags into drowsiness."



Check Your Progress

Q 9: What is the difference between Jonson and Shakespeare in terms of characterisation?



5.8 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have tried to offer an analysis of Jonson's great play *Volpone.* The play centres on the protagonist Volpone, a Venetian aristocrat who amasses wealth through gulling the avaricious legacy-hunters. Jonson uses the Italian beast fable of the fox and the birds. A fox (Volpe in Italian) that is too old to catch his prey pretends to be terminally sick and lures the birds while a fly (Mosca in Italian) hovers over the body. Volpone (derived from Volpe) pretends to be dying and the legacy-hunters—Voltore, Corbaccio, Corvino and Lady Politic Would-be come to his house with rich gifts, each of them expecting to be made his heir. All three have their place in the beast fable with Sir Politic and Lady Politic representing parrots and Peregrine the hawk. The subplot is considered irrelevant and discordant by some critics but others (like James A. Barish) find it thematically integral to the main plot. In order to represent Jonson's society in the fullest possible sense, attempts have been made to make this unit an interesting reading experience. You will find that the capitalistic greed as represented by the legacy hunters in the play strikes at the root of the older system of social unity, which valued human relationships. Jonson has made the most scathing assault on the new ethos resulting from the Renaissance individualism.



5.9 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/pages/3832/Jonson-Ben-c-1572-1637.html



5.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: The idea of legacy hunting is derived from works like Horace's *Satires,* Parts of Petronius's *Satiricon*, and Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*… …the Predatory world of Legacy hunters mark the influence of the Medieval beast epic—*The History of Reynard the Fox*… … influence of the *Commedia Dell'arte*… …most importantly, the Renaissance acts of overreaching, greed, deception, and self-deception.

Ans to Q 2: Sir Politic Would-be, Lady Politic Would-be and Peregrine… …the subplot deals with folly and it is tied to the main plot by Lady Would be… …the dividing line between crime and folly could be very easily graduate into crime.

Ans to Q 3: Our admiration for him is enhanced by his virtuoso performance in the Mountback scene with his great rhetorical skill… …Although, Volpone's tricks are criminal, the dupes are equally foolish and criminal in their greed… …but by attempting rape on the virtuous Celia he overstretched himself and forfeits our sympathy and admiration.

Ans to Q 4: Jonson presents Bonario and Celia as helpless in the face of the corrupt world dominated by the knaves and fools… …they are the two virtuous characters… …they are helpless because they cannot change or adapt to the emerging circumstance… …yet they retain some faith in truth and justice.

Ans to Q 5: By using religious imagery Jonson exposes the perversion of values… …Volpone chants hymns to gold… …reminds the readers

and the audience that in his world of insatiable greed gold replaces the sun as the centre and the source of life.

Ans to Q 6: The dedication is made to the two famous Universities—Oxford and Cambridge… …the Dedication throws light on Jonson's own views on the state of poetry and drama in the days… …in the dedication, Jonson's aim was to reform the stage by restoring the virtues of classical drama… …the dedication is followed by the *Prologue* which is spoken by an actor mediating between the author and the audience.

Ans to Q 7: The central theme of the play is the degeneration of human beings into beasts. Characters are accordingly broadly divided as belonging to two categories-the knaves and the fools. He uses the beast fable in the manner of Aesop. But, while in the beast fable the animals behave like human beings, Jonson shows in *Volpone* how humans behave like animals.

Ans to Q 8: Jonson presents the gold centred universe in the first scene, where gold is worshipped by Volpone. It represents the degradation of all moral, ethical and human values as ideals of life.

Ans to Q 9: Jonson's method of characterisation is opposite to that of Shakespeare. Where Shakespeare's characters are human beings, objectively drawn 'round' characters, those of Jonson are flat and types.



5.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the dramatic significance of the animal names of Volpone, Mosca and the three birds of prey in Jonson's *Volpone.*

Q 2: Do you consider the Politic Would-be subplot is irrelevant and discordant? Discuss.

Q 3: Attempt an analysis of the character of Volpone. In what ways, does the play centre on the character of Volpone?

Q 4: Comment on Dryden's criticism of the structure of the play. Is the fifth act extraneous to the structure of the play?

Q 5: Discuss *Volpone* as a satire on greed.

Q 6: How far does *Volpone* conform to Jonson's theory that comedy should sport with human follies, not with crimes.

Q 7: Describe the different sources Jonson makes use of while writing the play *Volpone.*

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UNIT 6: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: LIFE AND WORKS

UNIT STRUCTURE

6.1 Learning Objectives

6.2 Introduction

6.3 William Shakespeare: Life and Works

6.4 A Quick View at Shakespeare's Tragedies

6.5 Critical Reception of Shakespeare

6.6 Let us Sum up

3.7 Further Reading

3.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

3.9 Possible Questions

6.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- discuss briefly the life and works of Shakespeare
- make a quick survey of the kind of plays and poetry written by the bard
- explain the causes behind Shakespeare's unprecedented popularity as an English playwright
- provide a critical reception of Shakespeare.

6.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of the Block, which is dedicated entirely to Shakespeare, and a few of his plays. There cannot be an iota of doubt that the world is yet to produce a playwright with the kind of overwhelming greatness and influence of Shakespeare. There is perhaps no area of human concern that has not been explored and creatively exploited in his plays. Goethe best describes the influence of Shakespeare on him when he says: "I do not remember that any book or person or event in my life ever made so great an impression upon me as the plays of Shakespeare." In fact, his appeal is so universal that we can safely conclude with Ben Jonson that

"He was not of an age, but for all time!" In what follows, you will be able to learn about the life and works of Shakespeare in detail, which shall further help you to discuss the prescribed plays of Shakespeare in the following units in a more meaningful way.

6.3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: LIFE AND WORKS



Source:
https://commons.wikimedia.org

Although birth and death dates were not recorded in Shakespeare's time, the churches did record baptisms and burials, usually a few days after the actual event. According to the records of Holy Trinity Church, the Parish Church of Stratford, infant William was baptised on April 26, 1564. As it was usually the custom to baptise children on the third day after birth, it is generally accepted that Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564. Moreover, it is also evident from the inscription upon his monument that on April 23, 1616, he had already begun his fifty-third year. While his father, John Shakespeare was a farmer's son from a village close to Stratford called Snitterfield, his mother Mary Arden was the daughter of a prosperous farmer who descended from an old Warwickshire family of mixed Anglo-Saxon and Norman blood. Being the youngest daughter of the family, she inherited much of her father's landowning and farming estate when he died. John was by occupation a dealer in agricultural commodities. He also served the Stratford government in various capacities as a member of the Council, Chamberlain, Alderman and finally high Bailiff, which is the equivalent of town mayor. The family lived in Henley Street, Stratford, with John having earned for himself both fortune and fame. However, around 1577, when William was in his early teens, his father's fortunes began to decrease due to growing debt. Although his fortunes and respect were restored, several years of debt and lawsuits proved terribly distressing for the family. This also explains the reason why William could not proceed for university education of any kind. Not much is known about the education of William Shakespeare except that he attended the free grammar school at Stratford

where he learnt his Latin and Classical Greek. It is also not known as to how long he attended the school. However, the Grammar school proved to be of immense benefit to Shakespeare. For not only did it mark the beginning of his career but, almost everything he seemed to have mastered was learnt by him there. However, he had to leave the Grammar School when he was about fourteen years old to extend financial support to the family. Yet what occupation he pursued exactly for the next couple of years is a matter of conjecture. It is alleged on the basis of evidence available in his plays that he served as a country schoolmaster and a lawyer's clerk.



Chamberlain: An official who used to look after the home and servants of a king, queen or an important family in the past.

His Works:

However, it is generally accepted that Shakespeare arrived in London around 1588 and began to establish himself as an actor and playwright. He emerged successful as a playwright quite early and even aroused the jealousy of as reputed and established a playwright as Robert Greene, who termed him, "...an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers…" in a pamphlet called "A Groat's Worth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance" in 1592. In any case, Shakespeare's career began to flourish and several of his plays were performed by an acting company called PEMBROKE'S MEN for whom perhaps he also acted. Shakespeare also acted for various other acting companies like ADMIRAL'S MEN, DERBY'S MEN', LEICESTER'S MEN, but the company he was most closely associated with was the Chamberlain's Men (known as KING'S MEN after the accession of King James I in 1603).

The years 1594-1599 however turned out to be most productive for him. For not only did he produce a fairly large number of successful plays and some of his best poems, including his *Venus and Adonis* and *Rape of Lucrece* in 1599, he also became part owner of the most prestigious public playhouse in London, the Globe. Subsequently, Chamberlain's Men became the most popular acting company in London, being invited to perform at court far more often than any other group. Shakespeare himself must have done a great deal of acting. Indeed, he became so popular that he had his plays published and sold in octavo editions, or "penny-copies" to the more literate section of his audiences. Perhaps, Shakespeare's last work before

he retired was *The Tempest*, possibly based on the disappearance of an English ship in 1609. It was believed that the shipwreck had killed all on board but strangely enough, all the sailors returned home after a year.

Yet his success and popularity notwithstanding, Shakespeare decided to settle for the comfortable life of a country gentleman and around the year 1611, he left London for his permanent retirement to Stratford, leaving aside his dramatic career. However, he did not live for long, and five years after his retirement to Stratford, he died on his birthday, April 23, 1616. He was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church on April 25, 1616.



1. Ann Hathaway whom Shakespeare married in 1582 was eight years older than her husband.
2. On June 29, 1613 the Globe Theatre was burned down by a canon fire during a performance of *Henry VIII*. It was, however, rebuilt within a year by a carpenter named Peter Rose.

The great body of work constituting Shakespeare's legacy is indeed so vast that it is not likely to be matched by any other writer of any civilization, in the past, present or future. Both his poems and plays continue to inspire and influence generations with a degree of awe and charm that makes him a truly universal figure for all times. As has been stated already, Shakespeare authored 37 plays, 154 sonnets and 2 long poems, "Venus and Adonis" and "The Rape of Lucrece".

Shakespeare's **tragedies**, about **ten** in number, were mostly inspired by his reading of *Lives* by Plutarch, the Greek historian and essayist and *Chronicles* of Raphael Holinshed. Some of these plays, again, were reworking of previous stories based on English or Roman history. Similarly, the Histories, a genre, presumably created by the Bard himself are an attempt to dramatise the lives, the rule and times of English Kings from King John to Henry VIII. His **comedies**, about **seventeen** in number, are often divided into subclasses like 'early comedies', 'middle comedies', 'problem plays', 'dark comedies', 'romances', etc. reflecting – the playwright's development with the passage of time. While the early comedies at times betray his inexperience, his later comedies, accompanied by serious intent, show a mastery unequalled by any of his contemporaries.

Coming to his one hundred and fifty four sonnets, it is seen that the first 126 sonnets are addressed to a young man, and the rest to a dark lady. Of course, the identity of "Mr W.H", the young man to whom the sonnets are dedicated is also debatable. For, if "W.H.", for most scholars, stands for the initials of William Herbert, the third earl of Pembroke, there are others

who would have us believe that the letters could be a reversal of Henry Wrothesly's initials. However, whatever be the private motivation that had gone into the making of the sonnets, there can be no doubt that the sonnets give us the impression of being the product of a mind with extraordinary poetic sensibility and calibre.

Now let us have a discussion on Shakespeare's works in more detail. As the stage was well set, William Shakespeare made grand entry, perhaps for the best ever. He raised the English drama to a height of envy and grandeur. Having penned down thirty-seven (37) plays spanning over a period of some twenty-four years of his writing career, Shakespeare proved his acumen as a dramatist par excellence, and became an institution himself. Any serious consideration into his writing would bring out the fact that he started his career with history plays trumpeting the glory of the nation and unconditional praise for the dynasty. As his plays were intended for performance, and not for publication, he always sought to cater to the taste of people. Taking a close look at the growing nationalist sentiment that owed much to the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 or exploration of new geographical locations along English ethos and cultural ambience under the stewardship of Richard Hakluyt, Sir Francis Drake or Sir Walter Raleigh, he framed his ideas conforming to this and wrote plays accordingly. However, writing down the history plays, he was more concerned with examining the historical personalities with their virtues and vices. His hidden agenda was to bring those personalities within the reach of common people. The strategy made the characters more lively and vibrant. Of course, the Renaissance ideal of concentrating on the life of an individual had its role in this regard too. The idea in his history plays is not that of hero-worship, rather of humanising and examining a hero or monarch.

In course of time, Shakespeare broadened his horizon, and serious consideration into human life oriented his writing mechanism. As opposed to the early plays in connection with their being light and fanciful, most of the plays produced in this phase are more insightful and powerful. The strength he showed in characterisation and treatment of subject matter opened up a new chapter in the English drama. All the plays including *Richard*

III, King John, The Merchant of Venice, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, to mention a few, document Shakespeare as a mature artist whose light-heartedness as noticed in his early dramatic pursuits dried out and made room for the more serious and realistic formulations. With this, he gave vent to personal sorrow and philosophical contemplation in the plays. As he experienced the worst, with his son and father dying, and friend deserting, his pen sketched the most vibrant plays that were highly accepted by the public. The period seemed to be a real beauty since everything was viewed through the lens of a shrewd eye that strove to find out the mystery of evil and sorrow affecting human life.

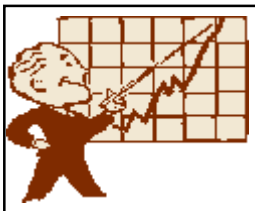
Given tragic dimension as an inseparable part of life, his plays, mostly tragedies, seek to unfold the root cause as it impinges untold suffering on human beings. Keeping this in view, his *Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra,* among others, are incredible editions to his creative genius. However, despite the darker side to these plays, there is something positive, bright, not completely missing. Of course, the overdose of tragic elements affects the good and noble, often in infinite measure. However, the ultimatum is not of the evil and bad. Another significant proposition in Shakespeare's endeavour at unveiling the mystery of evil and bad is that the king, traditionally accorded the closest position to God, could be an embodiment of evil as well. The proposition seems dangerous since it raises possibility of removing and replacing the king or the ruler and taking hold of the position by other agency. This is a recurring theme in most of his plays such as *Richard III, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth,* and *Coriolanus.* Moreover, love, ambition, power, death, authority are some of the abstracts that have great role to play in bringing out the evil and bad affecting all concerned.

Giving a vent to the personal experience that Shakespeare had, especially at a time conditioned largely by Senecan influence, he appeared at his level best in this distinctive form. Under Seneca's wide-ranging impact, he seemed to have found out a new dimension to the tragic downfall of people and orchestrated his writing in consonant with such an approach. Of course, Thomas Kyd's faithful adherence to the Senecan heritage equally

fabricated Shakespeare's concept of tragedy with no less vigour and enthusiasm. In addition, Aristotle's *Poetics*, heavily drawn upon theorising the drama, most strikingly tragedy, was equally elemental to the formation of Shakespeare's powerful concept of tragedy. Although he did not follow Aristotle wholeheartedly as he frequently diverted from the Classical Unities of Time, Place and Action in his plays, most of the basic observations by the Greek genius found an easy access to his writing skill.

As a faithful heir to the revenge tradition of Seneca, Shakespeare's early tragedies including *Titus Andronicus, Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar,* and *Hamlet* are accomplished works in this direction. What Shakespeare concentrated upon was the tragic downfall of protagonists, a development that unfailingly owed to terrible weakness or error of judgment on the part of the sufferers. Its effect is so strong that the sufferers can do nothing substantial, but to endure and face the consequences. In the eye of Shakespeare, individuals are primarily responsible for their downfall. They are the real architects of the seemingly all powerful 'Destiny'. The Renaissance ideal of an individual being the central factor of everything seemed to have come out handy for Shakespeare in analysing the cause and effect of suffering or tragic overtones in one's life. Although the good and evil carry out their presence in his plays, particularly in tragedies, it is the evil that has been worthily punished. The evil cannot go scot free, but the good and noble also get punishment in the process. At the site of the good being punished or receiving pain at the hands of the evil, readers are moved. Indeed, destruction of the good seems to be a design framed by the dramatist perhaps with a view to inculcating the touch of tragedy in the creations.

Thus, you have seen that was Shakespeare the English poet, playwright and actor is regarded as one of the greatest writers in the English language and the world's pre-eminent dramatist. He is also known as England's National Poet and the "Bard of Avon." His plays have been translated into every major existing language and are performed more often than those of any other playwrights.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What did Robert Greene call Shakespeare?

Q2: Name the important sources utilised by Shakespeare for his tragedies?

Q 3: How do Shakespeare's history plays connect with Renaissance Individualism?

Q 4: How come Shakespeare could have a powerful concept of tragedy?

6.4 A QUICK VIEW AT SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES

In this section, we shall have a look at the three tragedies other than *King Lear*.

You should note that all his tragedies such as *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear,* and *Macbeth* seem to be experimental in nature since Shakespeare took up pains at analysing the tragic dimension in life from various standpoints. For instance, his major work, *Hamlet* (1600-01), belonged as it is to revenge tradition, draws upon the principle that one's procrastination or frequent postponement of action leads to complicacy, often tragic downfall as well. If someone does not have the urge to do something, there is no question of experiencing the ebb and flow in life. However, it does not hold good to a person who wants to do something substantial, and fails to accomplish the design in due course of time. Hamlet's prime objective of taking revenge upon his uncle, Claudius gets delayed with the former searching for sound opportunity that is appropriate to the action. As the intensity of avenging the guilt of his uncle is delayed, he turns out more restless and fails to continue life as usual. The misdeeds of Claudius, viz. murdering Hamlet's father and marrying his mother, weigh so high on his psyche that he loses the sanity of mind and goes almost mad. Of course, his madness is feigned to some extent since it is in this guise that he would like to hide his real intention from others, especially Claudius. However, Claudius is not utterly convinced by Hamlet's affectation, and he finds him as a real threat and uses Laertes to kill him. Here Claudius' stance could be

viewed as a typical Renaissance ideal that remains ever ready to do anything to overpower any possible threat. As the society is replete with cruelty, hypocrisy, betrayal, and other inhuman qualities, Hamlet's idealised world is shattered, and he finds it hard to take anybody into confidence. Even Horatio, his most trusted friend fails to uphold friendliness with him. This relates to the breakdown of ethos in the set up Hamlet is placed upon. However, all this could be overcome if someone does have the strength of mind and character, and takes up prompt action when required. This is something quite missing from Hamlet, who is more considerate towards perception, rather than action. For this, he faces the punishment, though successful in taking revenge upon Claudius. The evil is punished, but the good is not left unhurt. Another important thing to be noticed in the play is that a person of action is the need of time, and that is what Shakespeare has done with Fortinbras, Prince of Norway, making the King of Denmark.

With the success scaling through *Hamlet*, Shakespeare proceeded towards *Othello* (1603-04) as a sequence to the revenge tradition. If Hamlet's tragedy occurs primarily because of his speculative and procrastinating mind set, that of Othello and Desdemona is materialised by a sexual trickery hatched by Iago. Here Othello's weakness is that he fails utterly to comprehend Iago's villainy, and acts under the pall of jealousy and brutality. As he is a Moor, he justifies his position by appearing as an inexperienced and self-distrustful person. Although Iago appears as a true 'Machiavellian' villain, a development gaining momentum in the Renaissance, he cuts himself as resolute and firm character, a person of action. The illicit love relationship between Desdemona and Cassio, falsely implicated as it has been, showcases Iago's powerful, indeed successful, manipulation of situation to his use and interest. However, all this might not have yielded the result as such, provided Othello had acted sense and logic. He is more at the emotional level, and acts accordingly. It is true that his emotional act unfailingly costs much damage in the play, but it also points out the intensity of love he possesses for Desdemona. Here she turns out a victim since she hardly knows the complicacy of action, but ironically gets punishment in the war between Iago and Othello. Her innocence is rewarded with a

punishment, and that is so because of two male characters. Hence, a question mark could be raised about the treatment meted out to a woman in the vortex of an Iago-dominated condition. However, this could not be taken as an ultimate and well-acceptable dimension considering Iago's rage and his single-minded work plan to destroy Othello at any cost. It does not matter whether there is Desdemona or any other person in that position. His sole motif is to bring an end to Othello, and there is no second thought to this.

With *Macbeth* (1606), Shakespeare achieved the milestone he intended in the field of tragedy. It was none other than T.S. Eliot, who viewed the play as the highest feat of artistic excellence. Both form and content have been so dexterously accomplished that the play could be a real eye-opener for any writer aspiring for the best ever. Although Eliot did have a hidden agenda in his criticism, viz. to justify his theory of "Objective Correlative", Shakespeare's mastery in the play may not be ruled out. Here the dramatist deals with the greed of power, and how it leads to destruction and loss of peace in life. As in *Hamlet,* Shakespeare's *Macbeth* also introduces supernatural elements acting inseparably in the life of people. Perhaps Shakespeare was considerate towards the interest of King James I in witchcraft and of the people. Whatever it may be, the witches and the prophecy they make do have a far-reaching impact on the course of action that Macbeth pursues. Having learnt that Macbeth would be the king, Lady Macbeth becomes more ambitious and persuades him to accomplish the mission at any cost. It is true that King Duncan's murder has paved the way for Macbeth, but the act equally brings into effect the loss of refreshment and renewal in life. The sense of guilt is so strong that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth could hardly make themselves free of. As such the utterance—"What, will these hands ne'er be clean"- by Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene displays the mental agony and prick of conscience they are passing through. The most striking feature in the play is that readers hardly keep the villainy of Macbeth and her ambitious wife; rather they maintain a sympathetic attitude towards them. Their agony and loss of sanity of the mind act as an emotional bond with the readers. Perhaps their repentance gives rise to

forgiveness for others and it defies the tag of the malcontent. Besides, Macbeth's misdeeds are the result of his ignorance and an unexamined ambition. If Othello's tragic downfall owes to his innocence Macbeth has to do with his ignorance.

6.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SHAKESPEARE

[adapted from Wikipedia]

During his lifetime, Shakespeare was rated as one among many talented playwrights and poets. However, since the late 17th century, was considered the supreme playwright and poet of the English language. Till date, no other dramatist has been performed so often on the world stage as Shakespeare. Besides, the plays have often been being adapted in performance. So great was his influence that during the 18th and 19th centuries, to be a star on the British stage was synonymous with being a great Shakespearean actor. Then, the emphasis was placed on the soliloquies as declamatory turns at the expense of pace and action, and Shakespeare's plays seemed in peril of disappearing beneath the added music, scenery, and special effects produced by thunder, lightning, and wave machines. Editors and critics of the plays, disdaining the showiness and melodrama of Shakespearean stage representation, began to focus on Shakespeare as a dramatic poet, to be studied on the printed page rather than in the theatre.

The rift between Shakespeare on the stage and Shakespeare on the page was at its widest in the early 19th century, at a time when both forms of Shakespeare were hitting peaks of fame and popularity. Theatrical Shakespeare was successful due to spectacle and melodrama for the masses, while book or closet drama Shakespeare was being elevated by the reverential commentary of the Romantics into unique poetic genius, prophet, and bard. Before the Romantics, Shakespeare was simply the most admired of all dramatic poets, especially for his insight into human nature and his realism, but Romantic critics such as Coleridge made him an object of almost religious adoration, Bernard Shaw later coining the term "bardolatry" to describe it. These critics regarded Shakespeare as

towering above other writers, and regarding his plays not as “merely great works of art” but as “phenomena of nature, like the sun and the sea, the stars and the flowers” and “with entire submission of our own faculties” as mentioned by Thomas De Quincy. To the later 19th century, Shakespeare became in addition an emblem of national pride, the crown jewel of English culture.



6.6 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that the world is yet to produce a playwright with the kind of overwhelming greatness and influence of Shakespeare, which is mainly because there is perhaps no area of human concern that has not been explored and creatively exploited in his plays. Shakespeare authored thirty-seven plays, one hundred and fifty four sonnets and two long poems, “Venus and Adonis” and “The Rape of Lucrece”. Shakespeare’s tragedies were mostly inspired by his reading of *Lives* by Plutarch, and *Chronicles* of Raphael Holinshed. Some of these plays, again, were reworking of previous stories based on English or Roman history. Similarly, his History Plays dramatise the lives, the rule and times of English Kings from King John to Henry VIII. His comedies reflect the playwright’s development with the passage of time. It is expected that your knowledge about the life and works as well as the critical reception of Shakespeare shall help you to read the following units more engagingly.



6.7 FURTHER READING

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Web Resources:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shakespeare%27s_reputation



6.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Robert Greene in a pamphlet called "A Groat's Worth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance" termed Shakespeare as "...an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers…"

Ans to Q 2: Shakespeare's tragedies, were mostly inspired by his reading of *Lives* by Plutarch, the Greek historian and essayist, and *Chronicles* of Raphael Holinshed… …some of these plays, again, were reworking of previous stories based on English or Roman history.

Ans to Q 3: His history plays examines the historical personalities with their virtues and vices… … the hidden agenda was to bring those personalities within the reach of common people… …the Renaissance ideal of concentrating on the life of an individual had its role in this regard too… …the idea was not to hero-worship, but rather to humanise and examine the hero or monarch.

Ans to Q 4: his personal experience was conditioned largely by Senecan influence… …he seemed to have found out a new dimension to the tragic downfall of people… …Thomas Kyd's adherence to the Senecan heritage further fabricated Shakespeare's concept of tragedy… …influence of Aristotle's *Poetics.*



6.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a comprehensive note on the development of drama and the shift the distinctive genre experienced in the preceding decades of the University Wits.

Q 2: How did the University Wits provide the platform for William Shakespeare? Assess the contribution by the University Wits.

Q 3: Do you consider William Shakespeare as one of the greatest dramatists in English literature? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 4: How did William Shakespeare come into terms with the blessings of the Renaissance? Write a note in the light of his four greatest tragedies he wrote in the last phase of his literary career.

Q 5: Write a note on Shakespeare's dramatic achievements with special references to the four of his greatest tragedies. What were the influences he made maximum use of in his pursuit of writing tragedy?

Q 6: While unveiling the mystery of evil and bad, Shakespeare implies that even the king, traditionally accorded the closest position to God, could be an embodiment of evil as well. Discuss.

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UNIT 7: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *KING LEAR* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

7.1 Objectives

7.2 Introduction

7.3 Sources of the Play King Lear

7.4 Act-wise Summary of the Play

7.5 Critical Reception of Shakespeare's *King Lear*

7.6 Let us Sum up

7.7 Further Reading

7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

7.9 Possible Questions

7.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to-

- have information about the sources of *King Lear*
- make a summary of the play *King Lear*
- write about the critical reception of the play
- appreciate *King Lear* as one of the greatest tragedies of Shakespeare

7.2 INTRODUCTION

Any discussion on *King Lear* remains incomplete unless consideration is accorded to the dramatic genius of William Shakespeare, who gave a new orientation to the practice of drama in the Elizabethan period. Although studying a text warrants the least consideration into its author's life and achievement, what is intended is to look at the different stages in his dramatic career that help us understand the context affecting his writing. As there is no denying the fact that *King Lear* is one of the four greatest tragedies, the other three being *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Macbeth,* written in the last phase of his illustrious career, Shakespeare also used his pen at comedy, tragicomedy and sonnet writing with an élan that was simply unprecedented. His genius apart, the stage was all conducive to an

artist directed towards excellence and novelty of expression. Of course, it is worth mentioning that the said stage did not come overnight, rather it equally owed to the alluvia left out by the dramatic performance in the medieval period and incredible works by the *University Wits*. In this unit, you will get an opportunity to read about the play in general as well as its sources.

7.3 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *KING LEAR*

William Shakespeare's *King Lear* takes recourse to a number of sources. This substantiates the view that he never lost originality of perception and novelty of exposition in his dramatic pursuits. Indeed, bearing an open eye on different sources and materials points out to his insightful approach that hardly allowed things go scot-free without considering their value judgment.

Of the available sources making their way to *King Lear*, the foremost was an old chronicle play by the name of *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*, published in 1605. Although the play was of unknown authorship, it seemed to have lasting impression upon the public, and that was what Shakespeare wanted to give vent to, in fact with modifications. It is true that he deviated from the source at certain points, but remained a meticulous follower throughout. Going by the chronicle play, he introduced Leir, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella as Lear, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. With these major characters, he introduced the main plot. As both the plays open, we see King Leir and King Lear dividing the kingdom, indeed in different context. King Leir divided with a view to getting deserving suitors for his unmarried daughters. But, King Lear divides among daughters, already married, so that he could continue the rest of his life without under much compulsion. What strikes the most is the same attitude maintained by Cordella and Cordelia, viz. utter reluctance at flattery, which the rest of the daughters adopt as a powerful weapon to earn the maximum of their father's estate. Although King Leir does not banish Cordella, she is deprived of her due part. However, Shakespeare's King Lear banishes Cordelia and the banishment leaves Goneril and Regan at a free run to execute their evil plans. In contrast to Lear's madness and his tragic downfall leading to his

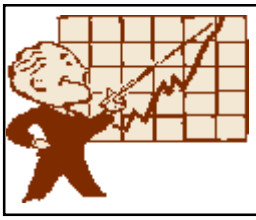
death and daughter Cordelia, King Leir is restored to the throne by the Gallian King and he lives happily for the rest of life. There is no question of Cordella's death, be it in the form of murder or suicide. As Perillus has been there to accompany King Leir, Shakespeare has Kent devoted whole-heartedly to King Lear even after his banishment from the kingdom.

The digressions Shakespeare makes in *King Lear* are the real markers to the novelty of approach as made to the source. Complete parallelism and affinity between the source and the play by Shakespeare would have raised big question mark on the playwright's power and originality for which he is well known worldwide. Moreover, another significant addition by Shakespeare is the introduction of the sub-plot comprising Gloucester and his legitimate son, Edgar, and illegitimate Edmund. Given the dexterous amalgamation between the main plot and the sub-plot, and their reciprocal position, Shakespeare seems to have gone a step farther than the source he has made use of.

Another important source of *King Lear* is, undoubtedly, Holinshed's *Chronicles* (1577) that has been largely used in Shakespeare's other works such as *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline.* Like Holinshed's account, the opening scene in *King Lear* remains the same with the father dividing the kingdom. However, the division carries difference since Leir divides the kingdom into two distinct parts with one half being given to the two elder daughters and the other half reserving for himself. The youngest Cordeilla receives nothing. Coming close to this, Shakespeare prepares King Lear dividing the kingdom into three parts with a view to giving them to each of the three daughters. Consequently, he gives them all to Goneril and Regan because of disinterested attitude of Cordelia, keeping 'nothing' for Lear himself. As Leir, going by Holinshed's account, restores a part of the kingdom for himself, both his daughters, Gonorilla and Ragan wage war and deprive him of the individual part. Being deprived, Leir takes refuge with Cordeilla in France and succeeds in defeating the elder daughters with the help of the French army. Restored as he has been, Leir reigns for two years, this does not stand with conformity to *King Lear* in which Lear goes mad and dies on the bosom of Cordelia. Besides, in contrast to Cordelia being hanged following

the order of Goneril and Edmund, Holinshed's account shows Cordeilla succeeding father to the throne that has come to a fatal end with the two nephews revolting against and taking her as prisoner, and she breathes her last in the prison.

Apart from all this, Shakespeare's *King Lear* also draws upon Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* especially in the depiction of the Fool and Cordelia's death. Despite Spenser's account of Cordelia's death, a case of suicide, appearing as a contrast to that of Shakespeare, what establishes a fine rapport between the two is the instance of death as an ultimatum. Since Cordelia's death occurs out of the stage, the element of doubt is not missing altogether. As such, in spite of the information that she has been hanged, nobody could be sure hundred percent in this regard. And the last, but not least, the sub-plot in *King Lear*, though a decent and effective creation by Shakespeare, seems to have taken clue from Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, albeit with some modifications.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Trace some of the important sources of the play *King Lear*?

7.4 ACT-WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

William Shakespeare's *King Lear* consists of five Acts, with each Act having a number of Scenes. All the Acts are closely knit facilitating the five major stages in plot construction customarily followed in the Elizabethan age. As followed in the period, the exposition or introduction, the complication or rising action, the climax or turning point, the resolution or falling action, and the catastrophe have been well accomplished in the five Acts included in the play.

Act I

Scene i.

The first scene is very significant since it is inseparably related to the rising action, and the ground is well set for further action. With exception

to Edgar and the Fool, all the major characters are introduced, and the main and sub-plots with their possible interaction have been hinted. However, the most important episode comes up when Lear decides to divide the kingdom among three daughters by the name of Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia, provided how much they could show love for father in words. As Goneril and Regan speak in the superlative, Cordelia simply declines saying that she loves father as the bond permits, neither too much nor too less. "Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave/My heart into my mouth: I love your Majesty/According to my bond- no more nor less." At this, Lear gets enraged and disinherits her from the part that is due to her. Like Cordelia, Lear's faithful ally, the Earl of Kent is also banished when he tries to remind the king of the lack of far-sightedness in the decision.

Scene ii.

Here the sub-plot centering the Earl of Gloucester and his legitimate Edgar, and illegitimate Edmund, begins with Edmund's long soliloquy. He appears a determined fellow who would like to follow his villainy by persuading Gloucester with a forged letter. Going by the letter, he informs Gloucester of the conspiracy hatched by Edgar to kill him and take hold of the property. The scene also introduces Edgar in person, but in a different mood. His open-mindedness simply defies the image as presented to Gloucester by Edmund, and it, on the contrary, proves the villainous nature of Edmund quite convincingly.

Scene iii.

Lear's eldest daughter, Goneril expresses her ease at enjoying authority, and her conversation with Oswald, her steward, reveals the attitude towards Lear. She is so blind having got an authoritarian position that the bond between father and daughter is completely shattered. She does not mind ordering Oswald to behave cold with Lear. Even the knights attending him are expected by Goneril to go against his interest.

Scene iv.

Being faithful, Kent re-appears in disguise and intends to serve Lear for the rest of his life. As Kent has been in faith and service for Lear, Goneril's steward Oswald presents himself as a contrasting personality, largely

because of Goneril's instigation. As such, Oswald behaves cold with Lear. The scene bears special significance with the entry of the Fool, who acts the chorus or stands for the conscience of Lear throughout the play. Although the Fool is designed for entertaining the public, most often he speaks sense. He is straightforward, and no element of fear distracts him from speaking the needful. Goneril and her husband Albany also appear at the scene showing their distinctive, but different mindset. As Goneril's evil nature is quite distinct, Albany acts the opposite. His disregard at partiality is something that gives much weightage to his personality. He is very candid, saying, "I cannot be so partial, Goneril."

Scene v.

The scene is based on the conversation between Lear and the Fool. Here the Fool foretells the way Lear would be treated by Regan. Like Goneril, Lear's second daughter, Regan would appear cold, and that is what the Fool apprehends at the earliest. The Fool wants Lear well-prepared to confront with the mischievous nature of Regan. However, Lear also repents at the treatment meted out to Cordelia saying, "I did her wrong-."

Act II

Scene i.

A court in the Earl of Gloucester's castle is seen with Edmund and a courtier having a conversation. The courtier is informative since he tells Edmund about the impending battle between the Dukes of Cornwall and Albany. The statement establishes the growing differences between Cornwall and Albany, which are known to most people. However, the most striking feature in the scene is the development of the sub-plot since Edmund succeeds persuading Gloucester against his legitimate son, Edgar. Although categorised as sub-plot, it has its union with the main plot, which has come into reality because of Edmund with all out support from Cornwall, Goneril, and Regan.

Scene ii.

Here Kent's straightforward and courageous nature becomes clear. As Oswald's villainy, owing to Goneril's instigation, is well known, Kent hardly bears with this and he does not mind using foul words to him. Kent is so

enraged that he draws the sword to punish him, but with a little success. The sudden arrival of Edmund and later on of Cornwall, Regan and Gloucester is a kind of rescue for Oswald. Considering Kent's defensive and uncompromising attitude, Cornwall and Regan give order to keep him in stocks. As Gloucester feels sorry for that, Kent tells him that he has learnt the magnitude of misery from Cordelia. He says, "But misery: I know 'tis from Cordelia."

Scene iii.

Edgar makes it public that conspiracy has been hatched to turn him a criminal and an outlaw. He finds himself fortunate since constant vigilance of the guards fails to trace him. As he flees the unjust guards, he takes the resolve to take up the baser form of life. "I will preserve myself; and am bethought/ To take the basest and most poorest shape/ That ever penury, in contempt of man/Brought near to beast;" With this, he would be regarded as a Bedlam beggar with roaring voice. An assumed madness is something that he intends to carry out for the rest of his life.

Scene iv.

Being loyal to Lear throughout his life, Kent informs him of the treatment he gets from Goneril and the servants at the time of delivering the letter. Goneril's indifference is quite worrying for Kent since he hardly bears the sight of humiliation inflicted upon his respected master. At this, the Fool speaks logic reiterating the fact that parents, when economically sound, are the dearest ones for children. However, economic impairment makes them unworthy of love and affection for children. "Fathers that wear rags/ Do make their children blind/ But fathers that bear bags/ Shall see their children kind." The most significant phase gets under way when Lear confronts with Regan, who is no less venomous than Goneril. When Lear informs her of Goneril's rudeness, she defends her sister and asks Lear to entreat her forgiveness. "Therefore I pray you/ That to our sister you do make return/ Say you have wrong'd her." Lear gets angry because he would not like to reduce his image by asking for mercy, hence he appears defiant. A considerable part of the scene draws upon the question of authority, which both Lear and his two daughters, Goneril and Regan are intended to

possess. Interestingly, no one of them likes to give up the claim, and being humiliated, Lear declares, indeed repeatedly, that he will go mad.

Act III

Scene i.

Started in the preceding chapter, the storm still continues with Kent and a gentleman discussing the whereabouts of Lear. The gentleman is informative, and he lets Kent know that Lear is also in the storm accompanied by the Fool. Indeed, Lear wants the storm to blow away all the "fretful" elements from earth since he has been irreparably fed up by the inhuman manners of the daughters. The storm symbolises the turbulent mental condition of Lear. Kent takes the gentlemen into confidence and tells him the possible invasion by France, to which Cordelia is now a queen.

Scene ii.

As the storm continues, Lear and the Fool are seen in another part of the heath. Enraged as he is, Lear is found in support of the inclement weather. "Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!/ You cataracts and hurricanes, spout/ Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!" The Fool cracks irony and reminds Lears's helplessness that has largely to do with his over-dependence upon the daughters. Of course, realization comes up with Lear saying, "…here I stand…/ A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man." But he takes the resolve to be patient, and wants to remain a model of endurance. When Kent arrives, Lear becomes more vocal and talks about crime, loss of justice and his utter victimization. "I am a man/ More sinn'd against than sinning."

Scene iii.

Disappointed at the unnatural condition in the kingdom of Britain, Gloucester intends to come of help for Lear. It is in conversation with Edmund that Gloucester expresses his intention. The growing rift between the Duke of Albany and the Duke of Cornwall is also a matter of deep worry since taking this opportunity the country might face challenge from a foreign nation. Giving a clue that the gross injustice meted out to Lear would be avenged in due course, Gloucester seems to have given a warning to those associated with doing misdeeds to Lear. Gloucester's intention of coming to the help of

Lear reduces the gap between the main plot and the sub-plot, and helps each other moving the action of the play. Having learnt Gloucester's interest, Edmund decides to inform the Duke of Cornwall, and also of the letter so that he could earn maximum benefit from his father's estate.

Scene iv.

With his sense of servitude towards Lear, Kent persists him in taking shelter in a safer place so that the ravaging storm cannot do harm. At this, Lear says that his inner turmoil is passing through such a stage in which inclement weather condition or any other natural disaster can hardly have its impact upon him. Indeed, the thought over Goneril and Regan's ill-treatment is eating him like venomous insect. Despite his repeating remarks, traumatic as they are, that he would shun the episode, in reality there is no respite from this. "… let me shun that/ No more of that." The scene turns out more interesting when Edgar enters in guise of a Bedlam beggar affected by madness. Edgar's feigned madness gives an added vent to Lear's real madness. To offer help to Lear, Gloucester also arrives at the place. It is through Gloucester's utterance that Edgar, calling himself Tom, gets to know the game played out by Edmund. That Edgar has been victimised, and made an enemy to his beloved father is something that really hurts him.

Scene v.

The scene, short as it is, draws upon the conversation between Cornwall and Edmund with the latter being declared the Earl of Gloucester. Hence, Edmund's intrigue becomes successful because Cornwall believes that Gloucester has been a faithful ally of France. Cornwall becomes angry and asks Edmund to find out his father for immediate arrest. Edmund also wins to gather much accolade from Cornwall, who assures that all out support would be accorded to him. Cornwall says, "I will lay trust upon thee; and thou shalt find a/ dearer father in my love."

Scene vi.

Lear's mental disorder continues and he holds a mock trial on Goneril and Regan, who have done wrong to him. With the help of Kent, Edgar and the Fool, the trial is sought to inflict punishment on daughters. Lear's vengeance gets a symbolic satisfaction out of the trial. Edgar too is

haunted by invisible fear saying that his enemy always follows him. Of course, he sympathises with Lear, and this is what gives weightage to his personality. Lear's wrath goes to an extent that he wants to dissect the body of Regan and see what foul elements have given such a nasty form and a mind. He says, "Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds/ about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that/ make these hard hearts?" Then Gloucester informs Kent of the danger awaiting Lear. A plot has been hatched to kill him, and that is what Gloucester has overheard. To save Lear, he entreats Kent to go to Dover. With the help of the Fool, Kent manages to escape the possible danger in the life of Lear. When all of them depart, Edgar realises the grief and pain Lear is passing through. As Lear's grief is the result of his daughters' indifference, his is a case because of father misguided by Edmund, and he takes the resolve to unmask everything as time passes on.

Scene vii.

All the mischievous persons such as Cornwall, Regan, Goneril, and Edmund are seen together holding Gloucester as traitor to the country. As the French invasion is imminent, they would like to punish Gloucester since he has been alleged with the charge of being a faithful spy of the French. This is further accentuated, perhaps for the worst, when Oswald informs that Gloucester has led Lear and a few of his close associates to Dover. Following orders, the servants bring Gloucester as a captive. This time both Cornwall and Regan appear very ferocious and the latter tells Gloucester that Edmund has told everything about his treachery. This makes him realise the misunderstanding that has unnecessarily cropped up between him and Edgar. Gloucester's eyes are plucked out by Cornwall with the help of Regan.

Act IV

Scene i.

Edgar is all alone in the heath revealing his thoughts that it is better to be despised openly, rather than to be flattered with no fervour of intimacy. If someone falls upon evil days, the lamentable thing is the change or shift from once happy stage of life. Then Gloucester is led by an old man. He seems to be repentant because of Edmund's deception and expresses his

willingness whether he could meet Edgar. In fact, Gloucester accepts the all-powerful destiny that plays upon human beings as it pleases. “As flies to wanton boys, are we to th’Gods;/ They kill us for their sport.” With his warm regards for father, Edgar helps Gloucester go to Dover, where the latter intends to meet the final phase of his troubled life.

Scene ii.

Goneril and Edmund arrive at the palace of the Duke of Albany thinking that the Duke is not present at the moment. However, Oswald informs them of the Duke’s presence and his disinterestedness in different matters including those of Gloucester’s alleged treachery and Edmund’s ‘faithful’ service to the kingdom. Albany has strong dislike for Goneril, and he observes that she is hardly a human being. She has lost all human qualities for which her image has been reduced considerably. Albany says, “O Goneril!/ You are not worth the dust which the rude wind/ Blows on your face.” Replying to this, Goneril also accuses him of lacking in quality to run administration. In her eye, he is a passive character that remains unmoved by the impending French army. As the debate goes on, a messenger enters and informs them of the death of Cornwall. For Albany, the news has nothing to worry about since it establishes the idea that wrong doers can hardly escape punishment at the court of God. What Albany is worried about is the loss of Gloucester’s eyes. Goneril has mixed response to the news. Although Cornwall’s death has paved the way for her absolute authority, it carries sadness because of Regan becoming a widow.

Scene iii.

Kent gets to know from a gentleman that the King of France has gone back without completing the mission of invading Britain. He has some urgent work to do in the estate. However, he leaves the charge to the Marshal of France at Dover. Then Kent is informed of Cordelia and her reaction to the letter describing the condition of Lear. She gets disheartened, but tries to control her passionate outburst. She holds the sisters responsible for the present stage of her father. In her eye, Goneril and Regan are a curse to humanity and the ladies in particular. Cordelia says, “Sisters! Sisters! Shame of ladies! sisters!” Kent has the apprehension that Lear might not meet

Cordelia, if opportunity arises, because of his sense of guilt towards the deprived daughter.

Scene iv.

The French camp near Dover sees Cordelia giving orders to find out her father immediately. His acute madness is a matter of agony and she entreats the doctor to collect the best of herbs that could redeem his pitiable condition. In the meantime, a messenger tells Cordelia about the approaching British army. To this, she says that the French army is well prepared. But it is because of Cordelia's prayer not to do any harm to her father that the French have retreated. She says, "O dear father!/ It is thy business that I go about;/Therefore great France/ My mourning and importun'd tears hath pitied."

Scene v.

Regan asks Oswald whether the army of the Duke of Albany has started the battle. Oswald responds in the affirmative and talks about Goneril's eagerness for the same, which hardly matches Albany's mental set up. What Regan considers a great mistake is the failure at putting Gloucester to death. She thinks that Edmund might have been distressed and repentant at the present condition of his father. Having known Goneril's letter to be dispatched to Edmund through Oswald, she exposes her utmost desire to get Edmund as life partner. To her, Goneril should not seek Edmund since she has her husband, Albany still alive. Regan says, "My Lord id dead; Edmund and I have talk'd/ And more convenient is he for my hand/Than for your Lady's."

Scene vi.

Gloucester, accompanied by Edgar, is bound for the top most peak at Dover, primary objective being to commit suicide. Betrayal of Edmund, misunderstanding regarding Edgar, the ill-treatment leading to the loss of eyes and his inability to save Lear are indeed some of the causes that do not make his life worth living. However, Edgar does not let him die saying that the holiest gods have saved him. With this, Gloucester gives up the idea of committing suicide and takes the resolve to endure affliction at the best of his capacity. Then Lear enters, still recognising himself as king, and

is found to be haunted by the misdeeds of his daughters. He is straightforward in revealing the effect of nature upon him that has helped find out the real image of every action. “When the rain came to/ wet me once and the wind to make me chatter/ when the thunder would not peace at my bidding/ there I found’em, there I smelt’em out.” Although Lear’s madness is at its extreme point, at times he speaks sense. For instance, he tells Gloucester to see things with ears when blindness affects him. Looking at Lear’s extremity, Gloucester and Edgar feel sorry and they fall short of words in uttering their disturbing feelings. What Lear observes is that human beings take birth in the world of ignorance, and there is hardly any rescue from such a disappointing condition. Lear says, “When we are born, we cry that we are come/ To this great stage of fools.” In the meantime, a gentleman, in company of a few attendants, finds out Lear following the order of Cordelia. That he would be treated like a king is what interests Lear and he runs saying that they would follow him. Oswald attempts at killing Gloucester, but of no result as such. Edgar interferes and kills Oswald in a fight between the two. Then he gets the letter of Goneril relating the plot of killing her husband, Albany. She recognises herself the wife of Edmund in the letter.

Scene vii.

At a tent in the French camp, the union between Lear and Cordelia becomes a reality. With her gratitude, Cordelia thanks Kent in warm words. The way he has devoted his life to the service of Lear is enough to win over Cordelia, which she acknowledges at the earliest. Broken-hearted as she has been, Cordelia mourns the condition of her father, most particularly when he hovered through the storm. The injustice meted out to him by the daughters never lets him stay balanced. All through his madness, the traumatic experience looms large upon him. However, interesting point is that he recognises Cordelia, who has, as Lear maintains, unlike Goneril and Regan, noble cause to despise him. Cordelia’s depravity and subsequent banishment is taken by Lear as hidden cause for which she could appear indifferent to him. Lear says, “I know you do not love me; for your sisters/ Have, as I do remember, done me wrong/You have some cause, they have not/No cause, no cause.”

Act V

Scene i.

Regan has the apprehension that Edmund is really in love with Goneril. As Regan loves him the most and intends to get as life partner, especially because of Cornwall's death, she hardly bears with Edmund ignoring her genuine feeling. In fact, Edmund forbids her to be skeptical since his love for Goneril is inseparably based on honour and respect. With the arrival of Albany and Goneril, discussion gets shifted to impending war and the approaching French army. Paying no heed to individual differences, Goneril entreats everyone to stand united in the wake of war. As all of them, except Albany, depart, Edgar enters and gives Goneril's letter, addressed to Edmund, to Albany. When Edgar goes away, Edmund comes and updates Albany of the situation made accessible by the spies. Edmund is found in a dilemma because of the pall of love he has created upon Goneril and Regan both. The envy that the two sisters have for each other is a matter of worry because it would stand as an impediment to Edmund fulfilling their quest for love. He also thinks of hatching a plot to kill Albany once the war is over.

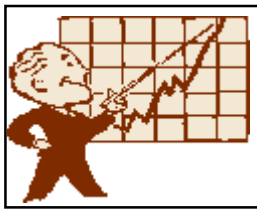
Scene ii.

As the war goes on, of course out stage, Edgar requests Gloucester to pray for the victory of the side fighting for a noble cause. Gloucester finds it encouraging and wishes the best ever for Edgar. However, after a while, he tells Gloucester about the victory scripted by the British army taking Lear and Cordelia as prisoners. Considering the critical stage, Edgar wants Gloucester to depart. But Gloucester does not like to escape since he wants to die there. At this, Edgar forbids him to think over the negative side of things.

Scene iii.

The victorious British camp near Dover sees Edmund as an absolute authority saying that the fate of Lear and Cordelia depends upon the judgment of great personages. In defence, Cordelia says that she does not mind pain and suffering. What she could hardly bear is the humiliation of her father at the hands of mischievous persons. But the re-union with Cordelia makes Lear bold and strong. Instead of being disheartened, he tells Cordelia that

they would life in prison as most people usually do in day-to-day life. He says, "…so we'll live/And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh/At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues/Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too." Following Edmund's disgust, Lear and Cordelia are taken away under guards. With this, Edmund does not stand still, rather gives secret order to a captain, which has not been made public. When Albany asks Edmund to hand over the prisoners including Lear and Cordelia so that justice could be done, Edmund tells him that they have been detained. Edmund is afraid that people would react against the authority if Lear and Cordelia are found as prisoners. Showing the extreme form of jealousy, Goneril poisons Regan with a view to removing an obstacle to the love of Edmund. With his noble intention, Albany would like to prove Edmund's treachery and hence provokes him for a fight. At that moment, Edgar arrives and fights with Edmund, the sole objective being to punish him for the misdeeds he has done to many people. As Albany presents Goneril's letter, she loses control and departs in despair. Being injured, Edmund undergoes change and confesses his villainy. Edgar reveals his identity and consoles the loss of Gloucester's eyes saying that it is a consequence of bastardy he committed to Edmund. He relates the story as to how he hid himself from the enemy, affected madness, served his father etc. Then a gentleman enters and gives the news of Goneril's suicide. Following the secret order by Edmund, the guard hanged Cordelia, in fact out of the stage, and the dead body is brought into the stage. Grief-stricken, Lear also succumbs to the agony. However, Kent reveals his identity before Lear's death. With the death of so many people, especially his master, Lear, Kent also intends to face the end saying, "I have a journey, sir, shortly to go/My master calls me, I must not say no." At the end of all, Albany seeks the co-operation of Edgar to run the kingdom.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 2: What is the significance of Act I Scene I?

7.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF SHAKESPEARE'S *KING LEAR*

Shakespeare's *King Lear* has been widely received in the domain of criticism, and various critics have interpreted the play touching upon different aspects. With their critical reading, the critics have opened up new vistas of understanding that come of immense help for the readers. Let us take a look at the reception as made by some critics over the years.

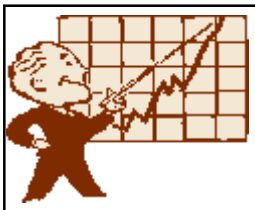
Back in 1810, Charles Lamb made a controversial study on *King Lear* saying that the play is so "painful and disgusting", and much difficulty arises in stage performance. Lear's physical appearance is not important; rather it is his intellectual or mental fabric that holds well throughout the play. "While we read it (play), we see not Lear, but we are Lear, we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms." What Lamb emphasises upon is the unfolding of the mental set up of Lear, and it gains momentum to an extent that simply undoes the physicality in the play. As such, episodes like the storm scene do not carry much significance for the critic. Another significant point missing from the play is the love scene, which is not usual in most of Shakespeare's plays. All the characters that are expected to nurture the feeling of love fail to do so. Instead, they are found directed towards sustaining hidden agenda throughout the play. Moreover, Lamb is equally critical about the unhappy ending of the play since a second thought could have been given to such a development. The way Cordelia leads her life with abject absence of a lover is what Lamb dislikes too. Although she is shown to have got married to the French King, it is not certain whether she has come under the pall of lovemaking.

William Hazlitt was another critic to have put comments on the play. In fact, he was mild in his arguments, and was of high praise for the way Lear showcases passion throughout. While talking about the tragic downfall, Hazlitt finds Lear's uncompromising attachment to "filial piety" as the root cause of all complicacy. To quote Hazlitt, "It is his (Lear) rash haste, his violent impetuosity, his blindness to everything but the dictates of his passions or affections, that produces all his misfortunes, that aggravates

his impatience of them, that enforces our pity for him." Of course, all this inculcates tragic overtone as intended. Hence, Lear appears as a successful character in playing out his part. Like Lear, his daughter Cordelia also has her useful part to play, and both of them accomplish the task. Although Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are categorised as villains and malcontents, they are not similar. The two sisters have great inclination towards the evil for which they would not like to treat Lear well, while Edmund adjourns villainy towards the end, though it is too late. Hazlitt finds it a type of "religious honesty". The importance of the Fool has been considered on the ground of inculcating lighter touch to the otherwise hard pace of action in the play. When the Fool disappears all of a sudden, the feigned madness of Edgar seems to have attained much proliferation. Opposed to the famous storm scene, Hazlitt showers praise upon the moralising scenes with mad Tom, Kent and Gloucester.

In his insightful and in depth study on the famous plays of Shakespeare, A.C. Bradley points out a number of seminal issues embedded in the play. As in other plays, Bradley finds *King Lear* as one of the greatest creations, but not of the standard credited to *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Macbeth.* This is more so for general readers. The play is a great achievement, but not the best as such. As a piece of drama, he finds *King Lear* inferior to *Hamlet.* The tragic dimension in *King Lear* is something that he takes it similar to that of *Othello.* The villainy and mischief of Edmund reminds Bradley of Iago. Like Iago's, Edmund's villainy has done much in the play. Of course, it is the tragic effects of ingratitude that have formed the central point of interest in the play. Although the first scene is strange, Bradley defends the same saying that everything is pre-planned, just the announcement is to be made by Lear. He takes the decision on his own, which showcases his sense of power and authority. His intention to live with his daughters is absurd since he has sufficient energy left to continue the rest of his life. As the unhappy ending of the play has been the subject of interest for the critical world, Bradley makes two different approaches. If we read the text as the specimen of drama, the happy ending is all-imperative. However, in terms of poetic imagination, the happy ending does

not hold good. Compared to plays like *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, the battle shown in *King Lear* is ludicrous. Although the play introduces main plot and sub plot, and the tragic strength of the former has been highlighted by a contrast in the latter, Bradley does not find sub plot dramatic.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: In what ways, has the play *King Lear,* been received?

Q 4: What does A C Bradley has to say about the play *King Lear*?



7.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have come to learn that Shakespeare's *King Lear* is one of his greatest tragedies, the other three being *Hamlet, Othello,* and *Macbeth.* Shakespeare drew upon a number of sources for writing down *King Lear.* But, he approached the sources with novel touch and ingenuity. The summary of the play must have helped you to remember the sequence of events and action right from the beginning till the end. Besides the sequence of events and action, the summary is also helpful to frame some ideas regarding various characters in the play. You have learnt that Shakespeare's *King Lear* comprises two plots—the main plot and the sub plot. The main plot includes Lear, his three daughters namely Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia with a few close associates. The sub plot centres on Gloucester and his two sons, Edgar (legitimate) and Edmund (illegitimate). However, the plots are well juxtaposed and they help each other in continuing the action of the play. In his critical study, Charles Lamb categorises the play as painful and disgusting. The intellectual back up is very strong than the physical appearance. William Hazlitt does not like the famous storm scene. He is in praise of the moralising scenes with Gloucester, Kent, and Tom.



7.7 FURTHER READING

Booth, Stephen. *'King Lear', 'Macbeth', Indefinition, and Tragedy.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983.

Bradley, A.C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear and Macbeth.* London: Macmillan and Co. ; London and New York: St. Martin's Press, 1905.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Lamb, Charles. "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare" (1811) excerpted in *The Romantics on Shakespeare. (ed)* Jonathan Bate. London: Penguin, 1992.



7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: One important source is *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*… …But, Shakespeare deviated from the source at certain points… …going by the chronicle play, he introduced Leir, Gonorill, Ragan, and Cordella as Lear, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia with some digressions.

Ans to Q 2: The first scene is very significant since it is inseparably related to the rising action, and the ground is well set for further action. With exception to Edgar and the Fool, all the major characters are introduced, and the main and sub-plots with their possible interaction have been hinted. However, the most important episode comes up when Lear decides to divide the kingdom among three daughters by the name of Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia, provided how much they could show love for father in words.

Ans to Q 3: Charles Lamb in 1810, said that the play is so "painful and disgusting"… …he was equally critical about the unhappy ending of

the play… …William Hazlitt on the other hand was of high praise for the way Lear showcases passion throughout… …A.C. Bradley found *King Lear* as one of the greatest creations.

Ans to Q 4: A.C. Bradley found *King Lear* to be one of the greatest creations, but not of the standard credited to his other tragedies… …he found *King Lear* inferior to *Hamlet…* …although the first scene is strange, Bradley defends the same saying that everything is pre-planned, just the announcement is to be made by Lear.



7.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What were the sources Shakespeare made use of in writing down *King Lear*? Do you think that he lost his originality in taking recourse to various sources? Justify your views.

Q 2: Evaluate the use of the main plot and sub plot in *King Lear*. How much do they contribute to the development of the action in the play?

Q 3: How can you situate *King Lear* in the domain of criticism? What are the novel ideas that could be derived from the critical reading made by various critics?

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UNIT 8: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *KING LEAR* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

8.1 Objectives

8.2 Introduction

8.3 Reading the Play

- 8.3.1 Critical Commentary of the Play
- 8.3.2 Major Themes
- 8.3.3 Major Characters
- 8.3.4 Shakespeare's Art of Characterisation

8.4 Let us sum up

8.5 Further Reading

8.6 Answers to check your progress (Hints Only)

8.7 Possible Questions

8.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- take a close look at *King Lear* as one of his greatest tragedies
- read *King Lear* from various critical viewpoints
- identify the major themes in the play
- make a list of the major characters and explain their roles
- frame some ideas regarding Shakespeare's art of characterisation
- discuss William Shakespeare's great mastery over his works of tragedy

8.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, a discussion has been done on the different aspects of the play *King Lear*. As you know, one of the basic philosophical formulations by William Shakespeare was that pain and suffering are inseparable parts in human life. Suffering has its own way to the life of an individual, and there is no denial of this ever-present reality. For instance, the medieval times

considered suffering as an indomitable element that people could hardly defy. However, the trend got changed in the Elizabethan period, and a positive significance was accorded to suffering in human life. Here, the Roman dramatist, Seneca became instrumental in postulating such a renewed interest in the tragic side of human beings. In the wake of the Renaissance, human life was sought to be analysed in its entirety, viz. both the tragic and comic dimensions. Instead of viewing tragic consequence in one's life as a natural course of action, people would like to discern the causes that affect suffering, and also the impact suffering creates upon human beings. Shakespeare's *King Lear* (1605-06) is based on the individual tragedies of Lear himself and his three daughters, and also on the tragic dimension of the Earl of Gloucester and his two sons.

8.3 READING THE PLAY

As Shakespeare wrote his plays for enactment, and primarily for theatre goers, reading the same might not bring out every aspect as intended by the dramatist. There are certain effects that could be produced in stagecraft, not simply through one's reading. However, reading introduces fresh look at the existing issues, while on the other, it may explore the hitherto unexplored issues and themes. In this way, the text is received with renewed interest and focus. Keeping all this in mind, we assume that *King Lear* has been read and re-read across the centuries, each time with novel perspective and different agenda in mind. The following subsections will help you to discuss the different important aspects of the play.

8.3.1 Critical commentary of the play

Shakespeare's *King Lear* is a well thought-out dramatic composition unfolding the tragic consequences the major characters face at different phases of life. Here tragedy seems to be a never-ending phenomenon. Any consideration of the play would unfailingly engage Lear's decision to divide the kingdom among his three daughters, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. The decision itself is the root cause of all suffering and pain since it does not get materialised

as expected by Lear. His expectation to hear the warmest words from the beloved daughter, Cordelia meets a dead end because of her adamant nature in continuing the bond between a father and a daughter. Although Goneril and Regan show gratitude, which is indeed flattery, Lear does not accord priority because he knows their nature very well. In contrast to them, Cordelia has genuine feeling for him, and Lear wants her to show it in the highest degree. Lear's only fault is that he expects the love of Cordelia in the sublime. When the aspiration fails to get the deserving response, Lear goes into rage, and his subsequent treatment at the hands of Goneril and Regan makes him go mad. Depending on his daughters too much and that is so at an age not ripe for the same, points out to Lear's weakness and his failure of understanding himself. In theoretical parlance, we may recognise the act as "hamartia" or error of judgment, which Aristotle aptly described as one of the root causes of one's tragic downfall.

Although Lear's decision to divide the kingdom seems to be hasty, there are certain critics including S.T. Coleridge who find the act as the offshoot of pre-conceived idea. Lear might have thought about the decision much in advance since taking such a momentous decision does not come overnight, especially from a person holding a serious position. As Lear's decision lacks far-sightedness and it does not stand in accordance with the demand of time. He would not like to give a second thought to it. When Kent reminds him of the possible consequences, indeed for the worst, Lear does not pay heed showcasing his sense of pride or what Aristotle would call "hubris" as a dominant factor in his personality.

It is true that Goneril and Regan behave rude with Lear, and he suffers a lot because of the ill-treatment. When Cordelia denies flattery and declares that she loves her father neither much nor less, all his expectation meets a serious jolt. Reluctantly he diverts the expectation towards Goneril and Regan with a view to undoing his disappointment, a result of Cordelia's indifference. However, the ill-

treatment Lear receives from Goneril and Regan is less disheartening compared to his shock at Cordelia's announcement. As the part of the kingdom meant for Cordelia is more "opulent", Lear's love for the youngest daughter could easily be discerned. This establishes the idea that Lear's love is not proportionate for the daughters. Cordelia's indifference is more appealing to Lear than that of Goneril and Regan. However, much of critical reading is directed vehemently towards Goneril and Regan's hypocrisy according less consideration into Cordelia's adamant and uncompromising position.

Looking at the growing rift in the relationship between Lear, and Goneril and Regan, we tend to question as to what leads them to such a conflicting zone. Why do Goneril and Regan appear so rude to Lear? What is the primary bone of contention between them? To respond such interrogations, we may consider a number of issues. Of all, sense of power and authority plays a major role that has much to do with growing chasm between Lear and his two elder daughters. Although Lear divides the kingdom, he would not like to give up kingship. Instead, he wants to sustain it because of its easy access to power and authority. His insistence on possessing the knights and attendants validates this position. This is what Goneril and Regan go against, and they show reluctance at responding to Lear's willingness. They find no logic in keeping so many attendants with Lear in view of the division of the kingdom and, hence, his power. What they expect from Lear is the sustenance of a normal course of life, devoid of unnecessary desire and gusto. However, Lear's inclination towards kingship or power and authority may be taken as a claim he could stand upon. When he loses his most beloved Cordelia and the kingdom, unexpectedly, to Goneril and Regan, he has nothing left. Hence, the word "nothing" is so redundant in the play. With this nothingness, one can hardly lead life. But Lear has to live his life. He is not to be swept away completely with his 'nothingness'. Unfortunately, he finds nothing, but kingship, that could sustain the rest of his life. He needs something to stand by him at

such a critical juncture. As such he claims kingship or power and authority, which turns out a point of deep worry for Goneril and Regan. Having received the parts of the kingdom, their sense of kingship also grows and it comes into conflict with that of Lear.

The storm scene is one of the most significant episodes in the play covering sizeable space. Symbolic as it is, the scene stands for the turbulent mental condition Lear is passing through. His humiliation at the hands of Goneril and Regan leading to madness comes to the view of spectators or readers. To showcase this, introduction of the scene imparts much dramatic effect to the play since it is through external objects that the inner working of the mind of Lear is made more vivid and convincing. Much action takes place within its ambit, and most of the characters including Lear, Kent, the Fool, Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund become a part of the scene. In addition to this, the most important aspect of the scene lies in Lear coming into contact with nature in her raw form. Before his contact with the storm, he is completely dominated by a type of cultural ambience having little to do with perceiving things naturally. He also starts realising the misfortunes of others, a development quite absent from his once kingly position. Doing this, Shakespeare envisions that people could be taught the best of lessons through their contact with nature.

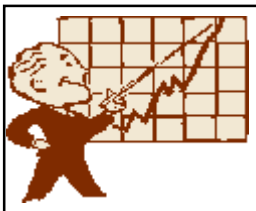
Although a flat character meant for fun and entertainment, the Fool is no less significant than the round characters in the play. His role is not simply confined to making fun and entertaining the public. In fact, he speaks sense and stands for the conscience for Lear. Most of his remarks are well directed towards Lear's actions and the way the old man takes things for granted. However, we may observe that the Fool's fun at Lear does not distract or disturb the latter as he usually does in the company of others. Instead, he likes the company of the Fool. Hence, the Fool may be taken more as a dramatic necessity to provide lighter touch to the otherwise grim and serious play. To augment this, we may also refer to the Fool's

mysterious disappearance and his subsequent hanging, though done offstage. When the curve of action is intended to have much tragic dimension, the Fool is simply removed from the scene. Perhaps, the effect of the storm scene is thought to be too functional for Lear to need the Fool as a constant companion.

The sub-plot is striking because it also shows the humiliation and ill-treatment a father receives with his illegitimate son, Edmund pursuing villainy. This seems to be consonant with the main plot in which Lear gets the same treatment at the hands of his daughters. But they are not identical. Lear's pain and agony is the result of his ignorance, while that of Gloucester in the sub plot owes to his innocence. The way he is persuaded by Edmund against Edgar establishes his easy-going nature lacking in logic and reasoning. However, nobody has urged Lear to divide the kingdom. What he has done is entirely on his own. As Edmund's villainy has been in line with his revengeful motif, there lies a justification to this. The humiliation he suffers primarily from bastardy bears every possibility of growing vengeance and that is what comes into effect in his action. He is not Hamlet thinking about the pros and cons before taking up a resolute decision and work accordingly. He likes to act**,** not to think much. Besides this ground, Edmund's repentance towards the end of the play succeeds in drawing sympathy from readers to a great extent. Indeed, it is too late since his villainy has already cost much damage, most specifically the killing of Cordelia in the prison following his order. Edmund also acts as a mediator between the main plot and sub plot. Though the Earl of Gloucester does maintain affinity with Lear, the relation gets affected after the division of the kingdom and Lear's turbulent phase in life. As Lear's kingdom falls into the evil hands of Goneril and Regan, Gloucester's estate becomes subject to Edmund's manipulation. Both the plots at this stage seem to be the reign of villainy and mischief. Simultaneously, Goneril and Regan's adultery with Edmund gives a further fillip to the close connection between the two plots.

Although the play introduces a number of deaths, Shakespeare turns out a conscious artist not to make the stage littered with dead bodies. Most of the casualties are presented off stage, and it is through information that readers and spectators get to know them. Doing away with macabre and grotesque scenes, Shakespeare seems to have catered to the taste and expectation of people, which underwent radical change in the Jacobean period. Another point to consider is that the character of Albany, indeed good and noble, has been reduced too much. Being a kind-hearted person, he protests against his wife, Goneril because of the wrong course of action. He defies the gang of mischievous people including Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund. The group becomes so powerful that people like Albany have no place in it. If he had not been sidelined, then the course of action might have taken a new shape. However, to facilitate a sound platform for attainment of tragic downfall, the mischief and hypocrisy of the Gonerils or Edmunds is more important than the good advice of Albany. Hence, the role thrust upon Albany is more of a dramatic necessity intended by the dramatist.

Much speculation is also on in regard to the unhappy ending of the play. If the play is to achieve the tag of tragedy, there is little to worry about the ending as such. In addition, there is no doubt that the play has been a successful rendition in the said category. However, the issue to consider is that tragedy may not be conceived as something unfailingly connected with death. Attainment of tragic dimension through one's death may not be taken an acceptable formulation all the time. The critical phase replete with pain and agony that Lear and Cordelia suffer from seem somehow enough to attain the brunt of tragedy. However, their death towards the end of the play appears unnecessary, given the completion of tragic downfall before their pathetic death. Hence, most of the readers and critics find it hard to accept the ending of the play without raising speculation and contention.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you think that Lear's decision to divide his country among his daughters was wrong?

Q 2: What is Lear's 'Hamartia'?

Q 3: Describe the symbolic significance of the storm scene?

Q 4: Do you think that the Fool never speaks sense?

Q 5: Why do Goneril and Regan appear so rude to Lear?

8.3.2 Major Themes

Shakespeare's *King Lear* makes a useful reading for critics and readers of general interest, and the text is gaining momentum with every passing day. Considering this, it is worth discussing the themes as follows:

Appearance and Reality:

When Lear divides the kingdom, he takes the appearance or showy nature of Goneril and Regan as a mark of reality. Their act of flattery pouring love and affection on Lear is nothing but a strategy to pocket maximum benefit. Lear fails to understand the true nature or reality of Cordelia and Kent as well. In fact, they mean what they say, and it is completely out of reach for Lear. We may say that appearance and reality go simultaneously in their personality, which is just the opposite of Goneril and Regan. Going this way, Lear showcases his ignorance that is not permissible for someone in charge of running a kingdom or any position of responsibility. He appears more as an agency of emotion in taking decisions. In the sub plot too, Gloucester gets convinced at the appearance of Edmund, who misguides him to meet the tragic downfall. With his easy-going and simple nature, Gloucester believes in the forged letter of Edmund, and takes his legitimate son, Edgar as someone going against the interest of his father. It is true that Gloucester's innocence leads him to the direction manhandled by Edmund, but the consequence it faces is disastrous, and it invalidates the positive

nuance of innocence. Appearance seems to have been treated both on negative and positive fronts. In case of Goneril and Regan, the appearance has scaled its worst connotation, while that of Kent and Edgar is treated at a satisfying level. It is through their disguise, appearance as it is, that they serve Lear and Gloucester to the best of their capacity.

Power and Authority:

The play involves power and authority as a dominant theme, and shows the complicacy it might brought to one's life. In fact, the tragedy of Lear, Goneril, Regan, and Edmund has a greater deal to do with this. Because of their major inclination towards this, they go indifferent to other aspects that are helpful to make life worth living. When Lear divides the kingdom, Goneril and Regan think that they have gained absolute power and authority. Their growing sense comes into conflict with Lear since he would not like to give up kingship. Lear's intention of keeping kingship presupposes his weakness for power and authority to be sustained in life. Indeed, Cordelia's banishment brings an irreparable loss in the life of Lear, which he could not expect to mend with the help of Goneril and Regan. He could have known their nature; hence he preserved the most "opulent" part for Cordelia. Of course, his love for the younger daughter has also appeared instrumental to the matter. Having lost Cordelia and the kingdom to Goneril and Regan, Lear does not find anything substantial to continue the rest of life. It is in power and authority that he finds the real cause of leading life. His insistence on keeping knights and attendants with him validates this position, which Goneril and Regan find quite disappointing. With the kingdom in hand, they would like to have their rule pronounced without any interference from Lear. This does not stand in consonant with Lear, who intends to make his presence felt as an agency of power and authority. As Lear has not preserved any part of the kingdom, his claim to sustain authority seems half-hearted to Goneril and Regan. The sub plot also has the theme of power and authority involving

Edmund and Gloucester. It is in the name of avenging the tag of bastardy and depravity that Edmund succeeds in taking hold of the earldom, a base to enjoy power and authority. Gloucester's plan to accord the position to his legitimate son, Edgar does not come into effect because of the trick played out by Edmund. Although Edmund's villainy has been conditioned largely by the treatment he gets because of bastardy, his motif of possessing power and authority may not be ruled out altogether.

Compassion and Reality:

Though much action takes place with less trace of understanding and compassion, the play is not completely missing the side. If a few of the characters are lagging behind this, there are certain others like Kent, Edgar, Cordelia, and even Lear, to some extent, do have the positive side, and act accordingly. With this, they form a reality of their own. Despite his banishment, the Earl of Kent entails compassion at the highest degree. As he is very resolute in serving Lear, he gives it the form of reality throughout his life. What he is interested in is the well-being of Lear, and he could hardly bear with his master passing through a critical phase of life. When Oswald, the steward of Goneril, intends to behave rude with Lear, Kent opposes to it vehemently. In fact, he understands the attitude of Goneril and Regan. As such, he re-appears in disguise after banishment, and gives company to Lear till the end. His servitude towards Lear is shown in excess, perhaps dramatic to a great extent. After Kent, the next important person to have shown compassion is, undoubtedly, Edgar. A victim to Edmund's villainy, Edgar also faces the condition as Kent does. However, Edgar would like to hide himself to escape the searching eye of the authority. Throughout this, he never loses compassion and gives it a solid functioning when he disguises himself and re-appears at the scene. His compassion makes him a strong personality in serving his father, Gloucester. Moreover, he is also considerate towards Lear, and he decries the mischief of his elder daughters. Even after her

banishment, Cordelia never loses compassion for Lear and waits for the opportunity to serve him to the best of her capacity. Hence she laments the ill-treatment meted out to Lear by Goneril and Regan when she comes to know about all this at the French camp. Though not completely, Lear is also compassionate towards the Fool. As he likes the company of the Fool, the readers or spectators can have access to the conscience of Lear since the Fool may be taken as the spokesperson along this line. Besides the lighter touch as given to the play, the Fool performs the vital task of unfolding the course of action.

Madness:

Shakespeare seems to have given a real thrust upon the theme of madness in his plays. Indeed he is very successful in presenting the inseparable part of life, something that nobody could deny. Interestingly, he represents both the real and feigned forms of madness in his plays. As in *Hamlet*, we get the real madness of Ophelia, and the feigned madness of Hamlet himself. Feigned or affected madness could be taken as a strategy to attain a given goal or objective. Hamlet's feigned madness is primarily of taking revenge upon his murderous uncle. He succeeds, but the course of action also kills him. However, the intensity of a revengeful motif is not of that proportion in *King Lear.* Here in contrast to Lear's real madness, Edgar has feigned madness. Although the motif of taking revenge upon Edmund is not absent altogether, this does not seem to be the *only* motif in his affected madness. In fact, he is more concerned with serving his father, Gloucester. A sense of gratitude towards his father makes him opt for affected madness, while at the same time it also helps him to find out the villainy of Edmund. His resolve to prove Edmund's mischief in front of his father comes out successful and it is his madness that helps him accomplish the task. He could have been arrested by the attendants of Edmund unless there had been feigned madness. Of course, Edgar's madness constitutes the elements of pathos and gloom to a great

extent. Like Lear's, his is a madness that moves the readers in an unprecedented way. In contrast to Edgar's feigned madness, Lear has real madness. Deprived as he is of due recognition and treatment, Lear loses the sanity of mind, a development that has much to do with his emotional back up. He is so emotionally attached with his daughters that he could not bear with their indifferent attitude, especially that of Goneril and Regan. Most strikingly, Cordelia's resolute character does have the most serious implication on him because of his strong likeness for her. It is perhaps of his extreme and uncompromising love and its unexpected return from his daughters that have pushed him to the feat of madness. Though the sight of his madness is pathetic, it turns out functional in making him understand the real condition of human beings, which is missing from him during kingship. As in the storm scene, his madness does not stand as an obstacle to establish a close rapport with nature and her different objects.

Sight and Blindness:

The theme of sight and blindness constitutes a major part in the play, which is somehow related to the previously mentioned theme of appearance and reality. While discussing the theme of sight and blindness, we may refer to Lear and Gloucester, the two important characters in the main and sub plots. It is true that Lear never loses eyesight, and he does have visual experience as usual. However, the theme holds significance in its metaphorical parlance, not in its physical sense. Interestingly, Lear is blind in spite of his experience of sight. To justify this, reference could be made to his failure at seeing the real motif underlying the flattery by Goneril and Regan. They pour words upon him that have little to do with reality. But Cordelia says what she means, and this is what Lear does not like. Lear's fascination for warm rhetoric makes him blind to the real nature of things. Gloucester's case is a bit different from that of Lear. As Lear does to Goneril and Regan, Gloucester also fails to see the villainy of Edmund. He is completely trapped in the web

hatched by Edmund, and takes Edgar as enemy. The misunderstanding that has cropped up between him and Edgar is primarily related to his inability to see things logically and rationally. Like Lear's, the eyesight of Gloucester is meaningless. Perhaps he gets the punishment for this when his eyes are plucked out by Cornwall and Regan at the instigation by Edmund. Having lost his eyes, he starts realising the fault, and comes to know the hand of Edmund behind the scene. Unfortunately, he has no eyes left to see the newly perceived things. Hence, Gloucester's inability to see things seems to be an inseparable part in his life.

8.3.3 Major Characters

The following are the most important characters that you must read about in the context of the play.

Lear:

Lear is the most significant of all characters presented in the play. If *King Lear* is to be categorised as a piece of tragedy, it is primarily because of Lear and his critical phase of life he has gone through. There is no denying the fact that the arrogant and wrathful nature of Lear causes downfall. However, the fatal end he meets does not seem proportionate to the act he has done at the beginning. His decision to divide the kingdom among his daughters may be taken as a turning point in the play in initiating the phase of tragedy. Besides, his over-dependence upon the daughters and the motif of exchange are instrumental to the enunciation of tragedy. He wants to get back the love that he has for the daughters. The division of the kingdom may be accepted as a trial of affection. Like Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth, Lear inherits fatal weakness. However, unlike most of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, Lear appears as passive sufferer. He lets himself down in the vortex of circumstances with no intention of doing something substantial to orient the course of action. His passionate hatred for Kent and Cordelia may also be noticed in his character. In fact, he wants to see things in accordance

with his expectations. If anyone goes against this, he would not tolerate. When Kent finds no justification in his action, Lear goes mad and punishes him in the strongest measure. Even Cordelia's resolute nature is something that Lear does not like and inflicts punishment. Lear hardly understands his limitations, but does not like others to point out to those. However, it is the Fool, who stands as an agency of reminding the wrong course of action. Interesting, he endures the Fool and likes his company. His association with the Fool unfolds the conscience, which is missing from the normal course of action. The readers or spectators get to know much of Lear in the storm scene and his mental condition. His exposition to the storm relates convincingly the turbulent mental condition, which is a result of the ill-treatment he has receives at the hands if Goneril and Regan. Besides this, his close contact with nature in its volatile form teaches the lesson of humanity and enriches him with the understanding of others. Here nature turns out powerful and it defies the all-pervading character of culture.

Goneril:

Goneril is the eldest daughter of Lear, and wife of the Duke of Albany. She is one of the most mischievous characters in the play, and is involved in various misdeeds causing utmost damage to others and to her as well. The most unpardonable feature in her character is, undoubtedly, the ill-treatment meted out to Lear. Having taken hold the part of the kingdom showing flattery, she treats Lear very rude. Indeed, it is a question of power and authority that fabricates her nature throughout, and it hardly tolerates Lear's interest in sustaining kingship after the division of the kingdom. What she likes, as does Regan, is the uncompromising authority that she does not like to be shared by others, especially Lear. Through her activity, we may assume her active and resolute personality, which stands in contrast to that Cordelia. He is very quick in taking decisions, and this helps initiate rapidity in action of the play. As there is no question of her villainy and mischief, the sense of jealousy is also very

redundant in her character. Given Regan's love for Edmund, she turns out jealous of the development. She could hardly bear with Regan marrying Edmund at the death of Cornwall. In the extremity of jealousy, she poisons Regan, and in course of time commits suicide. This relates to her uncompromising nature at the expense of all humanely feelings and emotions. She is so blind to her self-assuring nature that she fails to be a good wife as well. Being a good human being, Albany keeps repeating her evil design with a view to rectifying her, but of no result. Instead of paying heed, she follows life on her own.

Regan:

Regan is the second daughter of Lear, and wife of the Duke of Cornwall. Indeed, she may be taken as a true copy of Goneril. Throughout the play, we find her following the path of Goneril. Like Goneril, she also involves in flattery to earn the maximum benefit from Lear. Although flattery is not acceptable, her major thrust upon this establishes her understanding of the psyche of Lear and also of his expectation. Here she comes very close to Goneril in the trial of affection that Lear holds. However, her understanding, as that of Goneril, has been directed towards achieving a vested interest, i.e. to pocket much of the property of her father. With this evil design at hand, she appears ruder than Goneril in her dealing with Lear. Having ill-treated at the hands of Goneril, Lear's pain and agony goes manifold with Regan. Besides this, her abject cruelty may also be noticed in the act of plucking out the eyes of Gloucester with the help of Cornwall. Although both of them would like to follow similar course of action, that affinity costs damage to their relationship relating to the affair with Edmund. Regan faces the brunt of Goneril's jealousy and meets her sad end. Here she does not appear as active as Goneril does. She is a receiver of punishment inflicted upon her by the rival.

Cordelia*:*

Cordelia is the youngest daughter of Lear, perhaps the most lovable of the rest. It is true that she has genuine feeling for Lear, but

she is very selective in showing it. Indeed, she makes division of her love and affection preserving it for respective quarters of his close associates. That is why she talks of bond, and does not like to move away from the same. Her adherence to the bond makes her uncompromising and resolute as well, which proves fatal to most of the characters. Being the youngest, and embodying the purity of heart, she wins the favour of Lear. Hence the most "opulent" part of the kingdom is reserved for her. Lear is so much affectionate to her that he cannot bear with her not expressing warm regards, and coming under the pall of agony, he banishes her from the kingdom. Hasty as the decision is, Lear takes it as a guilt that proves instrumental to his madness. It is not simply the humiliation at the hands of Goneril and Regan; rather the sense of guilt, centering Cordelia's banishment that proves detrimental to Lear's succeeding periods of time. Another significant feature is her truthful nature and sense of dignity. Once she adheres to an ideal, she does not like to adjourn it, whatsoever situation arises. While following all this, she never loses humane feeling coupled with simplicity and tenderness. To validate this, it may be referred that she continues her warm regard to Lear even after her banishment, and serves him when opportunity arises. However, she acts as a passive character most of the times. The enthusiasm and zeal of Goneril and Regan seem to be missing from her.

Albany:

The Duke of Albany is one of the noblest characters in the play. In opposition to the Duke of Cornwall, he stands in favour of justice and humanity. He never supports Goneril in pursuit of her evil design, and tries to make her give up inhuman nature. To justify his simplicity and sense of justice, we may refer to him saying, "I cannot be so partial, Goneril/ To the great love I bear you." As he is a man of principle and dignity, people like Lear and Kent shower high praise on him. However, he seems to be sidelined, given the magnitude of misdeeds Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund have

attained. As such, his protest against Goneril proves vain since she does not give up her vested interests. He acts more as passive character in this connection. Instead of trying something substantial, he turns towards Lear and Gloucester. Their suffering moves him a lot, and extends sympathy with them. Another significant aspect to his character is the strong sense of patriotism and genuine concern for the country. His active participation in the fight against France to safeguard the country validates this position. After their victory over the French and the deaths of Lear, Cordelia and others, he wants to restore the throne with Kent and Edgar. Here it is not the thirst for power and authority, but that of responsibility for the countrymen, who need to be guided along a safe administrative line.

Cornwall:

The Duke of Cornwall is the husband of Ragan, and has been constantly in touch with Goneril and Edmund to carry out nefarious activities. In fact, less information is provided regarding him. However, we may assume that he is a cruel and callous person, who likes to accomplish evil design at the cost of others. With Goneril, Ragan, and Edmund, he constitutes the vicious circle directed towards achieving their goal. His various acts such as putting Kent in the stocks and plucking out the eyes of Gloucester establish the level of cruelty he sustains. However, it must be admitted that his role as a malcontent helps the play scale tragic dimension to a great extent.

Gloucester:

Gloucester is a central figure in the sub plot, and his misfortune and suffering seems very close to that of Lear. The close rapport could be established between Lear and Gloucester in terms of their critical phase conditioned by their children. In fact, Gloucester is a very simple and foolish kind of personality, who is easily persuaded by others. It is his innocence that makes him believe in the story hatched by Edmund. In his utter disregard at logic and reason, he goes against his legitimate son, Edgar. Taking everything

for granted with the least consideration is a major defect in his character for which he suffers a lot. Although Edmund's villainy is not permissible on humanitarian ground, his is a condition that inflicts much pain on him. Because of his bastardy, he has to live as an outcast in the society. Edmund's bastardy relates to Gloucester's wild and licentious habit of the past. As most of the times he lets himself to be driven by others or unseen force, often he shows courage in protesting against injustice. When he is produced to Goneril and Regan on the false charge of being a spy for the French, he does not hesitate condemning their cruelty to Lear. He says, "Because I would not see/Thy cruel nails pluck out his poor old eyes/ Nor thy fierce sister in his anointed flesh." In addition to this, he also has superstitious beliefs to some extent. Under such notion, he sees suffering as a cruel sport conditioned by the gods. Even his wrong information regarding Edgar's plot against him has been attributed to the heavenly bodies that are taken as active agents on earth. Of course, this connects Gloucester to the Elizabethan society that believed in superstition as an inseparable part of life.

Kent:

The Earl of Kent is somehow the most attractive character in the play. Like Edgar, he is also known for his servitude and sense of duty to the master. Loyalty, servitude, vehemence are the real hallmarks to his personality. He is so loyal to Lear that he likes to continue his service after the banishment as well. Although his loyalty is praiseworthy, it costs his personal life. Hence his personal life has not been given due focus in the play. He champions Cordelia, and finds justification in her dealing with Lear. It deserves mention that his uncompromising loyalty to Lear does not make him blind to his fault. Hence, in the opening scene, he is opposed to Lear's move in the division of the kingdom. With his wisdom and foresight, he could see the dark side to the decision. He could understand the ignorance of Lear and take the resolve to serve the master to the best of his capacity. What we get is that his service to Lear is more

of sympathy than of the sense of responsibility. His stay till the end of the play, along with Albany and Edgar, justifies the survival of the good and noble after a critical phase in life.

Edgar:

Edgar is the legitimate son of Gloucester known for his loyalty, and noble nature. His nobility of character is so strong that Edmund also speaks high of him. Indeed, he is a stark contrast to the mischievous nature of Goneril and Regan. He is one, who wages relentless effort at coming to the help of his father, while Goneril and Regan decry their parent all the time. The thing to be worried about Edgar is that he has been easily trapped by Edmund's story of his father's ill will towards him. He could have made an enquiry before accepting Edmund's story, but he does not. In fact, he knows the credulity of his father. However, the situation created by Edmund has so much of its magnitude that he dares not approach his father and talks about the villainy of Edmund. Fortunately, he does not get disappointed, and takes the resolve to undo the misconception brewed up between him and his father. Like Kent, he is driven to disguise himself with a view to succeeding in the mission. With feigned madness, he tries to pursue his course of action, and comes out successful. While doing this, he remains calm and deliberate even in the feat of madness. His feigned madness contrasts with the real madness of Lear, and this has made the theme more vivid. However, Lear's madness is given so importance in its treatment that it affects that of Edgar to some extent. His oft-quoted phrase "Ripeness is all" reminds us of Hamlet's "Readiness is all". Here Edgar's preference for experience and wisdom in one's pursuit of leading life may be observed.

Edmund:

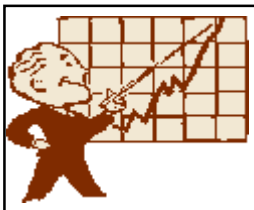
Of the villains in the play, Edmund enjoys the upper hand. He is the illegitimate son of Gloucester, and has to suffer a lot in the society. Despite his association with the Earldom, he fails to lead a normal course of life because of bastardy. It is unfortunate that he

has to live as an outcast. Moreover, his information regarding Gloucester's intention to make Edgar a legal heir to his property inflames his revenge motif in its worst form. Indeed, he deserves praise because of his tactful handling of the conspiracy intended for Gloucester and Edgar. He manages things skilfully and succeeds. Besides this, he also inherits licentiousness of Gloucester and applies it to Goneril and Regan. His lovemaking turns the two sisters hostile to each other, and he enjoys it. Like Albany, he also shows velour and courage in the battle and leads the troops of Regan. His acceptance of the combat with Edgar proves his readiness to face challenge whenever it arises. It is understood that his villainy and mischievous nature have done much damage in the play, but the confession he makes of the same towards the end gives dignity to his character. It has reduced the degree of villainy to a considerable point. His accumulation of both "wit and wickedness" places him very close to a few of Shakespeare's unforgettable creations such as Richard III and Iago.

The Fool:

In Shakespeare's time, the Fool was a very familiar figure, and people regarded him as an inseparable part in dramatic performances. Even one's reading of the play would ensure the significant role the Fool accomplishes. It is worth remembering that the Fool appears as a connecting agency between actors or actresses and audience. As he is well aware of the developments in the play, often he conveys them to the audience in advance. However, the primary objective is to provide fun and enjoyment with the audience. In *King Lear,* the Fool enjoys an important position, and most of the times he acts as a traditional jester targeting whom he likes. He does not hesitate to make comments, and the liberty of expression gives him a distinctive place. What is striking is that Lear also tolerates him. In fact, he is very straightforward and revelatory. If he finds Lear making mistakes, he would point out them without sparing time. He is a conscience of Lear. His worldly wisdom

provides us much information with regard to various matters. Indeed, he acts as mirror seeking to show Lear his real image. At the division of the kingdom, he tries to make Lear realise the mistake saying, "Thou mad'st thy daughters thy mother". Although such a statement provokes laughter, there lies logic behind the apparent meaning. As such, his remarks have double meaning. By pointing out the mistakes of Lear, the Fool makes effort at giving right direction to his course of action, but with little result. When Lear goes mad and loses the sanity of mind, the Fool vanishes from the scene. His subsequent hanging remains a mystery in the play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What is the difference between Lear and the other Shakespearean tragic heroes?

Q 7: How does Cordelia take her relationships?

Q 8: In what way, Lear and Gloucester similar characters?

8.3.4 Shakespeare's Art of Characterisation

In *King Lear,* Shakespeare shows excellence in the art of characterisation to a great extent. Almost all the characters have been skilfully developed, but not simply for their own sake. One may see their conformity to the plot or the situation they are placed upon. This strategy has made the characters more vibrant and fascinating. However, much of characterisation seems to have been intended emotional involvement of the readers and spectators. Perhaps of all the major characters, Lear, Cordelia, and Gloucester do have much emotional appeal in the vortex of which their follies and weaknesses go scot-free. The critical phases they are passing through seem to be enough in placing them in positions of deep emotional entanglement. Lear's ill-treatment at the hands of Goneril and Regan, and his resulting misfortune move the readers to an immeasurable degree. It takes up such a proportion that the readers

go indifferent to the mistakes he has committed, and fail to see his weakness.

Cordelia's adamant nature could be taken as one of the root causes of her tragic downfall, and also much of Lear's disappointment and mental breakdown. She could have compromised to some extent on showing warm regards for Lear, albeit not of the level Goneril and Regan have done. Her failure at realising the expectation of Lear makes her character weak. It is a question of responsibility, in which she fails. Strikingly, she never tries to mend, and remains a passive character. In case of Gloucester too, the overdose of emotional appeal seems more redundant. Taking advantage of his innocence, Edmund turns him against Edgar for the fulfilment of his nefarious design. Gloucester allows himself to be driven by Edmund, with no sense of giving second thought to the latter's course of action. He is trapped so completely that he could hardly make use of logic in taking Edgar along the line as such. This is what could be taken as blame to his character. Of course, all of them, viz. Lear, Cordelia, and Gloucester are more sinned against their sinning, and this has helped achieve tragic effect in the play.

Unlike Cordelia, Goneril and Regan are very active, though their stance is directed towards the evil and the ignoble. They are very much focused on the objective at hand, and leave no stone unturned to attain it. As we notice in the first scene, they show their cunning nature to the highest possible degree. They have proper understanding about Lear's expectation. Hence, they shower flattery with abject absence of real feelings. If flattery helps them pocket the maximum benefit, they would do it manifold. Their money-mindedness coupled with power and authority brings into effect a huge gap with Cordelia, and also the loss of warm feeling for their father. Of course, their villainy and mischief has been given a vent because of their union with Edmund and Cornwall. On the one hand, their association with Edmund helps them continue the misdeeds, while, on the other; it brings the main plot and the Gloucester plot

very close. Their characterisation equally contributes to achieving a sound structural pattern.

Like Edmund, Cornwall is also a malcontent, and he helps Goneril and Regan on every front. However, most often he seems to be a follower to the design hatched by Goneril, and, to some extent, Regan. Edmund also follows them, but his intent is to materialise the vested interests of his own. In contrast to these characters, Albany is a less developed character. He speaks sense and likes to stand for justice and humanity. However, this is hardly allowed against the backdrop of villainy and mischief conditioned by Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund. Hence, he has been sidelined, particularly in view of preparing the setting for most of the characters to meet their tragic downfall. Given Albany's stay until the end of the play, the agenda of sustaining the philosophy of honesty and nobility gets established. Along with Kent and Edgar, he is left to accept responsibility prevailing in the kingdom.

As opposed to Goneril, Regan, Cornwall, and Edmund, Kent and Edgar stand tall in their servitude, and both of them would not like to move even an inch from their resolve meant for the good of the concerned. Looking at Kent's genuine concern for Lear, we may assume this as a compensatory measure filling up the void left out by Goneril and Regan. In addition to his usual kindness for Lear, Kent takes Goneril and Regan's indifference as instrumental to the growing sense of servitude and responsibility. Hence he re-appears in disguise after the banishment, the sole objective being to come of help to Lear. His constant company to Lear till the end proves helpful to the fettered personality. However, it must be mentioned that Kent's loyalty is so extreme that it diminishes his personal life to the fullest. Edgar's role in the life of Gloucester is a contrasting portrayal to that of Goneril and Regan. The technique of contrast has given much credibility to the theme. Indeed, it must be confessed that Edgar is one of the most wretched figures in the play. As a victim to Edmund's villainy, he falls upon a critical phase, but mending

to the best of his ability. During the phase, he never loses patience, and adopts madness as a strategy to succeed in the desired goal.

The Fool is another successful creation in the play. Although a flat character, the Fool does much than providing fun and amusement. His remarks, witty as they are, have much to do with the baser aspects of reality. The company he gives to Lear is laudable since he stands for his conscience and speaks sense. Lear's lack of far-sightedness is what the Fool points out, which help the readers and spectators, know some of the hidden aspects. Interestingly, Lear tolerates the Fool all through. However, it deserves mention that he has been dropped suddenly in the middle of the play, and the information of his subsequent hanging is provided. When Lear attains madness at its extreme point, the Fool might have thought his presence as insignificant. As the pace of action takes heavily upon tense and grim condition, the importance of fun might not be a logical inclusion. These are some of the assumptions that prove instrumental to the exclusion of the Fool. But his stay in the life of Lear for the concerned period makes an interesting study of the hidden aspects in the latter's personality.



8.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have seen that William Shakespeare considered tragedy as an inseparable part of life. As opposed to the medieval times, the Elizabethan society accorded positive significance to the suffering of human beings. Renewed interest was given in unfolding the causes and consequences of suffering. Shakespeare's reputation as a dramatist rests, to a great extent, on the four of his tragedies such as *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear,* and *Macbeth. King Lear* is one of Shakespeare's best creations centering on a host of characters that include Lear, Cordelia, Gloucester, Edgar, Kent, Edmund, Goneril, Regan, and a few others. Besides the main plot, the play includes a sub plot involving Gloucester, Edgar, and Edmund. The play comprises a number of significant themes: Appearance and reality,

power and authority, madness, compassion and reality, sight and blindness are some of the most recurring and widely read themes. At the same time, the dignity of his characterisation could be noticed in its close rapport with the demand of situation the characters are placed upon.



8.5 FURTHER READING

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8.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Yes… …the decision is the root cause of all suffering and pain… …Lear's aspirations fail to get the deserving response from Cordelia because of her decision to continue her filial bond with her father… …Goneril and Regan show gratitude, but as part of flattery… …Lear's only fault is that he expects the love of Cordelia in the sublime… …, Lear goes into rage and he divides the kingdom and banishes Cordelia.

Ans to Q 2: Lear's weakness and his failure of understanding himself. In theoretical parlance, we may recognise the act as "hamartia" or error of judgment, which Aristotle aptly described as one of the root causes of one's tragic downfall.

Ans to Q 3: The storm stands for the turbulent mental condition Lear is passing through… …His humiliation at the hands of Goneril and Regan lead to madness in Lear… … it is through external objects like the storm that the inner working of the mind of Lear is made more vivid… …most of the characters including Lear, Kent, the Fool, Gloucester, Edgar and Edmund become a part of the scene.

Ans to Q 4: No… …in fact, the Fool speaks sense and stands for the conscience for Lear… …most of his remarks are well directed towards Lear's actions and the way the old man takes things for granted… …the Fool may be taken more of a dramatic necessity to provide lighter touch to the otherwise grim and serious play.

Ans to Q 5: Power and authority plays a major role to play in the growing rift between Lear and his two elder daughters… …Lear divides the kingdom, but not willing to give up kingship… …his insistence on possessing the knights and attendants validates this position… …this is what make Goneril and Regan so angry.

Ans to Q 6: unlike most of Shakespeare's tragic heroes like Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth, Lear appears as passive sufferer. He lets himself down in the vortex of circumstances with no intention of doing something substantial to orient the course of action.

Ans to Q 7: Cordelia has genuine feeling for Lear, but she is very selective in showing it… … she makes a division of her love and affection preserving it for respective quarters of his close associates. That is why she talks of bond, and does not like to move away from the same.

Ans to Q 8: Gloucester is a central figure in the sub plot, and his misfortune and suffering seems very close to that of Lear. The close rapport could be established between Lear and Gloucester in terms of their critical phase conditioned by their children.



8.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: How would you justify Lear's division of the kingdom? What are the consequences he faces because of the division?

Q 2: Can you say that the main plot and the sub plot have been well knit? How do they help each other in the advancement of action in the play?

Q 3: What is your opinion on the unhappy ending of the play? Do you think that the deaths of Lear and Cordelia have been too dramatic to attain the tragic effect? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 4: What are the major themes in the play? How do they help the characters get due focus?

Q 5: Give an account of the parent-child relationship in the play? What are the major issues affecting the relationship?

Q 6: Sketch the character of Lear with illustration from the text. How would you validate his madness in context of the circumstances?

Q 7: Compare and contrast the characters of Cordelia, and Goneril and Regan. How do individual interests affect their relationship with others?

Q 8: Write a comprehensive note on Kent and Edgar. Could you say that their unrestrained loyalty has affected personal life to a great extent?

Q 9: Do you find any justification in the course of action Edmund takes up? How does he prepare himself to attain his desired goal?

Q 10: How do you comprehend the role of the Fool? Is the Fool's sudden disappearance from the scene more of a dramatic necessity? Give a reasoned answer.

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UNIT 9: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *TWELFTH NIGHT* OR *WHAT YOU WILL*

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Shakespearean Comedies

9.4 Sources of the Play *Twelfth Night*

9.5 Reading the Play *Twelfth Night*

9.6 Act wise Summary of the Play

9.7 Critical Commentary on the Play

9.7.1 Major Themes

9.7.2 Major Characters

9.8 Let us Sum up

9.9 Further Reading

9.10 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

9.11 Possible Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- form an idea about Shakespearean comedies
- have necessary information about the source of the play *Twelfth Night*
- trace the development of the plot of the play *Twelfth Night*
- discuss the relevant themes and in connection with *Twelfth Night.*

9.2 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will get an opportunity to discuss one of Shakespeare' finest comedies—*Twelfth Night* probably written between 1599-1601.It is almost a consensus among the critics that *Twelfth Night* or *What You Will* was the last of Shakespeare's three mature comedies, the other two being—*Much Ado About Nothing* and *As You Like It*. This play is very

important in the development of Shakespeare's dramatic art because, from this time onward, all Shakespeare's plays are marked by a rich and subtle complexity. It is easily observable that much of the play's comedy comes from the sub-plot dealing with the members of Olivia's household: Sir Toby Belch, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, his friend, Malvolio, Olivia's Steward, Maria, and her waiting gentleman. The plot resolves itself in the ironic and satiric exposure of Malvolio, the Puritan and his humiliation. It is important to note that this comic sub-plot is entirely Shakespeare's invention, and many outstanding critics have noted this. In spite of its purely comic nature, the play seems to have been characterised by melancholy and a lyrical fervour which have been captured in two of Feste's beautiful songs – "come away, come away death", and "when that I was and a little ting boy." You will soon realise that the play *Twelfth Night* celebrates the triumph of love, and yet it is distinguished by a troubling undertone of melancholy, which suggests the playwright's tendency to enter into the deeper realms of the human psyche.

9.3 SHAKESPEAREAN COMEDIES

Shakespeare wrote as much as seventeen comedies and from the point of their growth and development, four distinct phases are discernible. They are as follows:

1. His early comedies include *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Screw*, *Love Labour's Lost*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *A Mid-summer Night's Dream.* In these comedies, there can be found considerable verbal wit but no remarkable probing into the inner workings of the human nature as result of which the plot enjoys some dominance over the character.
2. Shakespeare's middle comedies, commonly known as purely romantic comedies, are *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As you Like it*, *Twelfth Night,* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In these plays, Shakespeare seems to be at his best as a comic playwright though the influence of Robert Greene is noticeable in some of them. There is a good harmony between plot and characterisation and a

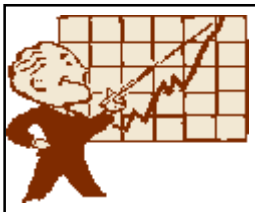
nice blending of romance and realism and more importantly, they are marked by masterly portraiture of human character. A characteristic feature of these comedies is indeed the comic exploration of the nature of love.

3. Then there is another group consisting of *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*. In these plays, some painful and distressing complications of human life are treated in a highly serious manner and forceful happy endings have been given to *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*. Therefore, they are called 'dark comedies' or 'problem comedies'.
4. The comedies like *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* form the last group of Shakespearean plays. These comedies too show a distinct development; they reveal sobriety, serenity and a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation. They are also called romances because their actions challenge psychological credibility.

Taken as a whole, Shakespeare's comedies show certain characteristic features. Except *The Taming of the Shrew* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, all the other comedies may be called romantic. These two comedies have more local touches than the others, they have scenes and characters more closely related to life and their actions, and dialogues are less coloured by the romantic sentiment whereas, the purely romantic comedies are a continuation of the pre-Shakespearean tradition. Shakespeare's fertile imagination makes ordinary things of life romantic and the improbable characters and events realistic. In fact, a perfect harmony of realism and fantasy, naturalism and supernaturalism, fact and fiction is the distinguishing mark of Shakespearean comedies.

It is also important to note that the real excellence of a Shakespearean comedy lies in its strength of characterisation. The creation of living characters against a background of romance, marvel and magic, distinguishes Shakespeare's early plays from similar attempts made by his contemporaries. In a sense, a Shakespearean comedy is an art of exploration in opposition to the classical comedy, which is mainly an art of

exposure. He places his characters in certain situation in which they learn the deeper secrets of their own hearts. Another notable point is that the heroine is often superior to the hero in the comedies and this is clearly noticeable in the middle comedies. Moreover, many of the Shakespearean comedies also introduce a Fool or Clown. He is drawn partly from life and partly from literature. He may be called the direct development of the Vice of the Morality Plays, and he is also the theatrical version of the professional comic fool or jester. The Clown keeps the comic interest of the play alive though often he bears no integral relation to the main plot. Music is another significant characteristic of a Shakespearean comedy.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Do you agree that the real strength of Shakespearean comedy lies in his art of Characterisation?

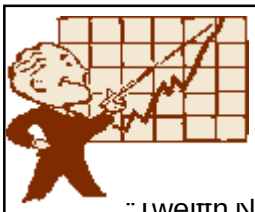
Q 2: What are the characteristics of Shakespearean comedy?

9.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *TWELFTH NIGHT*

John Manningham, the contemporary diarist saw a performance of the play *Twelfth Night* in the month of February 1602. It was first printed in the Folio of 1623. Its immediate source might be, asnoted by many critics, is the story of 'Apolonius and Silla' in Barnabe Riche's *Farewell to Military Profession.* This is an adaptation of Francoise Belleforest's French version of a novella by Bandello. And Bandello's novella was based on an Italian comedy *Gl Inganniti* (the Deceived). Thus, the remotest possible source of this play is an Italian play, particularly for the Olivia-Orsino-Viola-Sebastian plot. However, it is important to remember that Shakespeare's knowledge of the Italian language was not so great and it was highly unlikely that he could read this Italian play and there is no evidence that translations of such Italian plays were available to him. However, Shakespeare might also have been well-conversant with Bandello's and Belleforest's collections. He might have made some subtle artistic changes here and there from the

original sources but it is almost a consensus among the scholars and critics that the sub-plot and its characters are Shakespeare's own creation.

Shakespeare's title for the play is quite significant. The main title, *Twelfth Night* may refer to the night of the twelfth day after Christmas on which the Church celebrates the religious festival of Epiphany, the Manifestation of Christ. As many critics have noted, this particular play was prepared for an entertainment of that night since the festival was one of rejoicing and good fellowship. The play was probably performed for the first time on the night of Epiphany February 2, 1602. Manningham has made an entry in his diary in this way – "At our feast, we had a play called 'Twelfth Night' or 'What You Will.' There was another evidence that the play was acted before a gathering of lawyers soon after Christmas in that year. Shakespeare, who felt the pulse of his audience, too correctly seems to have taken enough care to make his play suitable for Christmas entertainment. He has given the play a cosmopolitan aura. We see that Sir Toby is a typical hard working, foxhunting English squire while the Duke and Olivia have Italian flavour. The composite nature of the play seems to point towards the second title, "What You Will." We see that different elements are cleverly presented and artistically blended; there is the spirit of romance of comedy, of force, of satire, even of morality. The curious readers or the audience may take it as a whole and call it "Twelfth Night" or "What You Will." In fact, the play is endowed with a rich complexity.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Comment on the significance of the title "Twelfth Night"?

9.5 READING THE PLAY *TWELFTH NIGHT*

Twelfth Night has always been accorded a high place among Shakespeare's comedies. You will see that the charm and exquisite delicacy of the character of Viola saturate the play with a romantic tone. However, the great appeal of the play seems to lie on the comical side, that is, in the

immortal characters of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, in Feste, a peculiar but typical Shakespearean clown, in Maria, in the glorious fooling of the plot against the steward and the minor comedy of errors put upon Viola and Sebastian. Many critics have put forward the opinion that *Twelfth Night* is perhaps the most graceful and harmonious comedy Shakespeare ever wrote.

9.6 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Act I

Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, speaks of his deep love for the countess, Olivia Valentina who has turned down his offer of love as she has sworn to retire into private life for seven years in memory of her late brother. Orsino is somewhat surprised at her dedication but hopes that she will change. Viola, the daughter of a noblemen, has been shipwrecked, but has safely landed on the coast of Illyria. She does not know the fate of her brother, Sebastian who was also in the ship. The captain of the ship consoles her saying that her brother might be safe somewhere. He also informs her that Duke Orsino governs there and that he is courting a lady who has entered seclusion. Viola decides to serve Orsino being disguised as a page, and pays the captain to make the arrangement. At Olivia's residence Sir Toby Belch, Maria and Andrew Aguecheek are having a conversation. Sir Toby complains of the vows Olivia has made. Maria, Olivia's chambermaid, suggests that Sir Toby and his visiting friend, Andrew Aguecheek, who hopes to woo Olivia, should lead less riotous lives for her mistress dislikes their drinking behaviour. Aguecheek who is very despondent at seeing so little of Olivia and knowing Duke Orsino's interest in her, decides to return home the following day. But sir Toby manages to persuade him to remain a little longer by telling him that Olivia disdains the Duke. Viola, being disguised as Cesario, has been for three days in the Duke's service and Valentine tells her that the Duke has been very pleased with her. The Duke appears and sends Cesario to try to persuade Olivia to marry him. Once alone, Viola muses on her distress; she has fallen in love with the man in whose behalf she must woo. Maria rebukes Feste, Olivia's jester, for his absence. Olivia appears with her steward, Malvolio. She seems to be angry with Feste for

playing truant but Feste regains her confidence by some witty remarks. Olivia also criticises Malvolio for his egoistical nature and behaviour. Maria announces that a messenger from Illyria has arrived. Olivia, at once, sends Maria and Malvolio to keep him away but Malvolio comes back and says that the boy-messenger is unwilling to depart. Olivia ultimately decides to meet the youth who is Viola in the guise of Cesario. Cesario makes a spirited but unsuccessful attempt to plead the cause of the Duke. However, interestingly enough, Olivia is attracted by the good looks of Cesario and falls in love with the supposed page. She makes a pretext of seeing that Cesario has dropped his ring and sends Malvolio after him with a ring of her own thinking that this will give her a chance to meet Cesario again.

Act II

Viola's brother, Sebastian has been rescued from the wreck but he thinks that his sister has been drowned. He bids goodbye to Antonio and sets out for the court of Orsino. Although Antonio has enemies there, he decides to follow Sebastian to help him in times of possible danger. Malvolio gives Olivia's ring to Cesario, (the disguised Viola) and Viola realises that Olivia has fallen in love with her (Cesario). She reflects on the complexity of the situation: she loves Orsino, Orsino loves Olivia, and Olivia loves her, and she observes that only time will have to untie this triangle which she herself cannot. Toby, Andrew and Feste are making merry in a wild scene of drinking and revelry when Maria enters and tries to unite them. Soon after Malvolio comes and chides them for their unruly behaviour. All of them do not like the manners of Malvolio. And, when he is gone, Maria proposes that they should play a trick on him to humiliate him. She will write a love-letter to him in Olivia's handwriting and hopes that he will make a fool of himself when he responds to the supposed love of his mistress. Viola (disguised Cesario) informs the Duke that Olivia's attitude towards him remains unchanged. The Duke has a long conversation with her on the subject of love and she delicately speaks of her affection for someone who resembles the Duke. Orsino fails to understand this as his mind is too much pre-occupied with the thoughts of Olivia. He then sends Cesario on another mission to Olivia with a present. At Olivia's garden the opportunity

comes for Maria to put into execution her already proposed practical joke on Malvolio. She conceals Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Fabian in the box-tree so that they can spy on the steward. She also plants a letter at a convenient place so that Malvolio may find it and assume that it has been dropped accidentally. The letter is written by Maria and is ambiguously worded in such a way that it is a message of love from Olivia. Malvolio comes and imagines to have married Olivia. He envisions a future when as her husband he will chastise Sir Toby. Then, he reads the letter and responds as predicted. He will follow the instructions given in the letter behaving oddly and wearing peculiar clothes to signify that he has received the message from Olivia. Malvolio then leaves and the 'conspirators' rejoice in the success of their scheme.

Act III

Viola (as Cesario), is having a witty conversation with Feste. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew take her to Olivia whom she is visiting on behalf of Orsino. When she discharges her errand to Olivia, Olivia confesses her love to Cesario who rejects her suit and she accepts the rejection as her melancholy lot. Sir Andrew expresses his desire to abandon his suit to Olivia as she has become inclined to Cesario. However, Sir Toby and Fabian reassure him asserting that Olivia's behaviour towards the young man is intended to create jealousy in his mind. In a spirit of fun, Sir Toby encourages Sir Andrew to challenge Cesario in a duel. Sir Andrew leaves to prepare for the challenge to the youth. Maria appears with the news that Malvolio is ridiculously dressed in response to the spurious love-letter and is about to meet Olivia. They all run to watch. Antonio has become worried about Sebastian's wandering alone in the city and has followed him for his protection. Sebastian thanks him. Antonio, however, tells Sebastian that it is dangerous for him to be seen in Illyria as once he was an enemy to Duke Orsino. So, he decides to seclude himself in an inn and meet Sebastian there later on.Olivia summons Malvolio to come to her and Maria tells her that Malvolio's conduct has become rather strange. Malvolio comes dressed in an extraordinary manner (as has been suggested in the forged letter). Being garishly costumed he leers and flirts with Olivia, which mystifies her.

She concludes that Malvolio might be mad and instructs Sir Toby to look after Malvolio. Sir Toby, carries the joke even further. He treats Malvolio as a lunatic and has him locked up in a dark room. Sir Andrew appears with a comical letter challenging Cesario to a duel. He then departs as Olivia and Viola (as Cesario) appear. Olivia repeatedly offers her love and Cesario insists that she should grant it to Orsino. Olivia leaves and sir Toby and Fabian remain to stir up the duel between Andrew and Cesario. Just at this critical moment, Antonio appears. He thinks that it is Sebastian who is involved (being deceived by Viola's likeness to her brother) and wishes to fight Sir Andrew himself. At this juncture, however, the Duke's officers appear and arrest Antonio for his former exploits against the Duke. As he is being taken away, he asks Viola for the purse, which he has given to Sebastian and her naturally, denies any knowledge of it. As she is called Sebastian by Antonio, she realises that her brother must be alive.

Act IV

Olivia has sent Feste to bring Cesario. He meets Sebastian and being deceived by the resemblance brings him before Olivia. On the way, however, Sebastian is attacked by Sir Andrew who still thinks that he is dealing with timid Cesario. Sir Andrew strikes Sebastian who responds by beating him. Sir Toby intervenes as Olivia appears ordering everyone else to leave, she wants to talk with Sebastian whom she also believes to be Cesario. She apologises for the assault and invites him inside with her. Sebastian is amazed at what was happening around him and goes with Olivia to her chamber. Feste disguises himself as one Sir Topas, a Puritan clergyman and meets Malvolio in prison. He insists that Malvolio is mad and disapproves the steward's assertion and his performance, but says that it is the high time to end the joke. Feste again visits Malvolio, this time undisguised. Malvolio asks him for pen and paper so that he can write to Olivia about his predicament. Feste teases him before agreeing to help. Sebastian is musing rather happily over the bewildering fact that he is apparently loved by a beautiful noblewoman. Olivia appears with a priest and suggests that she and Sebastian should immediately go through a marriage ceremony.

Act V

Orsino calls on Olivia with Viola (disguised as Cesario) and other followers. Antonio appears in the custody of the officers and is identified as the Duke's enemy. He tells of Sebastian's disloyalty referring to Viola's behaviour when he called on her at a street in the city. Orsino does not believe him because he knows that Cesario has been with him during that time. Olivia arrives and again rejects Orsino. Orsino becomes hysterical and says that he will kill Cesario not only because he knows Olivia's fondness for him but also because he loves the youth himself, and he seeks the pain of sacrifice. Viola declares herself to die for the Duke and Olivia cries out to her husband, as she believes Cesario to be. Viola denies this and Olivia summons the priest who performed her marriage two hours earlier. As the Duke berates Cesario, Sir Andrew and Sir Toby appear, wounded, claiming to have been assaulted by Cesario. They are followed by Sebastian whose appearance confounds everyone. Sebastian and Viola identify each other and rejoice in their union. The Duke then declares that he will marry Viola. Malvolio is summoned and he shows Olivia the letter which he believes, she has sent to him. Olivia realises that Maria has written it. Fabian defends Maria, saying that the plot was Sir Toby's idea and that Toby has already married Maria. Feste teases Malvolio who storms out vowing revenge. The Duke declares that a double wedding shall soon occur and all go indoors to celebrate except Feste who is left alone to sing a song.

In this final scene, as expected in a Shakespearean comedy, the misunderstandings on which the play has been built are now cleared up. For the first time, all the characters come together, Viola and Sebastian being side by side, the misconceptions are removed. The play thus winds up happily for everybody except Malvolio.

9.7 CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE PLAY

It is important to note that *Twelfth Night* was the last of Shakespeare's mature comedies. In this play, Shakespeare assembles some stock features of contemporary comedy like separated twins, disguises, obstacles

to love, and freshly arranges them in a sequence of events. And all these are accompanied with a sub-plot with a comic villain. The characters look like exaggerated examples of human nature placed in comically preposterous situations, which we willingly accept as necessary for the retelling of a familiar tale. Malvolio deserves his lot simply because he arrogantly and egoistically refuses to enter the fun or rather wants to destroy the fun. However, it should be noted that Malvolio is simply a nuisance and not a potential threat to the comic atmosphere of the play. The strong opposition to this comic atmosphere seems to have come from Orsino and Olivia, two of the lovers themselves who inhibit the fulfilment of love assuming wholly impractical self-images as a romantic lover and a mourning lady respectively. Their self-defeating posture suggests that there is something wrong in the idyllic and romantic world of Illyria. Some other important characters also inspire a certain disquiet or disturbance as well. Viola, the most clear-sighted and honest figure, is nevertheless tangled in the lie of her disguise which prevents her from expressing her love. Sir Toby, for all his humour, is a parasite and a victimiser of the hapless Sir Andrew as well as of Malvolio. Even the apparently frivolous Feste betrays a weary cynicism at times as his final song suggests. More importantly, Malvolio's imprisonment and humiliation seem so out of proportion to his offence that they lend the comic sub-plot a vicious air, which adds to our uneasy sense that the play's comedy is darker than it seems at first.

It may also be observed that this disturbing quality is subtly reinforced by the repeated motif of madness. Olivia asserts that Sir Toby "speaks nothing but madness" (I.v.107) and Feste pretending to excuse Toby's drunkenness allows that "he is but mad yet and the fool shall look to the madman" (I.v. 138-139). When Sebastian arrives at Illyria only to be pointedly assaulted, he cries out, "Are all these people mad" (IV.i.26), and when Olivia mysteriously treats him as her lover, he exclaims: "Either I am mad or else this is a dream" (IV.i.60). Malvolio is especially associated with lunacy. His ludicrous behaviour towards Olivia induced by Maria's letter is received as "midsummer madness". And later on, he is imprisoned as a lunatic, which was the commonest treatment for mental disorder in Shakespeare's time.

These elements have led some critics to regard the play as a social commentary resembling in spirit *Troilous and Cressida* or the satirical comedies of Ben Jonson. Olivia and Orsino may be taken as comic portraits of egoists—Olivia for her comic withdrawal from life and the Duke in his absurd pose as a romantic lover. Most of the Illyrians can be seen as socially ambitious and thus fit subjects for satire. Toby is a vulgar glutton who seeks a continued life of ease in Olivia's household; Malvolio, Sir Andrew and Maria each seeks a profitable marriage. Only Viola alone offers honest love in a society where affectation dominates.

However, the satirical tone does not dominate the play, as Viola is very carefully made free from the acid taste of satire. There is no doubt that she too is vulnerable to love's irrationality to some extent but unlike the others, she recognises and acknowledges her blindness. She admits that the situation is beyond her control as soon as the three loves – her love for Orsino, Orsino's for Olivia, and Olivia's for her have become evident – "O time thou must untangle this, not I/It is too hard a knot for me to entire." She knows what she wants, that is, Orsino's love and she maintains her disguise as the Duke's page and waits for a miracle. In doing so, she becomes a splendid example of the Shakespearean comic heroine, resourceful and aggressive in the pursuit of her man. Viola's effect on her fellow lovers is positive also. As the spirited Cesario, her youthful good looks and imaginative compliments to Olivia bring out the would-be recluse's capacity to love. Similarly, her devotion and loyalty to Orsino slowly and gradually make him prepared for genuine love. In fact, she rescues the two leading figures of Illyria from their own illusions and this paves the way for the happy ending.

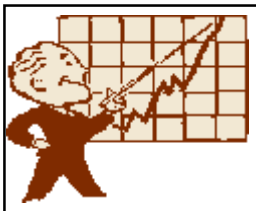
However, the tremors of unease accompany the development of the comic complication that reaches its breaking point only in the final scene. Then equally disturbingly, it generates some potential violence in some fronts. Orsino hysterically threatens to 'sacrifice the lamb that I do love' (5.1.128) by killing Cesario. The crisis is heightened by the appearance of Sir Andrew and Sir Toby both of whom have been wounded in actual violence. Sebastian's entry provides Viola her missing brother, the arrival of Olivia's new husband and the correct identification of Cesario. It also makes possible

the final alignment of the lovers. Sebastian's first encounter with Olivia in IV. i. confirms his power to dissolve the network of ambiguity that has entrapped the other lovers. In fact, more subtly and more significantly, Sebastian represents fulfilment in the incomplete lives of the other characters. He embodies the positive capacity for love that has been needed to calm down the disquieting aura which has been disturbing Illyria.

Yet our feeling of uneasiness is not totally dispelled as there remains the difficult resolution of the sub-plot. The 'Problem of Malvolio', as it has long been termed, has attracted the attention of the critics. In the 17th century, the play was sometimes known as 'Malvolio' and in the 19th century Charles Lamb found 'tragic interest in the catastrophe of this character'. Of course, this seems to be an over statement for Malvolio who lacks the grandeur of a tragic hero. Malvolio's unjust imprisonment definitely raises a moral question; in fact, his undeniably shabby treatment or his unrepentant final response cannot be properly reconciled with the happy ending. It is true that Malvolio is a comic character, the villain of a rollicking sub-plot powered by the wit of Maria and the lusty excesses of Sir Toby. He seems to have deserved his punishment and it has been delivered in a comical fashion. Nevertheless, his anger at his humiliation makes him humanly sympathetic and his raging departure, though looks ugly, and seems justified leaving us with an ongoing sense of disturbance. Shakespeare's purpose here seems to be subtle but effective. Our appreciation of the loving aura that closes the play is strengthened by our simultaneous sense of sadness that happiness is never pure.

Feste provides the play's anti-romantic undertone in his bitter song (V. i. 388-407) which outlines the sad life of a drunkard. For him, the loving resolution of the main plot seems to count for nothing: "The rain, it rained every day." Feste's song expresses the world. But it also reminds us of the limitations of comedy, which has been part of Shakespeare's message in other ways. Though the words leave us with an echo of the harmony of a happy ending, the final stanza of the song has another function; to end the play formally and send the audience on its way. Like an epilogue, it makes a bid and promises that "actors will strive to please you every day." (V.

i.407). The denouement suggests that although the play has unsettling aspects, the triumph of love is *Twelfth Night's* major theme.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Comment briefly on the motif of madness in the play.

Q 5: What do you think about Malvolio's humiliation in the play? Is it just?

Q 6: What is the love triangle in the play?

Q 7: What are the characteristics of Shakespeare's comedy available in this play?

9.7.1 Major Themes

Majority of the critics tend to ascertain that an important characteristics of Shakespearean comedy is the comic exploration of the nature of love. It is often said that love leading to marriage is the persistent theme of Shakespearean comedy. Of course, lovers are made to suffer because the course of true love never runs smooth in Shakespearean comedy. However, the end is invariably happy. In this context, it seems important to note that Shakespeare presents both the happy and darker aspects of life. As far as *Twelfth Night* is concerned, it may also be called a typical Shakespearean comedy having the theme of love as the main point of interest. It is significant to note that the play opens with a reference to love made by Duke Orsino, a love-sick melancholy young man infatuated to Olivia, a countess who is unwilling to reciprocate: "If music be the food of love, play on,/Give me the excess of it, that surfeiting/The apperite may sicken and so die."

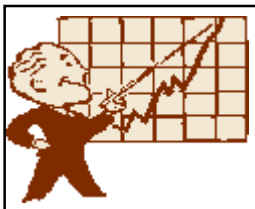
Olivia seems to be a bit egoistical; rather inimical to love as she takes her emotional stance of mourning her dead brother for comparatively a long period of time. Interestingly enough, Viola herself, falls in love with Duke Orsino though she cannot express

her passion and feelings, and on the other hand, Olivia falls in love with Viola (disguised as Cesario and looking like a beautiful youth), and is looking for chances to meet her and her passion becomes deeper and deeper as time goes on. Thus, a difficult love-triangle develops as Viola herself assesses her situation saying, “O time thou must untangle this not I/It is too hard a knot for me to untie” (II.ii. 39-40). However, as the action of the play moves forward, Olivia makes a bold declaration of love for Cesario and when she meets Sebastian (Viola’s brother who bears a strong resemblance to his sister), she at once takes him to the altar of marriage though she recognises the irrationality of her course—‘Blame not this haste of mine.’ Similarly, Orsino being wrapped up in his self-image as a melancholic rejected lover and becoming impressed with Cesario’s devotion and sincerity, develops a fondness for him and when Cesario’s actual identity is revealed he does not hesitate to take Viola as his deserving wife. Thus, we see that Olivia and Sebastian, Orsino and Viola are united in wedlock satisfying Shakespeare’s comprehensive comic design. It is also reported that Sir Toby and Maria are also going to be married soon.

However, it might be an over simplification to state that *Twelfth Night* is simply a romantic comedy on the theme of love. One may also be justified to say that it is also a mild satirical comedy to a certain extent. In this context, it seems worthwhile to mention that in Shakespeare’s time, there were two conceptions of comedy. The more popular conception was that a comedy started in trouble and ended in happiness. The other conception was that a comedy was an imitation of the common errors of human life presented in a scornful and ridiculous way. These two conceptions were obviously romantic and satirical respectively. Shakespeare seems to have been conscious of both these types of comedy when he was writing his own. We can easily notice that much of the play’s comic interest comes from this sub-plot dealing with the members of Olivia’s household - Sir Toby Belch, her uncle, Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Toby’s

friend, Malvolio, Olivia's pompous steward, Maria, the waiting gentle woman and the clown, Feste. Though a trusted domestic servant, Malvolio is a stern enemy to all kinds of merriment and joyful pursuits representing the spoil-sport spirit of intolerant Puritanism embracing its hypocrisy. Such people were the targets of satire as they were open enemies to the contemporary theatrical activities along with enthusiasm. So, the gulling or hoodwinking of Malvolio may also be said to be an important theme in *Twelfth Night*. Being disgusted with Malvolio's contempt for revelry and merry-making, the other members of Olivia's household improvise a crude stratagem to expose Malvolio in his true colours. Maria, the intelligent waiting woman, who had a remarkable insight into the steward's character, contrives the plot. In fact, Malvolio's behaviour becomes so odd and alarming that ultimately he is subjected to the primitive shock treatment reserved for Elizabethan lunatics – "cast into a cell as dark as ignorance and is compelled to lie in a bed of straw." Malvolio is again humiliated by Feste in prison in the guise of Sir Topas. However, very soon it was realised that Malvolio's punishment and humiliation were excessive and ultimately he was released though he swears revenge against such humiliation.

Thus, *Twelfth Night* seems to be in some degrees at least an imitation of the common errors of human life presented in a ridiculous and scornful way. In other words, Malvolio's intolerant Puritan attitude towards the healthy pleasures of life, his hypocrisy and pompousness are put into satiric exposure. And this ultimately leads to the 'appearance and reality' theme which is also a common feature of Shakespearean comedies.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 8: Is *Twelfth Night* only a romantic comedy?

Q 9: What attitude does Malvolio represent?

9.7.2 Major Characters

The following are the important characters in the play *Twelfth Night.*

Viola:

Viola seems to be the most important character of the play *Twelfth Night*. She shows admirable loyalty in pressing Orsino's suit to Olivia even when it goes against her love for him. She displays no boastful courage when threatened with a duel but shows the shortcoming and natural weakness of a feminine nature. Apart from her loyalty and sincere love for Orsino, she seems to act like a guardian angel for him. When Orsino, being hysterical over Olivia's continued rejection, proposes to kill Cesario, she says to him: "I... to do you rest, a thousand deaths to die." (V. i. 130-131). It is noteworthy that Viola's attitude towards love is much more wholesome and dignified than that of Orsino and Olivia, and her influence on both these characters seems to be positive. Similarly, Orsino being wrapped up in his self-image as a melancholic rejected lover, becomes impressed with her devotion and sincerity and then develops a fondness for her, which ultimately transforms into husbandly affection. In fact, Viola liberates Olivia and Orsino from their misconceived notions and actions and thus brings out the happiest of conclusions to the play. Viola is one of Shakespeare's most attractive heroines. She is plucky, adventurous and committed to the pursuit of love. Her modesty, mental strength and determination ensure us every moment that her love will surely triumph. She is full of energy and vitality by which she has been able to remove the passivity of Orsino and Olivia.

Olivia:

Olivia is a wealthy lady of Illyria who mistakenly falls in love with Cesario (disguised Viola) and ultimately marries Sebastian, Viola's brother. She is loved by Duke Orsino but she rejects him and other suitors simply because she prefers a scheduled life for some time

to allay the grief of her dead brother. Like Orsino she seems to obstruct the course of the triumph of love as depicted in the play. She moves from one illusion to another beginning with a wilful withdrawal into seclusion and denial of love and then falling into a passion, which is based on a mistake. Only the course of events beginning with the appearance of Sebastian correct matters for her because she is never aware of her mistakes. Olivia seems to be a bit whimsical and irrational who likes to have ones way in many matters. In this regard, she seems to have something in common with her steward, Malvolio who also scorns pleasure and love. However, it will be a mistake to say that she is temperamentally melancholy all the time. She displays her sound common sense and healthy outlook on life when she says to Malvolio: “O you are sick to self-love, Malvolio and taste with a distempered appetite.” (I. i. 89-90) We also see that she forgets her brother as soon as she falls under the charm of Cesario and her pent-up instinct for love plunges her into a frenzy though her passion is misplaced. It may be said that like most of the characters of Shakespeare, Olivia’s character is also in a process of growth as the dramatic action moves forward. However, Olivia is a clear-sighted, cultural, sensible and intelligent woman to a great extent and is fully aware of her status and honour having a sound commonsense.

Orsino:

Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, at first, loves Olivia, the countess and then repeatedly rejected by her, finally loves and marries Viola. Orsino seems to be an image of the melancholy lovers of Shakespearean comedies. He cannot easily accept the fact that his passion for Olivia is misplaced. When we first see him in the play, he displays an amusing distortion of a melancholy lover. In an absurd romantic pose, he demands music to satiate his love-sick soul and insists that a particular phrase should be repeated and then immediately orders that music should be stopped saying: “It is not so sweet now as it was before.” (I.i.8)Thus, Orsino likes to remain

absorbed in his own fantasies. His whimsical and egoistical nature is again observed when he talks of killing Cesario in a frenzied mood after being repeatedly rejected by Olivia. However, towards the end of the play, his instincts direct him to the right path and once Viola's identity is revealed, he becomes ready to love and marry her. Viola also sees in him something worthy of her love. By all means, Orsino is an interesting character through whom Shakespeare illustrates the capacity of man, if he so wishes, to find a positive meaning of life through love.

Malvolio:

Malvolio is undoubtedly one of the most interesting characters of *Twelfth Night*. He is definitely the focal point in the comic sub-plot comprising Malvolio himself, Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Maria, Feste and Olivia. He is such a strongly drawn character that in the 17th century, sometimes the play was known as Malvolio. He seems to be an ordinary comic villain, an obvious misfit who mistreats others and in the end is humiliated by a crude stratagem. As we see in the play itself, Malvolio seems to be an austere, serious-minded person who rejects humour and love in favour of stern coldness and a consuming personal ambition. His dislike of merriment and his rigorously sober dress and behaviour seem to justify his name, which in Italian means "Ill-will." These features were typical of the 17th century Puritans who were rather inimical to art, literature and theatre and other healthy amusements. He sternly opposes the frivolity of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste in Act II. Scene iii. inspiring sir Toby's protesting retort: "Dost thou think because thou art virtuous. There should be no more cakes and etc." (II. Iii. 114-115). This was a strong assault on his dignity which makes Malvolio angry. He threatens Maria, the maid of Olivia, thereby triggering the plot that brings him down. However, we should acknowledge that Malvolio does his best to instill some kind of domestic order into his employer's household. But his stern method and Puritan attitude antagonised sir Toby, Sir Andrew, Feste and Maria who are also active members of Olivia's household.

However, it may be said that Malvolio's punishment and humiliation have become excessive in comparison to his offence. Despite all his unwholesome traits and features, he is not a serious threat to the hilarity of the comedy.

Sir Andrew Aguecheek:

Sir Andrew Aguecheek is an important character of the play so far as the comic sub-plot of the play is concerned. He stays in the household of Olivia foolishly cherishing a secret ambition to marry her. He is easily gulled and exploited by his friend, Sir Toby who professes to help him in his suit to Olivia. In fact, he is a foolish knight and a ridiculous figure who does not inspire any feelings of pity and sympathy. We see that Sir Andrew fancies himself as a wit but actually he is a dolt. He thinks that he might be popular among the ladies but in reality he is skinny and disgusting. He poses himself to be a fighter though proves to be a coward. He is gulled by Sir Toby in arranging a challenge to Cesario (disguised Viola) but is then terrified by Sir Toby's fictitious accounts of his valour and fencing skill. He meets Sebastian and strikes him mistaking him for Cesario and is badly beaten as a result.

Sir Toby Belch:

Sir Toby Belch is the drunken uncle of Olivia. He establishes himself as a mentor to Sir Andrew Aguecheek who regards him as an ideal gentleman. As we see in the play, Sir Toby is a self-indulgent gentleman who drinks heavily for the sake of pleasure and with Maria, Sir Andrew and Fabian he represents the jocular, festive spirit of life which ultimately triumphs over the cold humourless rigidity of Malvolio. His joyful temperament is easily discernible in his very first speech when he complains of Olivia's mourning for her dead brother, saying "what a plague means my niece to take the death of a brother thus? I am sure care is an enemy to life." (I.iii.1-3)However, one can easily observe a darker side in Toby. His selfishness is easily noticeable when he exploits both his friend, Sir Andrew and his niece, Olivia.

He spends the foolish Andrew's money pretending that he is promoting his ambitious proposal of marriage to Olivia. However, Sir Toby is not totally devoid of generosity and human sympathy. He realises that the teasing of Malvolio in the prison was going to the extreme and so he says: "I would, we were well rid of this Knavery" (IV. ii. 60-62). We feel happy and satisfied when in Act V it is reported that he has been married to Maria, an intelligent and spirited young woman. Sir Toby has his faults, but is, also a symbol of the values of humour and joyous living and is therefore, a representative of the triumphant spirit of comedy.

Maria:

Maria is endowed with a remarkable insight into human nature. Her utterances regarding Malvolio seem to be absolutely correct when she describes him as "So crammed as he thinks, with excellences that it is his ground of faith that all look on, love him." In the play, Maria functions as the chambermaid of Olivia who performs her duties sincerely. In fact, with Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Faliban, Maria represents the spirit of fun that opposes the humourless severity of Malvolio in the comic sub-plot. She contrives the plot against Malvolio, writing the love-letter in Olivia's hand and leaving it where he will find it. It is she who suggests to Olivia that Malvolio's strange behaviour might be the result of his madness and it is she who persuades Feste to impersonate Sir Topas and torment Malvolio in the prison. At the conclusion of the play, we learn that Sir Toby has married Maria on being impressed by her wit. We feel that this is a befitting marital union, not simply the pairing of characters at the conclusion of a comic play. Maria contributes significantly to the comic spirit of the play.

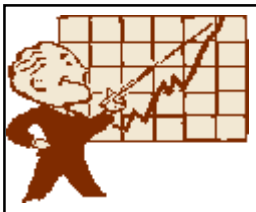
Feste:

Feste is a jester or a professional fool in the household of Olivia. He represents the play's spirit of festivity which eventually triumphs over the steward Malvolio's chilly ill humour. Feste is a ready-witted, entertaining rogue who has an enviable capacity for looking into the

reality of things. He frequents the courts of both Olivia and Orsino, encounters both Viola and Sebastian, challenges the first appearance of Malvolio, and takes part in the revelry of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. He also advances the comic sub-plot by teasing Malvolio in the prison while being disguised as Sir Topas. As an officially designated Fool, he performs his obligations admirably. He accurately diagnoses Orsino's melancholy and Olivia's obsessive mourning.

Sebastian:

Though slightly sketched, Sebastian is an important character in the comic resolution and happy ending of the play. He is the twin brother of Viola and the husband of Olivia. The character of Sebastian may be seen as a strong contrast to the other characters of the play. There is a downright simplicity and directness about him, which stand out, in refreshing contrast to the current of intrigue which runs elsewhere. We see that Sebastian is capable of offering strong and viable friendship to Antonio. His direct and simple mental make-up is seen when Olivia mistakes when a beautiful stranger offers him unexpected and violent love but soon he accepts her as his wife with calmness. When he is baited by Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, he returns their blows as readily as he returned Olivia's love. No doubt, he has a strong resemblance to Viola as a twin, but he has even a stronger resemblance to her honesty of purpose.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: Who is Feste? What does he represent?

Q 11: What is the significance of Sebastian in the play?



9.8 LET US SUM UP

By this time, you have seen that in *Twelfth Night* Shakespeare seems to have achieved a wonderful harmony between romance and

comedy. This play has also been regarded as one of the most delightful of Shakespeare's comedies. It has some amount of satire, but it is aimed at the ludicrous rather than the ridiculous. It makes us laugh at the follies of humankind and never allows us to bear any ill will against them. Moreover, the play is enriched with a gentle melancholy and lyrical atmosphere, which is captured in two of Feste's beautiful songs: "Come away death" and "When I was a little boy." You can enjoy the play in many different ways for its genial humour, for its lyrical grace, for its mixture of fun and seriousness, and, above all, for its positive affirmation of love and human sympathy. It seems as if Shakespeare is saying to us "Enjoy what you will." Furthermore, by a judicious mixture of prose with verse in the dialogue, Shakespeare has made the talk of the characters seem natural and convincing in comparison with the stilted and monotonous rhyme of his first efforts as a playwright.



9.9 FURTHER READING

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9.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Yes… …Shakespeare's creation of living characters against a background of romance, marvel and magic is a distinguishing mark of Shakespeare as a comedy writer… …out of the situation in which they are portrayed, the characters learn the deeper secrets of their own hearts.

Ans to Q 2: Most of his comedies may be called romantic… …they show a perfect harmony of realism and fantasy, naturalism and supernaturalism, fact and fiction… …the strength also lies in Shakespeare's characterisation… …his characters learn the deeper secrets of their own hearts in certain situations… …introduction of Fool or Clown.

Ans to Q 3: The play's title is really significant… …*Twelfth Night* refers to the 12th night after Christmas in which the Church celebrates the religious festival of Epiphany… …One possible explanation is that this play was written for an entertainment at one such night to rejoice at good fellowship.

Ans to Q 4: The motif of madness actually serves as a social commentary… …The word madness is used quite a number of times in the play… …but Shakespeare may also have intended a satire on the Illyrians who are socially ambitious.

Ans to Q 5: Malvolio's imprisonment and humiliation adds impetus to the comic sub-plot… …Malvolio's unjust imprisonment definitely raises a moral question… …but his anger at his humiliation and vows for revenge seem justified… … he is a sensitive man and a rounded character.

Ans to Q 6: Viola loves for Orsino… … Orsino loves Olivia… …and Olivia loves Viola who is disguised as Cesario.

Ans to Q 7: The *Twelfth Night* is the last of Shakespeare's mature comedies… …the features of comedies like separated twins, disguises, obstacles to love are clearly prevalent in this play… …and all these are accompanied with a sub-plot with a comic villain.

Ans to Q 8: Not exactly… …Shakespeare, in this play, presents both the happy and darker aspects of life… …but this play is a typical Shakespearean comedy having the theme of love as the main point of interest.

Ans to Q 9: Malvolio presents the Puritan attitude towards the healthy pleasures of life.

Ans to Q 10: Feste is a jester or a professional fool in the household of Olivia. He represents the play's spirit of festivity which eventually triumphs over the steward Malvolio's chilly ill humour.

Ans to Q 11: Sebastian as a character is a strong contrast to the other characters of the play… …there is a downright simplicity and directness about him… …we see that Sebastian is capable of offering strong and viable friendship to Antonio.



9.11 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: *Twelfth Night* seems to be a drama of love. Justify your views.

Q 2: What are the important characteristics of Shakespearean comedy? Discuss *Twelfth Night* as a typical Shakespearean Comedy.

Q 3: Write a critical note on Shakespeare's interfusion and integration of the elements of romance, satire and pure comedy in *Twelfth Night*.

Q 4: Comment on Shakespeare's handling of the sub-plot, and the role played by the minor characters in *Twelfth Night*.

Q 5: Discuss the significance of the title *Twelfth Night* with reference to its various sources.

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UNIT 10: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *THE TEMPEST* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

10.1 Learning Objectives

10.2 Introduction

10.3 William Shakespeare: The Playwright

10.4 Sources of the Play *The Tempest*

10.5 Act wise Summary of the Play

10.6 Let us Sum up

10.7 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

10.8 Possible Questions

10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- identify the important sources of the play *The Tempest*
- make a summary of the play
- describe the importance of the play *The Tempest* in the context of the period discussed
- assess the significance of Shakespeare as a playwright on the basis of the play *The Tempest.*

10.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit deals with William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* which is the fourth, final, and the finest of Shakespeare's late romances. It is a complex work whose plot structure serves to draw attention to wider aesthetic and philosophical themes. King Alonso of Naples and his entourage sail home for Italy after attending his daughter's wedding in Tunis, Africa. They encounter a violent storm, or tempest. The ship in which they are sailing is wrecked and the crew are washed ashore on a strange island inhabited by the magician Prospero who has deliberately conjured up the storm. Prospero is in fact the rightful Duke of Milan who had been put to sea to die with his

three-year-old daughter Miranda by his brother, Antonio, who was in league with King Alonso of Naples. When Prospero and Miranda finally reached the island they found it inhabited by Ariel, an airy spirit, and the ugly, half-human Caliban. Caliban deeply resents Prospero as he believes that he is the rightful ruler of the island. It is because this island had a sinister history up till then for a witch named Sycorax had been banished there. She gave birth to a monster Caliban and enraged with Ariel who was an airy spirit, had imprisoned him in a tree. She had died without setting him free. Prospero freed Ariel and he became his servant thereafter. Though Prospero tried to educate and civilise Caliban, he developed into a vengeful creature, hating his benefactor but forced to obey him. After you finish reading the unit, you will learn that Caliban plots with King Alonso's confidants to murder Prospero. But, the play finally ends with almost all the offenders repenting, Prospero regaining his dukedom, Ariel being set free, the island is left to Caliban. Thus, a happy ending was brought to the play.

10.3 WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: THE PLAYWRIGHT

In the first unit of this Block, you have read in detail about the life and works of Shakespeare. This is just a recapitulation of what you have already read. You find that except for the records of his baptism in 1564 and his burial in 1616, there is very little substantial evidence for William Shakespeare's life. Shakespeare is mentioned occasionally, in official records, in the records of the lives of his relations and friends, and in the writings of his fellow actors and dramatists, and that is all. His life and career have been more extensively researched than those of any other writer. Still, the evidences remain elusive. Shakespeare's professional life in London was marked by a number of financially advantageous arrangements that permitted him to share the profits of his acting company—the Lord Chamberlain's Company, which later came to be known as the King's Men, and its two Theatres, the Globe Theatre and the Black Friars. Shakespeare produced most of his known work between 1589 and 1613. His early plays were mainly comedies and histories until about 1608, when he wrote his tragedies—*Hamlet, King Lear, Othello* and *Macbeth.* In his last phase, he

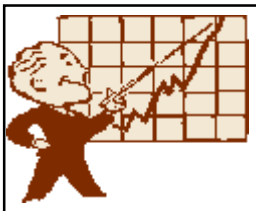
wrote tragi-comedies, also known as romances, and collaborated with other playwrights. After about 1608, Shakespeare's dramatic production waned and it seems that he spent more time in Stratford.

By 1592, he was quite well known in London theatre. The first recorded works of Shakespeare are *Richard III* and the three parts of *Henry VI*, written in the first phase when historical drama was in vogue. Besides plays, he also wrote 154 Sonnets dedicated to one Dark Lady and Mr. W. H. Shakespeare's plays are difficult to date. However, the studies of the texts suggest that plays like *Titus Andronicus*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Romeo and Juliet* etc. belong to Shakespeare's earliest period until 1594. The period 1594-98 saw the production of the middle comedies like *Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice*, and history play *Richard II*. Shakespeare's mature comedies include *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It*, and *Twelfth Night* about which you have already studied in the previous unit. In the early 17th century, Shakespeare wrote the darker comedies, sometimes called the problem plays, like *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*. Many critics believe that Shakespeare's greatest tragedies like *Hamlet*, *Othelo*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth* represent the peak of his dramatic career. In his final period, Shakespeare turned to romance or tragicomedy, and completed three major plays: *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. It is heard that Shakespeare also collaborated on two other plays, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, probably with John Fletcher.

10.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY *THE TEMPEST*

The Tempest was probably written in 1610–1611 and published in the first Folio of 1623. The play became very popular possibly because it was a great success at Court when presented in the winter of 1612-13, gracing the betrothal and nuptials of the Princess Elizabeth with the Prince Palatine Elector. You find that *The Tempest* is most likely the last play and it is remarkable for being one of the only two plays (the other being *Love's Labor's Lost*) whose plot is entirely original. No single source has so far

been established and this also supports the argument of those who claim that in writing what he might have felt to be his last stage work, he was consciously denouncing his theatrical art. Therefore, those looking for a source to the plot of this play are sure to get disappointed. Yet, one Thomas Warton in a note in his book *History of English Poetry* (1781), wrote that he had been informed by the late Mr. Collins of Chichester that Shakespeare's *Tempest* was based on a popular romance *Aurelio and Isabella* in Italian (1586). But this is not free from criticism. Others have followed the clue of a German play, *Die Schone Sidea* written by one Jacob Ayrer, in which there is a magician who is also the Prince Ludolph of the play. He has a daughter and keeps a demon. It may be that Shakespeare used Ayrer's play, for the English comedians of his time might have seen the German play *Die Schone Sidea,* and brought home the story. There are secondary sources and analogues ranging from Ovid to travel documents most notably the accounts of a tempest off the Bermudas that separated and nearly wrecked a fleet of colonial ships sailing from Plymouth to Virginia in around 1609. That Shakespeare used at least some of the pamphlets dealing with this wreck can never be disputed. The English colonial project seems to be on Shakespeare's mind throughout *The Tempest,* as almost every character, from lord Gonzalo to the drunken Stephano, ponders how he would rule the island if he were its king. Shakespeare seems also to have drawn on Montaigne's essay "Of the Cannibals," which was translated into English in 1603. The name of Prospero's servant-monster, Caliban, seems to be an anagram or derivative of "Cannibal." Thus, you will find that there is no dominant source for this play. Although many works are named there is not any particular known work in which the plot of the play can be positively traced.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What would you like to say about the source of the play *The Tempest*?

Q 2: What resemblance does *The Tempest* has with the German play *Die Schone Sidea?*

10.5 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

Act 1

The Tempest opens with a terrible storm at sea when a royal party is on board a ship. The sailors struggle to save the ship, and enraged and worried boatswain orders Alonso and his company to go below the deck. The king's councillor, Gonzalo, reminds the boatswain that he is speaking to the King, but the boatswain pays little heed to what Gonzalo said. Despite all efforts, the ship is lost. Prospero and Miranda are watching the ship caught in the storm. Miranda knows that the storm is a creation of her father and begs him to end the storm, as she cannot watch the crew suffer. Prospero assures his daughter Miranda that his actions are meant to protect her future. He also tells her the story of her birth and of their lives before they came to the island. Prospero informs that he is the rightful duke of Milan and Miranda is a princess. He also tells that he had assigned the rule of his kingdom to his brother Antonio, as he was more absorbed in studies. However, Antonio formed an alliance with the king of Naples to oust Prospero and usurp his kingdom. Prospero and his daughter were placed in a small rickety boat to die at the sea. It was with the help of a sympathetic Neapolitan, called Gonzalo, that they could escape unhurt. Eventually, Prospero and Miranda arrived on the island, where they have remained ever since. When he finishes the tale, Prospero uses his magic to put Miranda to sleep. The spirit Ariel enters to report on the storm, the ship, and the crew who are separated into smaller groups and stranded on different parts of the island. Ariel then demands his freedom as Prospero had promised. However, Prospero tells that his freedom will be delayed. When Ariel leaves, Prospero awakens Miranda and calls Caliban, the son of the witch, Sycorax. Prospero has enslaved Caliban who is adamant, arrogant and rebellious and is controlled only through Prospero's magic. Caliban claims the island to be his own while Prospero claims that Caliban is corrupt, having tried to rape Miranda. After Caliban leaves, Ariel enters with Ferdinand, who sees Miranda, and the two fall instantly in love. Although this is what Prospero intended, he does not want it to appear too easy for Ferdinand, and accuses him of being a spy, according to his plan.

Act II

This act opens with Gonzalo praising God for their survival and King Alonso lamenting the loss of his son Ferdinand. In the meantime, Antonio and Sebastian whisper among themselves and belittle both Alonso's grief and Gonzalo's cheer. Instead of making attempts to pacify him, they tell Alonso that he should not have permitted his daughter to marry the African. Ariel enters, unseen by the group, and makes them fall asleep, except for Sebastian and Antonio. Subsequently, these two are seen to work out a plot by which Sebastian will seize Alonso's crown, the way Antonio had years back seized Prospero's title and possessions. Subsequently, they would try to kill the sleeping king and his party. Just at this moment, Ariel awakens Gonzalo and prevents the murders. Then the royal party starts searching for Ferdinand. In the next scene of this act Caliban curses Prospero. When he hears someone approaching, he assumes that it is one of Prospero's spirits, coming to torture him once again. Trinculo, the King's jester is looking for shelter and encounters Caliban who seems to be half man and half-fish. Trinculo takes shelter under his cloak. The king's butler, Stefano also enters, clearly drunk. Stefano stops at the sight of the object on the ground, covered with a cloak and with four legs sticking out. Like Trinculo, Stefano immediately understands the financial possibilities that such a creature can offer back home. But, alarmed Caliban thinks that he is about to experience a new form of torture. Stefano pulls the cloak from Caliban's head and pours wine into his mouth. Trinculo is happy to find another survivor of the storm on the island and joins them in drinking wine. Drunken Caliban now watches the happy reunion of Stefano and Trinculo and imagines Stefano to be a god, dropped from heaven. Caliban swears devotion to this new "god," and promises to find Stefano the best food on the island.

Act III

Ferdinand enters carrying a log, which he claims is an odious task but the thoughts of Miranda make the work effortless. Miranda enters and offers to take up his task so that she might force him to rest, but Ferdinand refuses. Although she was instructed by her father not to reveal herself, Miranda out of emotional impulse reveals it to Ferdinand. Ferdinand admits

to having never seen and known as perfecta woman as Miranda. Miranda too confesses that she has known no other women, nor any other man, except her father. Now, she would want no other man except Ferdinand. After exchanging some words of love, Miranda tells Ferdinand that she is unworthy of him but will marry him if he wants her. Prospero has been watching and listening to them secretly. He acknowledges Miranda and Ferdinand's natural match as being "Of two most rare affections", but he has other plans that need his immediate attention. The attention of the audience now returns to Stefano, Trinculo, and Caliban—all of whom are now heavily drunk. Caliban has a plan to kill Prospero so he needs helpfrom his new friends. As Caliban explains that he is the rightful owner of the island, Ariel arrives and listens to everything. Caliban explains that they must burn Prospero's books, and after Prospero is dead, Stefano can marry Miranda, which will make her his queen of the island. Ariel resolves to tell Prospero about the plot against him. When the drunken men sing, Ariel accompanies them with a pipe. They are afraid, but Caliban reassures them that such sounds are frequently heard on the island. The royal party finishes their futile search for Ferdinand. In a short while, a number of ghostly figures arrive, and with them, a lavish dinner. The royal party is hungry and ready to eat while Ariel appears disguised as a harpy. He makes the banquet disappear and accuses Antonio, Sebastian, and Alonso of being the instruments of sin. Although they draw their swords, they are frozen in place by magic and unable to lift up their arms. The king is shaken by what he has seen and heard, and he flees, as do Antonio and Sebastian. Worried that they might do themselves harm, Gonzalo sends Adrian and Francisco to watch them.

Act IV

Prospero, acknowledging that he has been harsh towards the young lovers and now promises a reward. Recognizing Ferdinand and Miranda's love for each other, he offers Miranda to Ferdinand as his wife. Prospero calls Ariel to arrange a celebration of their betrothal. The celebration includes a masque, presented by the spirits of the island. Suddenly Prospero remembers the three conspirators who have set out to murder him and

calls a halt to the masque. Ariel reports that he led the three men, all of whom are very drunk, through a briar patch and into a filthy pond, where he left them wallowing. Soon Caliban, Stefano, and Trinculo appear, wet and smelling foul. Stefano and Trinculo lament the loss of their bottles but are much cheered when they see the clothing hanging nearby. The two ignore Caliban's pleas to continue on their mission. At that moment, Prospero and Ariel enter with spirits, disguised as hunters and hounds. The three conspirators flee, with the spirits in pursuit. Prospero, acknowledging that the power now holds over all his enemies, promises Ariel that he will soon be set free.



LET US KNOW

Masque: These are mini plays consisting of songs, poetry and dances performed by brightly costumed players, often represented by mythological characters. In this masque of the play *The Tempest*, three goddesses Iris (the goddess of rainbow), Juno (the wife of Jupitar) and Ceres (the earth goddess) are seen bestowing their blessings on the young couple. You should know that such masques were very popular during Shakespeare's time. The royal people used to watch them sitting, playing chess. Ferdinand and Miranda, too, see them and Miranda speaks the memorable off quoted lines:

"O wonder !How many goodly creatures are there here
How beauteous mankind is! O brave new World"

Act V

This act opens with Prospero's decision to finish his project. Ariel reveals to Prospero that Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio are remorseful, worried, and desperate. Prospero reassures Ariel that he will be compassionate in dealing with his enemies and asks him to bring the group to him. Then in a soliloquy, Prospero reveals what he has accomplished with magic and promises that he will now give up his magic, bury his magic staff, and drown his magic book at sea. Ariel enters with the royal party,

who appear to be in a state of trance, and places them within the magic circle that Prospero had earlier drawn. Prospero, clothed in the attire of the duke of Milan, appears before them. In a gesture of reconciliation, Prospero embraces Alonso, who is filled with remorse. Gonzalo is also embraced in turn, and then Prospero turns to Sebastian and Antonio. Prospero tells them that he will not charge them as traitors, at this time. Antonio is forgiven and is required to renounce his claims on Prospero's dukedom. While Alonso continues to mourn the loss of his son, Prospero relates that he too has lost his daughter. But he means that he has lost her in marriage and pulls back a curtain to reveal Ferdinand and Miranda playing chess. Ferdinand explains to his father that he is betrothed to Miranda and that this event occurred while he thought his father was dead. At the sight of the couple, Gonzalo begins to cry and thanks God for having worked such a miracle. Ariel enters with the master of the boat and boatswain. Although the ship lay in harbour and in perfect shape, the puzzled men cannot explain how that had occurred. Alonso is also mystified, but Prospero tells him not to trouble his mind with such concerns. Ariel brings in Caliban, Stefano, and Trinculo, who are still drunk but fear struck. Prospero explains that these men have robbed him and plotted to murder him. Caliban immediately repents and promises to seek grace. Then Prospero orders Caliban to go back to his cell and decorate it. He invites his guests to spend the night with him, where he will tell them about his adventures and of his life during these past 12 years. Ariel's last duty to Prospero is to provide calm seas and favourable winds as they sail back to Naples next morning.

Act V Epilogue

At the end of Act V, Prospero offers an Epilogue. Prospero, who is now alone on stage, requests that the audience free him. He states that he has thrown away his magic and pardoned those who have injured him. Now he requires that the audience release him from the island, which has been his prison so that he might return to Naples. The audience's applause will be the signal that he is freed. Prospero indicates that his forgiveness of his former enemies is what all men crave. With the audience's applause, Prospero leaves the stage.

Plot Construction:

There is really very little in the plot of *The Tempest*. There is a love story, and then there is story of two younger brothers who usurp their older brothers' titles and possessions. And finally, there is the story of Caliban's plot to murder Prospero. However, none of these plots are given much attention or substance; instead, the play is about the complexities of human nature and about reminding the audience that the division between happiness and tragedy is always fragile and must be carefully maintained. *The Tempest* ends with the promise of a wedding; it could just as easily have ended with tragedy followed by the two murder plots and betrayals. However, Prospero's avoidance of tragedy reveals his character's decency and contradicts some critics' arguments that he is an amoral demigod exploiting the natural inhabitants of this island.

The play *The Tempest* is unique in its adherence to the three unities. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle argued that *unity of action* was essential for dramatic structure. This meant that a dramatic work should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. The *unity of time* is derived from Aristotle's argument that all the action should occur within one revolution of the sun—one day. The *unity of place* developed later is a Renaissance idea, which held that the location of the play should be limited to one place. These unities added verisimilitude to the work and made it easier for the audience to believe the events unfolding on the stage. Shakespeare rarely used the three unities in other plays, but he fully adheres to them in this play. All the events that occur on the island are limited to three hours period. Shakespeare needed the three unities, especially that of time, to counter the incredulity of the magic and to add coherence to the plot.

The Tempest, although it is one of Shakespeare's shortest plays, still maintains the integrity of the five-act structure. In fact, most Elizabethan theatres adhere to the five-act structure, which corresponds to divisions in the action. The first act is the Exposition, in which the playwright sets forth the problem and introduces the main characters. In *The Tempest*, the first act establishes the nature of Antonio's betrayal of Prospero, and it explains how Prospero and Miranda came to live on the island. This first act also

opens with a violent storm, which establishes the extent of Prospero's power. Most of the play's remaining characters also make an appearance in this act. The second act is the Complication, in which the entanglement or conflict is developed. In *The Tempest*, the conspiracy to murder Alonso is developed, which establishes that Antonio is still an unsavoury character. In addition, the audience learns more about Caliban, with Stefano and Trinculo preparing the groundwork for a second conspiracy to be formed. The third act is the Climax; when the action takes a turning point and complications occur. It is important that the way to love is not too easy, and so in *The Tempest*, Prospero has forbidden contact between Miranda and Ferdinand, although the audience knows this to be pretence on his part. In this act, the conspiracy to murder Prospero is developed, although the audience knows that Ariel is listening, and so there is no real danger. Finally, the essential climactic moment occurs in this act when Prospero confronts his enemies at the ghostly banquet. The forth act is called the Falling Action, which signals the beginning of the play's resolution. In this act, the romance between Ferdinand and Miranda is acknowledged and celebrated with a masque, and Prospero deals with the conspiracy to murder him by punishing Caliban, Stefano, and Trinculo. The fifth act is called the Catastrophe, wherein the conclusion occurs. As the term suggests, this act brings closure to the play, a resolution to the conflict, and the plans for a wedding. As the play draws to a close, Prospero is victorious over his enemies, Ferdinand is reunited with his father, Antonio and Sebastian are vanquished, and Caliban regrets his plotting.



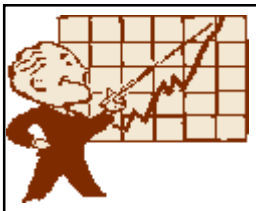
LET US KNOW

The Two Groups of Characters in the play *The Tempest*

The first group is represented by Antonio and Sebastian who do not inspire admiration. Alonso, believing his only son Ferdinand to be dead is overwhelmed with grief and is distractedly looking for him, but Antonio and Sebastian, far from sympathising with him and consoling him, are conspiring against his life. Antonio had once overthrown his own brother

and brought his own native land under foreign domination by conspiring with Alonso. Once a traitor, always a traitor and he now conspires with Sebastian to overthrow Alonso. They plan to kill Alonso when he is sleeping but Prospero averts this disaster by making Ariel wake up Gonzalo just on time.

There is another group, that of comic characters like Stephano and Trinculo. These two excite the admiration of Caliban, who takes them for gods and swears allegiance to them. These three then hatch a plot against Prospero. This plot too is foiled by Prospero's watchfulness through Ariel. You can see that this is a parody of the plot against Alonso by Antonio and Sebastian.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: How many stories are there in the play *The Tempest*?

Q 4: What is the nature of Ferdinand's love for Miranda?

Q 5: What is so unique about the play *The Tempest*?



10.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, you have read about the play *The Tempest* and the context of its production and the different possible sources from which the plot of the play was drawn. However, you have also seen from the reading of the play that it is one of Shakespearean plays where the plot was perhaps Shakespeare's own, and it is difficult to trace one single main source for the play. *The Tempest* is a story about love, revenge, and greed. Set on a mythical island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, Prospero comes up with a plan to avenge a treachery done against him, reclaim the title of dukedom his brother had stolen, and in the process helps his beautiful daughter find a true and royal match. Through the use of magic and the spirit Ariel, he also uncovers the plot of the villains to kill the king Alonso and himself. Unlike some other romantic comedies of Shakespeare, *The Tempest* is less focused on the love story, and more on the plots of murder and revenge.

10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q 1: *The Tempest* is a play whose plot is entirely original… …No single source has so far been established… …yet Thomas Warton refers to a popular Italian romance *Aurelio and Isabella* (1586) and others seek to trace the source in a German play *Die Schone Sidea…* …Shakespeare might also have used some pamphlets dealing with the wreck of colonial ships near Barmuda in 1609.

Ans to Q 2: Just like Prospero in *The Tempest,* in Jacob Ayrer's German play *Die Schone Sidea* too there is a magician… …he too has a daughter and keeps a demon.

Ans to Q 3: There is a love story between Ferdinand and Miranda… …there is the story of two younger brothers, Antonio and Sebastian, who usurp/ seek to usurp their elder brothers' titles and possessions… …and finally there is the story of Caliban's attempts to murder Prospero.

Ans to Q 4: Ferdinand's love for Miranda passes through a lot of hardships… …he needs to prove his worth as an would-be husband in front of Prospero… …but Ferdinand is a worthy lover as he has great devotion to his love for Miranda.

Ans to Q 5: The play is unique in its adherence to the three unities which Shakespeare rarely used… …following 'unity of action' this play has a clear beginning, middle, and end… …'unity of time' is observed in its completion of the action in one day… …'unity of place' is seen as the play is limited to one place only (the island).

10.8 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: What is the nature of Prospero and Miranda's relationship? How does Miranda's character change over the course of the play?

Q 2: In what ways, can the play *The Tempest* be called a narrative of colonialism? What are the aspects of colonialism available in the play?

Q 3: What is Prospero's sense of justice? Do, you think that his sense of justice and mercifulness have let Prospero emerge as the most admirable character of the play?

Q 4: What are the marked differences you find in the characters of Caliban and Ariel?

Q 5: Write a note on the different sources that Shakespeare adhered to in writing the play *The Tempest*.

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UNIT 11: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *THE TEMPEST* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

11.1 Learning Objectives

11.2 Introduction

11.3 Critical Commentary on the Play

11.4 Major Themes

11.5 Major Characters

11.6 Critical Reception

11.7 Let us Sum up

11.8 Further Reading

11.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

11.10 Possible Questions

11.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- take a close look at *The Tempest* as one of Shakespeare's greatest plays
- read *the play* from various critical viewpoints
- identify the major themes which make the play so important
- make a list of the major characters and explain their roles
- frame some ideas regarding Shakespeare's reputation as a playwright.

11.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of this Block on Shakespeare. In this unit, a discussion will be provided on the play *Tempest* which is also supposed to be the bard's last play. This play is believed to have been written in 1610–11, and is thought by many critics to be the last play that Shakespeare wrote alone. It is set on a remote island, where the sorcerer Prospero the rightful Duke of Milan plots to restore his daughter Miranda to her rightful

place using illusion and skilful manipulation. Prospero is served by a spirit named Ariel, whom he had rescued from a tree in which he had been trapped by the cruel witch Sycorax, after he had refused to obey her. Prospero ensures Ariel's loyalty by repeatedly promising to release it from servitude. Sycorax' son, Caliban, a deformed monster and the only inhabitant before the arrival of Prospero, was initially adopted and raised by him. Prospero with the help of Ariel conjures up a storm, the eponymous tempest, to lure his usurping brother Antonio and the complicit King Alonso of Naples to the island. There, his machinations bring about the revelation of Antonio's lowly nature, the redemption of the King, and the marriage of Miranda to Alonso's son, Ferdinand and so on. The story of the play draws heavily on the tradition of the Romance, and it was influenced by the courtly masque and also the Italian Commedia dell'arte. By the time you finish reading the unit, you should be able to appreciate the play in totality.

11.3 CRITICAL COMMENTARY ON THE PLAY

The play can be read and analysed in terms of its different aspects. Following is an attempt to discuss the text keeping some of the issue and aspects in mind. You should realise that this is just one way to look at the text. However, you are advised to read some of the recommended books for a better understanding and interpretation of the themes and issues prevalent in the text.

It should be stated that the term 'romance' is a label commonly attached to this play by some critics. However, in the early 17th Century, these plays would have been read as 'tragicomedies' though it is actually classified as a comedy in the First Folio. It remains, however, a useful observation that this play shares many of the conventions of romance and seeks to illustrate a moral point. Shakespeare's romances also make a statement of some sort and the play *The Tempest* demonstrates an awareness of the improbability of its own story. The combination of myth and fantasy, characteristic of a romance, gave Shakespeare, now at his last phase of career, two tempting opportunities – one, it gave him a pretext to reflect on the way art and the imagination operate in understanding of the

world; and second, it provided an appropriate context in which to show the world not only as it is but as it could be.

20th century critics often discuss *The Tempest* as a narrative of colonialism as Shakespeare's source materials are clearly drawn from recent adventures of an English fleet in Bermuda. Moreover, and the play was written in a period when considerable investment and settlement were taking place in the English colonies in the New World, particularly in Virginia (now the southern USA). Though geography indicates a Mediterranean location (for example, Alonso's ship is *en route* from Tunis to Naples), Caliban's name resembles 'Carib', the name of the original West-Indian islanders wiped out by European disease and genocide. Thus, a New World colonial setting is often assumed by critics while reading the play. Others suggest that the play is actually set in an area, which was a point of conflict between Catholic Europeans and Muslim Turks. There was also, at the same time, the continuing struggle to establish English rule in Ireland, over a people regarded by many English writers and colonisers as 'Masterless men'. However, in the same colonial enterprise there are also the temptations of the wilderness, which might lead the virtuous and saintly European astray. This wild and anarchic utopia is figured as a female in the symbolic function of Miranda. Prospero knows that his power may at any moment dissolve into nothingness. Yet his nagging fear seems to be that he will lose control over his own daughter's sexuality (IV. i. 14–23, 51–4). Prospero admits that he has only his dead wife's word that Miranda actually is his daughter (I. ii. 56–7). This is one of the most interesting mysteries of the play.

Prospero controls the island by inflicting violence with his magic. His is a language that contains the violence as Caliban immediately reminds them: "You taught me language, and my profit on't/Is, I know how to curse. The red-plague rid you/For learning me your language!" (I.ii. 363–5).When Prospero and Miranda first came to the island, Caliban had no knowledge of their language, yet they treated him with affection and in return they received love and care from him. The attempted rape seems to have happened only after their concepts and ideas had been imparted to him more fully. Prospero and Miranda gave Caliban a language which replaced

his 'brutish … gabble'. However, they blame the rape attempt on his own savage nature, not on his view of the world, which their language could have given him. What Prospero has failed to do is to destroy Caliban's capacity to think for himself. Stephano and Trinculo might sing that 'Thought is free'(III 2 123), but it is Caliban who knows what that means, even if Ariel knows it as well. Even under the surveillance of Prospero, Caliban is not totally trapped by the system of hierarchy and oppression the invaders have brought to his island. Prospero is a usurper in Caliban's kingdom just as much as Antonio is in Milan, but it is still Caliban who appreciates the beauty of his home and can speak for future peace and happiness. Take the following lines for example

"Be not afeared, the isle is full of noises,
Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about my ears; and sometimes voices,
That if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming,
The clouds methought would open, and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again." (III.Ii. 135–43)

The play seems to tell us how different is the 'savage' Caliban from the 'civilised' invaders. Caliban has his own distinctive view of the world, his own sense of beauty and of what it is to be alive. Caliban's ideas of freedom are placed in sharp contrast against the structurally oppressive language and ideas of the invaders. For example, Prospero's language is full of threat, aggression, violence and demands. Ferdinand says, Prospero is 'composed of harshness' (III 1 9). Yet Caliban (and also Ariel) speaks out for liberty, and we are given an even more startling perspective on freedom in the face of physical realities in the play's first scene. As the storm created by Ariel threatens the King of Naples' ship, the courtiers come up on deck only to be firmly put into their place by the boatswain:

Alonso: Good boatswain, have care. Where's the master?
Play the men.

Boatswain: I pray now, keep below.

Antonio: Where is the master, bos'n?

Boatswain: Do you not hear him? You mar our labour.*

Keep your cabins – you do assist the storm.

Gonzalo: Nay, good, be patient.

Boatswain: When the sea is. Hence! What care these roarers

for the name of king? To cabin! silence! Trouble us not.

Gonzalo: Good, yet remember whom thou hast aboard.

Boatswain: None that I love more than myself. You are a councillor;

if you can command these elements to silence, and

work the peace of the present*, we will not hand a rope

more. Use your authority. (I.i 9–21)

The royal party presumes that their superiority is natural, and perhaps have not realised that they do not apply over the professional seafarers struggling to save the ship and its crew. The scene shows such superiority to be far from natural, and prepares for the other challenges of the play that hierarchy is another form of violence, not a God-given right to rule. The ending of the play is even more interesting. Prospero strives to have excused himself from his own involvement in the injustice of the world in which he lives. However, many critics even suggest that Gonzalo's speech about his ideal kingdom, and Sebastian and Antonio's response to it in act III, foreground a paradox about power in the play. Prospero seeks to bring about liberty and justice through his use of absolute hierarchical power, but without any notion of his responsibilities to a wider community. By the last part of the play, however, he knows his power is arbitrary. In his speech after the end of the masque he reminds us of the insubstantial fictionality both of what we are watching and of his authority (IV. i. 146–58), an estrangement device in itself. He calls on the audience, to release him from the island and his role because he too seeks freedom from guilt which can be achieved only outside his roles as the duke and the magician in the play:

*Prospero:*As you from crimes would pardoned be,

Let your indulgence set me free. (Exit)

(V. Epilogue 19–20)

Prospero knows that his brother is guilty of treachery and intended murder (for Antonio had tried to kill Prospero and Miranda, however indirectly). He must be made to repent, for the good of his own soul. The issues of sin, repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation are serious issues that have given a religious dimension to all the last romances of Shakespeare. You must note here that the play ends happily. We see Prospero getting his dukedom back. Ferdinand and Miranda are united and their union also unites the two kingdoms of Milan and Naples. Prospero however realises that his magical powers should play no part in the life he is going to lead as the ruler of Milan. Therefore, before he meets the culprits and forgives them, he renounces his magical powers. In the epilogue, Prospero looks forward to the days in future which he will spend as the Duke of Milan: "…will retire me to my Milan where/ Every third thought shall be my grave."

Caliban's enslavement to Stephano through drink can be seen as an undercutting parody of the magic power by which Prospero enslaves him. It mocks Prospero's power through a comic replication of the main action, as happens in the history plays. But Prospero (acting through Ferdinand), Caliban and Stephano all see Miranda's body as a piece of property to be cultivated, from which each hopes both to produce a future for himself and to establish his own identity. Miranda, then, stands symbolically for the island itself. This maiden is the virgin territory that is to be conquered so that the conqueror may establish his identity and authority over other parts of the world.



LET US KNOW

Women and their relationships with men are central to this play, especially because in a romance, it was a common belief that the errors of the older generation will be redeemed. Though women are seen either as unruly and uncontrollable individuals (as in Sycorax), or as beautiful and fertile objects (as in Miranda), they nevertheless possess qualities that will make the world better. They only save men from the harshness and injustice of power and domination.

By showing how time can undermine all deeply held beliefs and structures, this play has a utopian vision, which looks forward to a more equal and fair world.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: How does the play combine art and imagination?

Q 2: Refer to some of the actual records that contribute to the theme of colonialism in this play?

Q 3: How does Caliban react to the teachings of Prospero?

11.4 MAJOR THEMES

The preceding subsection has provided necessary hints on the possible themes of the play. The following is however a discussion on some of the most important themes of the play.

The Theme of Freedom:

This is one of the dominant themes of the play. At the superficial level, there is the thirst for freedom evinced primarily by Ariel and to a lesser degree by Caliban. The concept is produced in the second scene of Act I when Prospero asks “How now! Moody?/ What is’t thou canst demand?”Ariel replies “My liberty”. Although this theme seems to run through the whole of *The Tempest*, it is the thought that the true freedom of man consists in servitude. The characters, each in his own way, discover this truth. Ferdinand finds that in service that will bring him closer to Miranda: “This is my mean task/Would be as heavy to me, as odious, but/The mistress which I serve quickens what’s dead/And makes my labours pleasant.” (III. i. 4-7) He gains freedom not only from this temporary slavery but also gains Miranda by serving Prospero in a willing and obedient manner. Then, once again he acknowledges his servitude to Miranda like this: “The very instant that I saw you, did/My heart fly to your service, there resides/To make me slave to it.” (III. i. 75-78) Miranda also is not ready to share his present servitude but also expresses her willingness to serve him throughout her life: “I am your

wife if you will marry me;/If not, I'll die your maid." (III. i. 98-99) Their willingness to undergo service is finally rewarded. Ferdinand not only gets Miranda but his father, and Miranda becomes, besides the wife of Ferdinand, the future queen of Naples, with the joyous approval of her father-in-law, Alonso. Another example of freedom is to be found in Gonzalo's description of an imaginary common wealth. This is to be a society totally free from all servitude or force. There is to be total freedom in this utopia imagined by him. You can see that the concept of freedom extended even to nature. Gonzalo says that there should be no use of force in any way. Even nature should produce without any force: "All things in common nature should produce/Without sweat or endeavour…" Prospero also talks of freedom in the epilogue. So, you can see that there are three kinds of freedom that are present in the play: firstly it is freedom from servitude as represented by Ariel, freedom in servitude as in the case of Ferdinand and Miranda, and thirdly total freedom as is conceived by Gonzalo for his utopia.

The Theme of Natural Life:

According to Frank Kermode, in *The Tempest* Shakespeare has taken up the theme of Nature and the influence of Man (or Art) on her. Let me tell you that this is a common theme in Elizabethan literature. Man is shown in his relationship with nature and this is looked upon from two viewpoints. From one viewpoint, the vision of nature is pure, innocent and benevolent, and man introduces corruption into this innocent world. From the other, nature is wild and barbarous and would benefit by man's careful art. Shakespeare presents both the views. The play describes an uninhabited island, which is not a hostile one. For example, Gonzalo finds everything in it that man may need to live simply and peacefully. He really finds this place to be an ideal one for utopia. We come to know through Caliban that there are pleasant and fertile spots in the island. He had shown them to Prospero and Miranda when they had come to the island, and he is ready to show them to Stephano and Trinculo as he accepts them as gods dropped from the moon. You should note that this is the positive, ideal and pastoral aspect of nature. Shakespeare also points out the negative aspects through the character of Caliban who represents nature. Caliban is savage and wild.

No amount of effort on Prospero's part to nurture him has been successful. You can see that Caliban represents that aspect of nature which is wild and has to be tamed. Shakespeare perhaps leaves it open whether Nature triumphs over Art or vice versa.

The Theme of Regeneration:

Like in the three other romances, in this play too we find two generations and the older generation, being replaced by a purer and younger generation. The corrupt and ambitious brother of Prospero is punished. Prospero after long twelve years of self-analysis and repentance changes to a better person. This Prospero is different from the Prospero of twelve years ago. There has been complete regeneration of his own character. Ferdinand and Miranda, the embodiment of purity and innocence, try to make the world a better place. Therefore, you can see that this play shows regeneration, not only through a younger generation, but through a process of regeneration in Prospero himself. It is not that he does not retire from the worldly life but he renounces his magic powers and accepts the duties of dukedom. This new Prospero is one who has realised the importance of working among and through other human beings in ordinary society. Thus, you can see that this theme of regeneration assumes great importance because it is apart of life and nature.

The Illusion of Justice:

The Tempest tells a fairly straightforward story involving an unjust act, the usurpation of Prospero's throne by his brother, and Prospero's quest to re-establish justice by restoring himself to power. However, the idea of justice that the play works toward seems highly subjective, since this idea represents the view of only one character who controls the fate of all the other characters. Though Prospero presents himself as a victim of injustice working to right the wrongs that have been done to him, his idea of justice and injustice is somewhat hypocritical—though he is furious with his brother for taking his power, he has no qualms about enslaving Ariel and Caliban in order to achieve his ends. At many moments throughout the play, Prospero's sense of justice seems extremely one-sided and mainly involves what is good for Prospero himself. Moreover, because the play

offers no notion of higher order or justice to supersede Prospero's interpretation of events, the play is morally ambiguous.

As the play progresses, it becomes more and more involved with the idea of creativity and art, and Prospero's role begins to mirror more explicitly the role of an author creating a story around him. With this metaphor in mind, and especially if we accept Prospero as a surrogate for Shakespeare himself, Prospero's sense of justice seems to have worked. Moreover, the means he uses to achieve his idea of justice mirror the machinations of the artist, who also seeks to enable others to see his view of the world.

The Theme of Power:

The nearly uninhabited island presents the sense of infinite possibility to almost everyone who lands there. Prospero has found an ideal place to school his daughter. Sycorax, Caliban's mother, worked her magic there after she was exiled from Algeria. Caliban, once alone on the island, now Prospero's slave, laments that he had been his own king (I.ii.344–345). As he attempts to comfort Alonso, Gonzalo imagines a utopian society on the island, over which he would rule (II.i.148–156). In Act III, Scene ii, Caliban suggests that Stephano kill Prospero, and Stephano immediately envisions his own reign: "Monster, I will kill this man. His daughter and I will be King and Queen—save our graces!—and Trinculo and thyself shall be my viceroys" (III.ii.101–103). Stephano particularly looks forward to taking advantage of the spirits that make "noises" on the isle; they will provide music for his kingdom for free. Thus, you find all characters envisioning the island as a space of freedom and unrealised potential. Such views of the new comers to the island focus on the themes of colonialism as discussed by many 20th century critics.

While there are many representatives of the colonial impulse in the play, the colonised have only one representative: Caliban. We might develop sympathy for him at first, when Prospero seeks him out merely to abuse him, and when we see him tormented by spirits. However, this sympathy is made more difficult by his willingness to abase himself before Stephano in Act II, scene ii. Even as Caliban plots to kill one 'colonial' master Prospero in Act III, scene ii, he sets up another master Stephano for himself. The

urge to rule and to be ruled seem inextricably intertwined. The play can be seen to explore, with various degrees of explicitness, the issues of colonisation and legitimacy of government current at Shakespeare's time.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Discuss briefly the three different forms of freedom present in the play *The Tempest*.

Q 5: What does critic Frank Kermode say about the theme of nature in the play?

Q 6: Is there any scope to sympathise with Caliban.

11.5 MAJOR CHARACTERS

In the following, an attempt has been made to discuss the important characters of the play.

Prospero:

Prospero is the rightful Duke of Milan. Twelve years earlier, he and his daughter Miranda found refuge on this island after his younger brother, Antonio usurped his dukedom. Prospero was better fitted for an intellectual life than an administrative one, for he loved to study. He took no interest in ruling his kingdom but immersed himself in intellectual pursuits and left the governing of the kingdom in the hands of his brother. He had thus made two mistakes at this stage of his life. He had neglected his duties toward his subjects and entrusted the ruling of the kingdom to Antonio, thereby placing almost an irresistible temptation in front of his brother. Now Prospero, after twelve years of isolation and suffering, has attained great mental placidity and wants to bring his present condition to an end. He also aims at enabling Miranda to lead a normal life among other human beings in a normal society. Prospero is a complex personality. Although he refuses to free Ariel and enslaves Caliban, he is really a beneficent ruler, never intending to injure even his enemies. Early in the play, Prospero appears callous and cruel, especially in his treatment of Ariel and Caliban. He is also tyrannical in his treatment of Ferdinand, but Prospero realises

that Ferdinand and Miranda will value one another more if there are a few hindrances to their courtship. Prospero's humanity is clearly obvious in his treatment of Antonio, whom he calls traitor but declines to treat as a traitor. By the play's conclusion, it is clear that Prospero is just and fair, in addition to his being intelligent.

Miranda:

Miranda is Prospero's daughter. She was only three years old when she and her father left Milan. Now, some twelve years later, when she is fifteen, she has become a beautiful young woman. She is innocent, having never seen another woman or man and having no knowledge of any other human being, except her father. She knows about Caliban but is perhaps unaware of the existence of Ariel. She is unaware of her beauty because she does not know what feminine beauty means. Miranda's kindness is evident in the first act, in her concern for the suffering crew caught in the storm. She is filled with grief over the supposed drowning of the crew on the ship thinking that there surely must be some noble creature in it. Her tenderness is also evident when she begs her father not to use magic to control Ferdinand, whom she loves. She is an obedient daughter, as proved by her sadness when she forgets herself and reveals her name to Ferdinand, but she is also a young woman in love, and when her father is occupied, she immediately looks to release Ferdinand from his pains. When Ferdinand tells her that he loves her, Miranda weeps. In all that she does, Miranda is sweet and pure, honest and loving. She is beautiful, innocent, compassionate, self controlled and spontaneous.

Ariel:

Ariel is an airy spirit. Because he refused to serve the witch, Sycorax, he was imprisoned in a tree until rescued by Prospero. Ariel willingly carries out Prospero's commands because he is eager to be free. Although he wants his freedom in exchange, Ariel performs his tasks with enthusiasm, promptly reporting any activities that he does or observes. Early in the play, Ariel reports the plot against Prospero, and later, he assists in punishing Prospero's enemies. Ariel's obedience to his master is an important symbol of Prospero's humanity, because he to a large extent humanises the action

that Prospero takes against his old adversaries. Finally, Ariel's willing obedience to Prospero's wishes stands in stark contrast to Caliban's cursing and plotting against the same master. But Ariel's gender remains to be a mystery. Ariel's graceful and yielding nature, and fairy like qualities are typical of a woman, but his delight in harsh work, treatment of his victims and trickery made on the characters, are more typical of a male. Ariel reminds us of Puck in Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream.*

Caliban:

Caliban is the offspring of the witch Sycorax who had been banished from Algiers for her union with the devil. Prospero has made Caliban his servant or, more accurately, his slave. Throughout most of the play, Caliban is savage-like, insolent, rebellious, and is only controlled with magic. As we find in the play, he is half fish and half man, but with human head and limbs. Prospero calls him a tortoise and Trinculo states that he looks and smells like a fish. Caliban claims the island as his own, and maintains that Prospero has tricked him in the past. Because Prospero has conquered him, Caliban plots to murder Prospero in revenge. It is clear, though, that Caliban is a poor judge of character. He embraces Stefano as a god and trusts the two drunken conspirators to help him carry out a plot to murder Prospero. In many ways, Caliban is an innocent, reacting to emotional and physical needs without the ability to think and fully understands the events and people who surround him. He is truly a child of nature, uneducated and reacting to his surroundings in much the same way that an animal does.

Ferdinand:

Ferdinand is the son of Alonso the king of Naples. During the storm, he is separated from the rest of the king's party. Once ashore, he meets Miranda and falls madly in love with her. He easily reassures Prospero that he will respect Miranda's chastity and would not violate his trust. Ferdinand also respects and loves his father. He makes a commitment to marry Miranda while thinking that his father is dead. However, when he finds that his father is alive, he immediately acknowledges his father's authority and informs him of his obligation to Miranda. Although we know very little about his past life, we are convinced that he is noble, courtly and intelligent.

Alonso:

Alonso is the king of Naples. He is grief stricken believing that his son has drowned. Later, he is overjoyed to find Ferdinand alive. Alonso bears some responsibility for the events in Prospero's life, because Antonio would not have acted without Alonso's agreement. However, when confronted with his responsibility, Alonso is genuinely repentant for the pain he caused to Prospero in recent times. Alonso's concern for his son's safety and his deep grief followed by the assumed death of his son help to create an image of Alonso as a good and loving father but who has made mistakes in the past. The quickness with which he accepts Miranda as his daughter, as well as his attempts to apologise to her, also reinforce the image of Alonso as a good and just king.

Antonio:

As you have already read, Antonio is Prospero's younger brother. He is motivated by envy and a desire to create trouble. He is now the deceitful Duke of Milan and is still actively engaged in plotting rebellion. His actions against Prospero were not sufficient to satisfy his ambitions, and now, he convinces Sebastian to murder his brother Alonso. Although he may be frightened when confronted with the spirits and Prospero later, he reveals no sign of remorse for the actions he has committed. He is not only ambitious, but treacherous as well. Taking the help of the king Alonso of Naples, he usurped the kingdom but dared not kill Prospero because of his popularity, which might lead to popular uprising. Instead, he thought of a devilish plan for killing Prospero slowly but inevitably, in such a way that no one will ever know. Antonio is never seen repentant the way he should be, at the end of the play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: State the two major mistakes in the early life of Prospero?

Q 8: Who are the women characters of the play?

Q 9: Comment on the character of Ariel?

11.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION

As Boris Ford explains, the criticism of the play has been influenced by the notion of its being Shakespeare's 'Last Play', the summation of a lifetime of experiences. However, the assumptions from which such conclusions are drawn are not proven yet. They play exhibits the author's mature reflection on the nature and the limitation of the dramatic illusion. The turbulent sea, although a creation of Prospero, is associated with the larger forces of life. Most interestingly, the characters, whose stage life Prospero controls and moulds come together at a time when Prospero is ready to receive them. In addition, it is the island in which their action has to be worked out. In a sense, the island presents various aspects. For example, to Gonzalo the island presents anarchy founded on the spontaneous overflow of natural instincts in a community of people untainted by competition or ambition. However, the cynics like Antonio and Sebastian make Gonzalo's dream almost unreal. The fact that men like Antonio and Sebastian are portrayed also proves that cultivation of humanly qualities is necessary. Men must try to outgrow 'primitive nature' to find their human potentiality.

There is perhaps no doubt about the fact that *The Tempest* is most likely the last play written entirely by Shakespeare, and it is remarkable for being one play whose plot is entirely original. The first record of its performance tells us that it was produced at Court on 1 November, 1611. During the Restoration, however, audience demanded a different treatment, so Dryden and Davenant reformed the play giving Miranda a sister and providing her with a partner. In the 17th and the 18th centuries, the philosophical aspect of the play was ignored. The critics had Ben Jonson in their mind, and so they thought that Shakespeare did not have classical learning. Subsequently, they stressed the inventive power of his imagination. Again, with the Romantics, the focus shifted. They looked upon the play as an expression of deep and subtle ideas, too subtle for the stage and hence they laid more emphasis on its poetic beauty than on stage effect. In fact, this continued until the Victorian period. You can see that these critics became conscious of the importance of chronology and gave

autobiographical interpretation of the play. In the 20th century, critics began to analyse the play in different aspects. The theme of the play has provoked serious thought among them. For example, E.M.W. Tillyard relates this play to the tragic pattern and finds the completion of a cycle in which tragic disorder reaches final harmony. In fact, many new theories have come into existence in the second half of the 20th century like Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Reception theory, Post-colonialism and so on and Shakespeare's works are interpreted in the light of these theories. Let me tell you that the interpretation that looks upon Prospero as the usurper of Caliban's Kingdom in *The Tempest* is a Post-colonial one.



11.7 LET US SUM UP

As you finish reading this unit, we hope that you are now in a position to discuss the play in its totality. *The Tempest* is supposed to be the bard's last play. Set on a remote island, where the magician Prospero plots to restore his daughter Miranda to her rightful place using illusion and skilful manipulation, this play is an artistic marvel. The story of the play draws heavily on the tradition of the Romance, and it was influenced by the courtly masque and also the Italian Commedia dell'arte.



11.8 FURTHER READING

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Wilson, John Dover. (2009). *The Tempest.* Cambridge University Press.



11.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Being a romance, this play demonstrates an awareness of the improbability of its own story… …It combines myth and fantasy and reflects the way art and imagination operate in our understanding of the world.

Ans to Q 2: The play was written when settlement was taking place in the English colonies in Virginia, now the southern USA… …Caliban's name resembles 'Carib', the name of the original West-Indian islanders wiped out by European disease and genocide… …it also refers to the conflict between Catholic Europeans and Muslim Turks… …we can also trace in the play the continuing struggle to establish English rule among the 'masterless men' in Ireland.

Ans to Q 3: Prospero's teaching of language fails to change Caliban's own distinctive view of his world.. …he feels that his sense of freedom is in sharp contrast with the teachings of Prospero whom he calls an invader.

Ans to Q 4: Freedom from servitude… …freedom in servitude… …and total freedom.

Ans to Q 5: According to Frank Kermode, in *The Tempest* Shakespeare has taken up the theme of nature and the influence of Man (or Art) on Nature… …from one view point Nature is presented as pure, innocent and benevolent and man introduces corruption into this innocent world… …from another point of view nature is wild and represents the savage requiring to benefit man's careful art.

Ans to Q 6: Both Yes and No… …Yes, because Prospero torments Caliban like anything and seeks him out merely to abuse him, and we see him tormented by spirits… …No, Caliban has failed to learn from

Prospero's teachings, and instead, he plots to kill Prospero and sets up the worthless Stephano as the new master for himself.

Ans to Q 7: First, he had neglected his duties toward his subjects as a ruler, as he always remained absorbed in studies… …second, he entrusted the ruling of his kingdom to his brother Antonio, who finally usurped his kingdom out of ambition.

Ans to Q 8: The women characters are Miranda, the daughter of Prospero… …Miranda's absent mother and Sycorax, the mother of Caliban… …the later two are not physically present in the play.

Ans to Q 9: Ariel is an airy spirit… …Ariel's thirst for freedom makes him willingly carry out Prospero's commands… …Ariel is dutiful and promptly reports to Prospero… …Ariel's obedience to Prospero also reflects on Prospero's humanity.



11.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Do you consider the play a romance? If yes, what are the characteristics of a romance available in the play?

Q 2: Compare the plot to murder Prospero with the plot to murder Alonso. What is the significance of the two plots? How important are social status and rank in evaluating these two murder plots?

Q 3: What role does language play in explicating the theme of power and domination in the play? Discuss with reference to Prospero's use of language in the play.

Q 4: Discuss the themes of freedom and servitude in your own words?

Q 5: How, has the play, *The Tempest* been received throughout times especially in the context of the 20th century?

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UNIT 12: JOHN WEBSTER: *THE WHITE DEVIL* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

12.1 Objectives

12.2 Introduction

12.3 John Webster: The Playwright

12.4 Sources of the Play

12.5 Act wise Summary of the Play

12.6 Critical Reception of Webster's *The White Devil*

12.7 Let us Sum up

12.8 Further Reading

12.9 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

12.10 Possible Questions

12.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss John Webster's life and literary works
- identify the sources Webster made use of in *The White Devil*
- make a summary of the play
- discuss the place John Webster enjoyed as a playwright.

12.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the first unit of this Block, and it provides a discussion of Jacobean drama through Webster's play *The White Devil*. As a playwright, John Webster stood tall among the post-Shakespearean dramatists. The eminent critic, T.S. Eliot expressed high regards for Webster's poetic acumen, a development that successfully stood the test of time. But, tenderness and pleasant sympathy of the Shakespearean type seems to be missing from Webster's writing. On the contrary, he attained enviable height in unfolding the morbid and gloomy aspect of life. Little known to cheerfulness, he experienced melancholy and pessimism as an offshoot of the conflict between the old and the new. As rapid change was the order

of the day, he witnessed old values losing their ground, and the new ones gaining momentum. To Webster, the process brought in devastating and alarming impact upon conventional belief system. This resulted in deep pessimism, something that really matters in his plays. By the end of this unit, you will be able to discuss the life and works of Webster besides being able to explore the different important aspects of the play *The White Devil*.

12.3 JOHN WEBSTER: THE PLAYWRIGHT

It is unfortunate to note that very little is known about the personal life of John Webster (1578-1626). In addition to scanty record as such, the Great Fire of London in 1666 incurred irreparable loss in documenting the life history of the famous Jacobean dramatist. Hence, the dates given in support of his birth and death are sheer guesses. However, the research undertaken by Mary Edmond on the life of Webster entitled 'In Search of John Webster', published in "The Times Literary Supplement"; Dec. 24, 1976 has brought out a number of seminal aspects of the dramatist. Going by such findings and other records, we get to know that Webster was a son of a famous London coach merchant in Cow Lane, who was associated with the Merchant Taylor's Company. The name of his father was the same, i.e. John Webster, and he married Elizabeth Coates. Webster grew up in the noisy, densely populated parish of St. Sepulchre. His father's business provided him with the wider spectrum of London society full of commerce, nobility, and law. These things helped him grow many an insightful observation that proved elemental to his pursuit of writing. Indeed, it is remarkable to see him making comments that he was "born free" in spite of the din and bustle he was familiar with. This means that he led a unique life style, and could elicit the best of his materials.

Though not certain, he did his schooling at the Merchant Taylor's School, and later on in the New Inn, and the Middle Temple. Often his close rapport with Middle Temple is questioned, and much doubt is levied upon its authenticity. But his knowledge of law, and close connection with Sir Thomas Overbury, John Marston, and John Ford establish his association with the said institution. The trial scenes in *The White Devil, The Devil's*

Law Case, and in *Appius and Virginia* showcase the mastery he scaled in the field of law. As his prime interest was in the theatre, he grabbed the opportunity offered by Philip Henslowe. It deserves to be mentioned that his stay in the Merchant Taylor's School proved very effective in getting an edge to his interest in the drama. As the founding headmaster, Richard Mulcaster maintained a pro-active stance in popularising the dramatic form of writing, Webster got the required platform. The legacy left out by the illustrious alumni of the school such as Edmund Spenser, Thomas Lodge, and Thomas Kyd acted as an inspiration for a budding aspirant like Webster. It was in this school that he relished taste in the English language and literature other than the Greek and Latin classics. He was a voracious reader, who did not like to get his writings published. With his deep veneration for the native land, he liked to identify him as a Londoner. Although he wrote at times, his official recognition came in 1602 when Michael Drayton, Thomas Middleton, Anthony Munday and Webster himself were paid remuneration in advance for a play entitled *Caesar's Fall*, which does not remain until date.

It is interesting to observe that Webster's genius as dramatist showcased itself in collaborative works at the early phase of his career. As time passed on, he acquired courage and tried his hand in sole authorship, but with success. Be it in *The Devil's Law Case,* or the two tragedies, his real penchant for writing was well pronounced. In 1605-06, he married Sara Peniall, and their first child, John was born less than two months after the marriage. It is also known that besides John, they had other children including daughters, Sara, Margery, and Elizabeth. Their marriage life was happy. As there is less evidence for this, his high regard for family life with all its major aspects may be observed in his *The Duchess of Malfi.*

Webster's Dramatic Career:

Arguably, Webster was the last of the great Elizabethan dramatists. Though a genius as such, he is often criticised for limited scope of his dramatic writing. The pleasant sympathy and tenderness of the Shakespearean type seem to be missing from his plays, and much complaint has been lodged against the poor sense of structure, unbridled

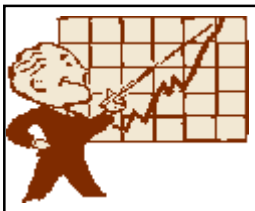
use of horror, and his ever-present inconsistencies. Indeed, these sides make an interesting reading, but they are not all-inclusive. Interestingly, Webster proved his position in the succeeding periods, especially for the romantics and the 20th century critics and readers. Be it Charles Lamb's influential study of his plays in *Specimens* or T.S. Eliot's high regard for his poetic excellence, what we assume is the greatness Webster did imbibe in his dramatic pursuit.

For convenience, Webster's dramatic career may be divided into three distinctive periods. To the first period, his apprenticeship and collaborative works are ascribed. The second period, perhaps the most significant of all, witnessed the two great tragedies, while the third period was meant for tragi-comedies. As a voracious reader, he became familiar with a host of writers, and tried to keep record of his reading. Very early in his career, he contributed to *The Famous History of Sir Thomas Wyatt.* It is worth remembering that he started his dramatic career through collaboration, and joined hands with a number of his contemporaries in a host of plays. Hence, he wrote *Anything for a Quiet Life* in collaboration with Middleton. Another close associate, Dekker had been a source of inspiration all through his life, and they wrote influential plays like *Westward Hoe,* and *Northward Hoe*. Dekker was so inspiring for Webster that he would like to continue their joint venture in other works as well. Hence, he joined hands with Dekker, Ford, and Rowley in the composition of *Keep the Widow Waking*. With Heywood, most prolific as he was, Webster wrote *A Cure for a Cuckold*. Moreover, Webster has, to his credit, *The Fair Maid of the Inn*, written in collaboration with Massinger and Ford. With his dramatic acumen, Webster expanded Marston's *The Malcontent*, indeed with much success.

The period of collaboration and joint venture was followed by two of his great tragedies, *The White Devil,* and *The Duchess of Malfi.* Here Webster is found to have inherited the legacy of the revenge tradition, but in a new look and treatment. In contrast to that of Kyd or Shakespeare, his is a treatment that is directed towards evolving the sympathy with the victim than with the avenger. With the 17th century Italy being a subject of interest, Webster capitalised the famous Italian courtesans in his writing. Indeed,

satiric portraiture of the court colours much of his dramatic pursuit in the period. It is worth remembering that dealing with Italy became almost a convention for most of the 17th century dramatists. Marston's *Antonio and Mellida, The Malcontent,* and *The Fawn,* Ben Jonson's *Volpone,* Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* are faithful renditions of Italy and different practices going on. Before these writers, Shakespeare also found Italy as of utmost interest in most of his plays. In *The White Devil*, Webster presents Vittoria Corombona, an Italian courtesan, as a devil, and much complexity comes up cantering her. However, she is not the only character corrupt in nature. Most of the characters do have unbridled passions of lust and ambition leading to their downfall and others as well. In his next venture, *The Duchess of Malfi,* Webster's growing sense of drawing sympathy with the victim gets an added edge. The widowed Duchess of Malfi secretly marries her steward, Antonio, and their act is punished by her brothers beyond imagination. Here the motif of revenge has become weak and fragile. What is significant is the feeling of humiliation the two brothers have experienced when their sister marries someone of lesser status and degree. In fact, the play is more durable because the plot is less chaotically framed. Moreover, the protagonist is conventionally sympathetic, and that is what most of the critics have pointed out.

The last phase in his dramatic career saw the arrival of tragi-comedies, but not of the height, he scaled in his tragedies. To this period, mention may be made of *The Devil's Law Case, A Cure for a Cuckold,* among a few others. What is striking in these plays is the rich pictorial beauty, and a close rapport with the art of a painter could easily be discerned. Enriched as they are in pictorial effectiveness, sensory experience finds its way to the readers. It is worth remembering that much of Webster's writing is like that of collage since he liked to draw upon ideas he came across elsewhere in the course of his wide reading. Like many of the contemporaries, he maintained a notebook or Commonplace Book jotting down his experience at different phases of life.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Trace the three periods in Webster's dramatic career.

Q 2: How does Webster deviate from the Revenge tradition of Kyd and Shakespeare?

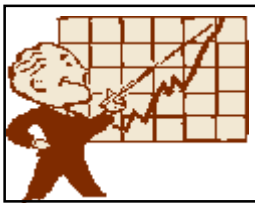
12.4 SOURCES OF THE PLAY

It is found that Webster drew upon a great variety of sources while writing down *The White Devil.* The sources have made the play an interesting reading displaying the writer's wide range of knowledge and information. He also made some modifications and changes. His immaculate skill and unquestioned disposal of subject matter mingled with high poetic beauty have set up the sources in a manner that is simply unparalleled.

In prompt response to the reigning interest in Italy in the Jacobean period, he took upon the real-life adventures ascribed to Vittoria Accoramboni and Paulo Giordano Orsini, the Duke of Bracciano. Connected to the late 16th century Italian history, the episode formed an important source of inspiration for Webster. Of course, they are not photocopy renditions. As in *The White Devil,* Vittoria's first husband is Camillo, which is a novel addition since Italian history presents the name of Francesco Peretti as her husband. In the same line, Isabella's son by Bracciano was named Virginio, not Giovanni. Bracciano is also pronounced as Brachiano in the play. The prominent figure of Monticelso in the play is Montalto in history, who adopted the coveted title of Sixtus V on becoming the Pope, not Paul IV. Besides, in contrast to the play, historical figure, Bracciano took the life of Isabella because of her incestuous relation with a person, and the former died a natural death. Webster did not find it appropriate and showed Isabella's death as the consequence of a plot, and Brachiano as a victim of revenge. Even Flamineo and Marcello hardly bear resemblance to their historical counterparts, and they stand primarily as of the dramatist's invention. Cornelia's strong moral fabric of nature, Francisco's uncompromising

vengeance, and Giovanni's significant role are real markers to Webster's innovations, and the dramatic necessity as well.

Sometimes it is assumed that Webster misinterpreted Italian history in his literary pursuits. To validate this, critics point out the digressions he has made in *The White Devil* while making use of the sources. However, such an assumption holds little water, provided the innovations he has made in the play. It is true that there was less documentation of the 17th century Italian history, and much information was in circulation through gossip and discussion. Indeed, this was not the hindrance for Webster, who approached history not simply for its sake; rather for the sake of his literary endeavour. It was his constructive reading of history that reaped the desired result. In addition to the aforesaid source, Webster also drew upon Erasmus' *Colloquia Familiara* especially for the substance and some of Latin words and phrases as used by Lodovico and Gasparo. With his wide reading, Webster was unfailingly indebted to continental literature trumpeted by Montaigne, Monteux, Guevara, and a host of others. Moreover, Sidney's *Arcadia,* Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller,* Painter's *Palace of Pleasure,* Bignon's *A Treatise on the Election of the Popes* were no less influential in giving shape to the plays of Webster.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What is the source of the play *The White Devil*?

12.5 ACT-WISE SUMMARY

Act I

Scene i:

The scene opens with a conversation among Lodovico, Antonelli, and Gasparo. Although the scene is short, it throws much light on the plight of Lodovico. Through his bitter experience, he says that fortune plays great mischief in the life of human beings. To quote him, "Fortune's a right whore/ If she give aught, she deals it in small parcels/That she may take away all at one swoop/This 'tis to have great enemies." Remarks made by Antonelli

and Gasparo are interesting since they point out Lodovico's inefficiency in sustaining the earldom resulting in his banishment. Lodovico wonders at the escape of powerful persons like Paulo Giordano Ursini from banishment. Antonelli gives words to do something for repealing Lodovico's banishment.

Scene ii.

Major characters such as Brachiano, Flamineo, and Vittoria are introduced here, and it comes to our knowledge that complicacy of action are not far away from the scene. Brachiano's growing weakness for Vittoria is illicit in nature since both of them are already married to Isabella and Camillo respectively. Indeed, it is Flamineo, brother to Vittoria, who inflames Brachiano's carnal desire for his sister, and extends his all out support to materialise the relation. With his presence of mind and eloquence, Flamineo makes remarks with a view to motivating Camillo go indifferent to his wife, Vittoria. Camillo seems to have some understanding in regard to Flamineo's intention, but of no result as such. The arrival of Cornelia, mother to Flamineo and Vittoria, throws much light on her personality. As an elderly person, she does not like Flamineo's wrong course of action in establishing an illicit relationship between Brachiano and Vittoria. She expresses sympathy with Camillo for the betrayal Vittoria has done to him. When she appears strong to Flamineo and rebukes him, the latter unfolds his past life, which had been under constant financial crunch. With his father dying a pre-mature death and failing to do something substantial for the family, Flamineo does not like to repeat the condition in his life. He wants to establish himself as a well to do person in the society, and for that he adopt every conceivable measure and avail opportunity.

Act II

Scene i.

Isabella, wife of Brachiano, seems tom have cordial relation with her brother, Francisco de Medicis. As Brachiano's growing weakness for Vittoria has become an open secret, the news also affects Francisco and his close associate, Cardinal Monticelso. When Brachiano arrives, Monticelso reminds him of the incestuous relationship, which the former denies in the strongest terms. Young Giovanni, son of Isabella and Brachiano,

shows precocity as far as his knowledge goes in regard to war fare and the skills required for running administration. However, almost the entire scene is unfailingly connected to the problems created by the rift between Brachiano and Isabella. It turns out interesting when Isabella experiences face-to-face contact with Brachiano. Despite her return after two months of sojourn, she fails to get warm regards from her husband, the underlying factor being Victoria's magic spell on him. Initially, Isabella does not appear indifferent at all. She says to Brachiano, "You are as welcome to these longing arms/As I to you a virgin." However, she comes to know his real attitude in course of the conversation as he speaks of divorce. At this, Isabella turns out strong, and expresses her resolve to deal tough with Vittoria. She holds Vittoria more responsible than Brachiano and intends to "…dig the strumpet's eyes out; let her lie/Some twenty months a-dying; to cut off/Her nose and lips, pull out her rotten teeth." With his mischief and ever-growing loyalty to Brachiano, Flamineo wants to remove every obstacle to the fulfilment of his master's desire. As such, Flamineo sets plan to take the life of Camillo. Taking the chance of the errand by Camillo and Marcello, Flamineo plans the former's death that people would take as an accident. He also wants to accomplish the death of Isabella by hatching plans. He says to Brachiano, "He (Camillo) dies this night, by such a politic strain/Men shall suppose him by's own engine slain/But for your duchess' death-"

Scene ii.

Brachiano's restlessness in eradicating the thorny site of Camillo and Isabella is well pronounced. He meets a conjurer to see them dead so that his relationship with Vittoria goes along an even path. The conjurer introduces two dumb shows engaging the way Isabella and Camillo would meet their doomsday. In showing Isabella's death, Julio and Christophero take the lead role in poisoning the picture of Brachiano. As Isabella quenches her thirst in kissing the picture of Brachiano every night, Julio and Christophero poison it, and the act costs her life. In the second dumb show, Flamineo appears pro-active in pushing Camillo forward and breaking the neck, designed to be mistaken as the act of the horse.

Act III

Scene i.

Francisco de Medicis applauds Monticelso for taking initiative in the impending trial on Vittoria for her incestuous relationship with Brachiano. Monticelso finds solid ground to charge Vittoria with, and intends to bring the best of the lawyers. But Flamineo seems to be the least affected, and does not mind the discourse on Vittoria and her relation with Brachiano. In contrast to him, Marcello, brother to Flamineo and Vittoria, is much worried about his brother's role in continuing the said relationship. Marcello does not like his sister, Vittoria embracing an immoral course of action, and intends to act tough in this regard. He says, "Oh, my unfortunate sister!/I would my dagger-point had cleft her heart." Flamineo offers his justification, which is inseparably associated with profit-making zeal. He finds Marcello's service to the duke as something that is abject failure at mercenary gain. He says to Marcello, "…what has got?/But, like the wealth of captains, a poor handful/Which in thy palm thou bear'st, as men hold water/Seeking to grip it fast, the frail reward/Steals through thy fingers."

Scene ii.

In spite of accusations brought against her, Vittoria is hardly moved, and she defends herself in the strongest terms. With her indomitable courage, she protests against the move by Monticelso and the lawyers. In support of her womanhood, and denying the accusation, she says, "…to the most worthy and respected/Lieger ambassadors, my modesty/And womanhood I tender; but withal/So entangled in a curs'd accusation." During the trial, Vittoria's eloquence and presence of mind may be observed, and she succeeds in giving prompt response to Monticelso's queries. In fact, Monticelso is very tough dealing with Vittoria, and does not hesitate presenting her as a recognised whore in the society. However, Francisco seems to have been convinced at Vittoria's strong remarks directed towards establishing her innocence as far as Camillo's murder is concerned. Francisco says, "For my part/I do not think she (Vittoria) hath a soul so black/To act a deed so bloody." This is something that Monticelso finds difficult in taking for granted. Of course, he forgives Flamineo and Marcello

saying the lack of proper evidence has made them go scot free. As the verdict comes out that Vittoria will have to stay in a house of "convertites", she simply ignores and terms it an act of injustice. After her departure, Giovanni, accompanied by Lodovico, meets Francisco and informs him of the death of hi8s mother, Isabella. At this, Francisco gets disheartened and intends to keep her fond memory forever or as long as he lives. To quote him, "…I am nothing but her grave;/And I shall keep her blessed memory/ Longer than thousand epitaphs."

Scene iii.

Flamineo is dissatisfied at the course of action, especially when his master, Brachiano and sister, Vittoria are held responsible for adultery. As such he finds himself deficient in giving the desired shape to the relationship. His anxiety could be noticed as he says, "Would I had rottled in some surgeon's house at Venice, built upon the pox as well as on piles, ere I had served Brachiano!" Like Vittoria, he also finds injustice in the way the case is handled at the court. Lodovico is amazed at Flamineo's open support for his sister's adultery. When Lodovico says something against Flamineo's interest, the latter falls down heavily upon him and unfolds the former's dependence upon the duchess in sustaining life. With his cunning nature, Flamineo asks about Isabella as if he were unknown to the turn of events. As he is informed of her death, he ascribes it to the role of fate in the life of human beings. To quote him, "O fate!/Misfortune comes like the coroner's business/Huddle upon huddle." Flamineo's inhuman nature is very much pronounced when he hardly bears with Lodovico being granted pardon by the Pope. As Antonelli informs Lodovico of the Pope's initiative in making him free of banishment, Flamineo tells them not to get rejoiced since there is no such provision in the legal system.

Act IV

Scene i.

The scene throws much light on Francisco, who appears resolute in avenging the death of Isabella, his beloved sister. Looking at murder, treachery, thefts, rapes etc. as the order of the day, he wants to bring an end, and this has established a sound image of him. However, Monticelso

advises him to have patience and wait for time that is ripe for action. Following Monticelso's direction, he prepares a list of knaves and ignoble persons, who are real threat to a stable society. Another significant episode in the scene is a long soliloquy by Francisco that reiterates his speculative mind to a great extent. Of course, his inner revelation also unfolds the course of activity going on in the city. Interestingly, the ghost of Isabella appears to him, but she says nothing to him. Indeed, he regards the ghost as a product of his thoughts that are not at the best category. Isabella's death and the misdeeds going on all around make him think a novel way. He says, "Thought, as a subtle juggler, makes us deem/Things supernatural, which have cause/Common as sickness." Perhaps the most striking aspect to his personality comes up when he makes candid revelation of his weakness for Vittoria. He says, "I am in love/In love with Corombona; and my suit/Thus halts to her in verse."

Scene ii.

Ups and downs could be observed when the letter by Francisco to Vittoria falls upon the hands of Flamineo and Brachiano. Although they have no knowledge about the addressor, the letter enrages Brachiano, who cannot put up with any rival to Vittoria. What he wants is the absolute control over her. Hence, the letter makes him think whether he is losing the hold. He holds Flamineo responsible for the turn of events, and behaves rude with him. To this, Flamineo says, "All your kindness to me, is like that miserable courtesy of Polyphemus to Ulysses; you reserve me to be devoured last." The course of action becomes more complicated when Vittoria arrives and confronts with Brachiano and Flamineo. As with Flamineo, Brachiano deals with Vittoria very rude and calls her a devil in guise of a human being. He uses foul language, and confesses the sense of loss he has experienced at the death of Isabella. He says, "Oh my sweetest duchess/How lovely art thou now!" Of course, Vittoria also does not appear as a silent listener. With her eloquence and presence of mind, she responds to Brachiano and reminds him of the dishonour their relation has brought to the society. She does not find anything positive in their relation. As such, she is very frank asking, "What have I gain'd by thee, but infamy?/ Thou hast stain'd the spotless honour of my house." She does not hesitate

pointing out Brachiano's immoral character, and it is an unsolved puzzle that he has played out with a number of ladies. However, it is astonishing to notice that Flamineo still wants his sister, Vittoria to go to Brachiano and avail the blessings of the dukedom.

Act IV

Scene iii.

In the wake of electing the Pope, Francisco is worried about Vittoria's elopement with Brachiano. The most worrying is the Prince Giovanni's union with his father, Brachiano. Moreover, Francisco finds Vittoria's elopement as a sign of humiliation to the country, and to him as well. As such, he orders the servants to get the Matron of the concertizes apprehended because without her help, Vittoria might not come out of the confinement. Monticelso does not support the pardon of Lodovico. He is astonished at Francisco's consideration into Lodovico's cause. However, through Monticelso's conversation with Lodovico, we come to know the latter's secret love for Isabella. He says to Monticelso, "Sir, I did love Brachiano's duchess dearly/Or rather I pursued her with hot lust/Though she ne'er knew on't." He is very resolute in avenging the murder of Isabella.

Act V

Scene i.

Much focus is given upon Francisco, who appears as the Moor by the name of Mulinassar. Shrewd Flamineo fails to understand the vested interest of Francisco, and the former takes the latter as someone seeking employment in the dukedom of Brachiano in the wake of the impending war between the side of Brachiano and that of the Duke of Florence. Speaking of the Moor's arrival, Flamineo says, "…he understands there's like to grow/ Some wars between us and the Duke of Florence/In which he hopes employment." Even Brachiano welcomes the Moor and employs him based on his commendable service record against the Turk. Brachiano places firm faith in the Moor, who is supposed to render the best of services to the dukedom. Of course, Francisco's revengeful motif is known to Lodovico and Gasparo. Although Francisco and his close allies move forward in orienting their vengeance, he does not find their approach to revenge as a

right one saying, “And yet methinks that this revenge is poor/Because it steals upon him like a thief.” Despite this, Francisco goes farther with his mission, and Flamineo reminds him of the service that the Duke of Brachiano would expect from him. Francisco appears more logical, and offers arguments that there is hardly a difference between him and the Duke. Flamineo’s cunning nature may also be noticed when he tries to persuade the Moor in regard to Brachiano’s half-heartedness in continuing his pledge. To reiterate this, Flamineo says to the Moor, “For I have known men that have come from serving against the Turk, for three or four months they have had pension to buy them new wooden legs, and fresh plasters; but after, ‘twas not to be had.” Of course, Flamineo knows that his villainy is known to Zanche to some extent, and it is by marrying her that he would like to access a safer position. However, this intention is utterly detested by his brother, Marcello, who calls Zanche a strumpet.

Scene ii.

Marcello goes against Flamineo in respect of the latter’s proposed marriage with Zanche. This offends Flamineo and enrages him to the fullest resulting in killing Marcello. Having killed Marcello in front of Cornelia, Flamineo showcases the extremity of cruelty. In fact, it is one of the most disturbing scenes in the play. Cornelia is heart-broken and expresses grief in immeasurable terms. Interestingly, when Brachiano asks about Marcello’s murder, Cornelia simply shrinks away from holding Flamineo responsible for that. In the meantime, Lodovico poisons Brachiano’s beaver keeping in view the vengeance that Francisco would take upon him.

Scene iii.

Brachiano experiences the effect of poison that has been applied to his helmet by Lodovico. As his pain is very acute that he could hardly tolerate, he forbids the rest of people to come near him lest they are affected with it. Hence, Vittoria and Giovanni are not permitted to approach him since he does not like to infect others with his poisoned body. Indeed, Brachiano is very much terrified at the prospect of death. He says, “On pain of death, let no man name death to me:/It is a word infinitely terrible.” When Brachiano is offstage, Lodovico appears at the scene and informs Francisco that

Brachiano has conferred the dukedom upon Francisco's sister, who is no more, till Prince Giovanni attains a mature stage. Giving a vent to vengeance, Brachiano is strangled, and looking at this, Vittoria smells the hidden agenda. She expresses her surprise saying, "Oh me! this place is hell." Flamineo says that he is a bad loser when Brachiano gives him nothing. Interestingly, Francisco plays with the sentiment of Flamineo saying that all this is an act of the Duke of Florence. To this, Flamineo says in the affirmative, and he expresses his angst. As Flamineo departs, Zanche arrives and makes a startling announcement. She informs, though late, Francisco of the murder of Isabella and Camillo. Here she confesses her guilt and the part being played out. "I sadly do confess, I had a hand/In the black deed."

Scene iv.

Though young, Giovanni does have understanding about Flamineo's nature. Hence, the young Prince wants Flamineo to say prayers and have penitence. "Study your prayers, sir, and be penitent." Flamineo takes it as a sign of humiliation and categorizes Giovanni after the nature of his uncle, Francisco. In the meantime, Francisco appears and talks about the pitiable sight of Cornelia mourning the death of Marcello. Having heard, Flamineo wants to meet them with Francisco saying this as the most uncharitable on his part. Cornelia, along with a few ladies, mourns the death of Marcello and wants to offer the best of garlands to the deceased as a mark of warm feeling. However, she does not forgive Flamineo, and thinks that the guilt of a brother's murder is still with him. Cornelia interrogates in respect of Flamineo, "…here's is a white hand:/Can blood so soon be washed out?" Flamineo makes a revelation of his troubled condition, and he finds himself as a disturbing fellow. His guilt at the murder of Marcello and his abject loss in the dukedom of Brachiano make his life full of pain and trouble. He says, "I have live'd/Riotously ill, like some that live in court." At the sight of Brachiano's ghost, Flamineo raises questions centering life and the experience whether the ghost has pocketed. However, Flamineo expects that all his loss would be compensated with Vittoria's sound economic condition. Unless she considers his case, he would prove himself deadly with her as time comes up. "…all these/Shall with Vittoria's bounty turn to good,/Or I will drown this weapon in her blood."

Scene v.

In this short scene, Lodovico entreats Francisco not to engage further in the course of action. He says that Francisco has already done too much, and hence he should leave the city. Lodovico also promises that he could quit everything and lead life free of complicacy. However, Francisco regards his mission as of noble stature, and would like to keep Lodovico's memory, if he experiences any casualty, intact. Addressing Lodovico, Francisco says, "I thou dost perish in this glorious act,/I'll rear unto thy memory that fame,/Shall in the ashes keep alive thy name."

Scene vi.

Showcasing his mercenary motif, Flamineo desperately wants Vittoria to give him a lion's share of the estate. Indeed, he claims the reward for his service, which he considers on a logical ground. However, the way he claims is almost a forceful approach that makes Vittoria take as an act of villainy. The situation turns out worse when he re-enters with two cases of pistols. Vitoria understands the intention of Flamineo, especially when he says, "I made a vow to my deceased lord (Brachiano)/Neither yourself nor I should outlive him." What Flamineo wants is the end of life. As he has not gained anything, he takes life as a failure. To this, Vittoria protests, and she calls him a "cursed devil", who hardly understands the meaning of life. Although death or end of life seems to have been given major thrust, Flamineo plays a game with Vittoria and Zanche, the objective being to test their faithfulness. For this, Flamineo gives them pistols that have no bullets. When they shoot, he feigns, but for a short while. With the trick, the ingratitude of Vittoria and Zanche is caught red handed, and Flamineo generalizes women as embodiments of treachery and frailty. Disguised as Capuchins, Lodovico and Gasparo reveal their identity, and also of the Duke of Florence. Lodovico appears full of scorn, and he goes mad in anger. "Oh, could I kill you forty times a day,/And use't four years together, 'twere too little!" Vittoria's fearless mindset is also to be taken note of when she intends to be beaten before her maid, Zanche's turn comes up. Her concern for Zanche is well pronounced. In quick succession, Vittoria and Flamineo die, and Lodovico reveals the secrecy of Francisco to Giovanni.

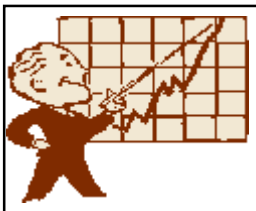
12.6 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF WEBSTER'S *THE WHITE DEVIL*

It goes without saying that Webster's *The White Devil* was not received well at the early stage. Its first performance in the famous Red Bull Theatre failed to pocket due recognition, and Webster came down heavily upon the theatre and the audience. In the world of criticism too, the play did not fare up to the standard, especially in the 17th and 18th centuries. In his influential study of the play back in 1661, Samuel Pepys did not accord high esteem; rather he categorised the play as "very poor". The literary scene in the 18th century too did not accept Webster and his plays on favourable terms. Indeed, wide-ranging interest in the study of Shakespeare in the period failed to open up the eye to other writers. It was in the 19th century that Webster and his plays started having readership, and the process did not receive halt in succeeding decades. Thanks to Charles Lamb, who accomplished the trend in his famous, *Specimens*. Developing genuine interest, he found Vittoria as an embodiment of innocence to an extent that the said quality resembles boldness. For him, Vittoria's boldness is an offshoot of her innocence. Lamb's close associate, William Hazlitt also found Vittoria as "dazzling as the lightening". Another influential critic, Charles Kingsley found the title character quite interesting, and the reverberation of "sin and horror" in the life of Vittoria is what drew his attention to the fullest.

To readers in the modernist period, the play bears special significance. Readers as well as critics have found out vivid poetry and ideas, violence and pessimism, and the desolate world in the play quite interesting since they stand in close connection to the experience usually felt in the modern world. Hence, influential critics like T.S. Eliot, T.E. Hulme, and F.R. Leavis have showered high praise for Webster and his writing. T.S. Eliot is very much straightforward talking about the high poetic genius of Webster, and his pre-occupation with the concept of 'death'. In a remarkable review, Kenneth Tynan argues that Webster's *The White Devil* has "no message as such", and the play deals with death as "harsh poetic

fact, not as sorrowful possibility." Here too, Webster's major thrust upon ambiguity and poetic treatment of death have been given due focus. Another critic by the name of Ralph Berry makes approach to the play considering the pattern as of "evil-doers and of retribution."

The Marxist critics in the 20th century have made significant study of the play, and elicited a few seminal issues relating to the ideology. Coming under this, Dena Goldberg takes up the character of Flamineo and sees him being "caught between upper class expectations and the realities of job market" in extremity. In the later 20th century, the play has made an interesting study along the critical schools of feminism and cultural materialism. Dympna Callaghan discusses the relationship between white Vittoria and black Zanche, and the sexual atrocities being meted out to them. Cultural materialist critic, Jonathan Dollimore is very much interested in power structures in the play, and their impact upon the life of individuals. In his eye, Vittoria and Flamineo are victims to the all powerful structures maintained by their respective authority. Though they offer service, they simply refuse to be sub-servient, and this is what inflicts pain on them. To justify its popularity, we may also refer to the Royal Shakespeare Company that took the play favorably in 1996. Even in the 21st century critical domain, the play continues to enjoy its day. As such, critics like Jan Sewell take upon the play dealing with various issues and aspects. Sewell finds the ambiguity in the play as an impenetrable entity and finds it hard to understand what is intended. Moreover, the critic regards Flamineo as a "typical malcontent" affecting many characters and their action.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: How was the play *The White Devil* received in the 17th and 18th century?

Q 5: How did the 20th century critics consider the play *The White Devil*?



12.7 LET US SUM UP

John Webster had to his credit the greatness popularly ascribed next to Shakespeare. His dramatic genius showcased early in the works of collaboration. He joined hands with Dekker, Heywood, Middleton, Ford, and Massinger in a number of plays. His primary reputation rests on *The White Devil*, and *The Duchess of Malfi.* Webster was a voracious reader, and had sufficient knowledge of the law. Though he wrote, he did not have much interest in publication. For writing down *The White Devil*, Webster drew upon wide range of sources. Based on the real-life adventures of Vittoria Accoramboni and of Paulo Giordano Orsini of the late 16th century Italy, the play also takes upon Erasmus' *Colloquia Familiara*, and much of continental literature. Webster's *The White Devil* is about the corrupt nature of people, who go oblivious to the basic tenets of humanity in the run up to fulfilling their nefarious agenda. Personal gain, betrayal, murder are seen as inseparable parts of people. You have learnt that, the 17th and 18th centuries did not come down favourably upon the play. It is in the 19th century that wide reception is made, and the process goes manifold as time passes on. In the 20th and 21st centuries too, the play and the writings of Webster enjoy the order of the day.



12.8 FURTHER READING

Bradbrook, M.C. (1980). *John Webster, citizen and dramatist.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Brooke, Rupert. (1916). *John Webster and the Elizabethan Drama.* New York: John Lane Company.

Bush, Douglas. (1959). *English Literature in the Earlier 17th Century.* Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

Sensabaugh, George F. (1965). *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900.* Vol. 5. No. 2. Elizabethan and Jacobean Drama, Rice University.

12.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: To the first period, his apprenticeship and collaborative works are ascribed…. …to the second, can be ascribed his two great tragedies The White Devil and The Duchess of Malfi… …the third period was meant for tragi-comedies.

Ans to Q 2: Webster did inherit the legacy of the revenge tradition, but in a new look and treatment… …as opposed to Kyd or Shakespeare, his is a treatment that is directed towards evolving the sympathy with the victim than with the avenger.

Ans to Q 3: In prompt response to the reigning interest in Italy in the Jacobean period, he took upon the real-life adventures ascribed to Vittoria Accoramboni and Paulo Giordano Orsini, the Duke of Bracciano. Connected to the late 16th century Italian history, the episode formed an important source of inspiration for Webster.

Ans to Q 4: The play was not received well at the early stage… …Samuel Pepys did not accord high esteem to the play and categorised it to be "very poor"… …Charles Lamb found the character of Vittoria as an embodiment of innocence… …William Hazlitt also found Vittoria as "dazzling as the lightening"… …therefore the Vittoria was the centre of nearly all critical responses.

Ans to Q 5: In the 20th century, Eliot praises Webster highly… …the Marxist critics Dena Goldberg takes the character of Flamineo as being "caught between upper class expectations and the realities of job market"… …cultural materialist critic, Jonathan Dollimore is very much interested in power structures in the play, and their impact upon the life of individuals.



12.10 POSSIBLE QUESTION

Q 1: Write a note on the practice of drama in the Jacobean period. Who were the major writers of the period and how they contributed to the enrichment of drama?

Q 2: What is your understanding of the dramatic genius of John Webster? How did he give shape to his writing habit?

Q 3: How did Webster's family life help him grow a writer? What are the three distinctive phases in his writing career?

Q 4: What were the sources Webster made use of in *The White Devil*? How would you justify the modification he made to the available sources?

Q 4: Write a comprehensive note on the plot construction of *The White Devil.*

Q.5: Elucidate the critical observations made by different critics on *The White Devil* over the periods. How does critical reception help us elicit the basic aspects in the play?

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UNIT 13: JOHN WEBSTER: *THE WHITE DEVIL* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

13.1 Learning Objectives

13.2 Introduction

13.3 Reading the play

- 13.3.1 Critical Commentary of the Play
- 13.3.2 Major Themes
- 13.3.3 Major Characters
- 13.3.4 Webster's Art of Characterisation

13.4 Let us Sum up

13.5 Further Reading

13.6 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

13.7 Possible Questions

13.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- make an insightful reading of the play touching upon various aspects
- explain the major themes that enrich the play
- reflect on the major characters and their role in the play
- make an assessment of Webster's art of characterisation.

13.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit is a sequel to the previous unit. Webster's *The White Devil* is a remarkable study of a famous Italian courtesan, which constituted one of the most preferred options for dramatists in the Jacobean period. However, the early 17th century Italy, as treated by the Jacobean dramatists, was the embodiment of gloomy atrocities, and bloodshed, death, avarice, cynicism etc. were the order of the day. In *The White Devil,* he has taken the life of Vittoria, an Italian courtesan, with a view to unfolding the rampant practices in the Italian court. As the play is in line of the revenge tradition, here revenge is not presented as a bounden duty; rather as a passion. Though Vittoria is

the heroine of the play, she is also a villain, a devil, who develops incestuous relationship with the Duke of Brachiano. The growing relationship results in the murder of her husband, Camillo, and Brachiano's Duchess, Isabella. When the trial is commenced for her adultery, the corrupt nature of the judges is also brought into limelight. However, Vittoria appears influential with her superb oratory and defence, and she handles the proceeding efficiently. There is no denial of the successful portrayal of Vittoria, but the post-Shakespearean dramatic scene is proud of such a literary rendition. By the end of this unit, you will be able to appreciate and discuss the play in terms of its different important aspects.

13.3 READING THE PLAY

Webster's *The White Devil* is one of his most successful and largely anthologised plays written at the peak of glory in his literary career. The play makes an interesting reading since it convincingly draws upon a number of seminal issues and ideas, which are presented through various characters with an elan that is worth remembering. Apart from being a faithful study of an Italian courtesan by the name of Vittoria Corombona, the play seems to have given major thrust upon the reigning concepts of lust, ambition, power, betrayal, mortality, femininity, and family set up. Accumulation of these aspects has given much variety, and readers bearing different tastes are likely to quench their thirst.

While reading the play, it seems that the most preferred area Webster would like to concentrate upon is adultery or illicit relationship, which affected the sizeable section of people in the aftermath of Queen Elizabeth's reign. In this sense, the play was a due response to the background, or what time demanded. Of course, this has been done by taking recourse to Italy, a European country of rich heritage, Renaissance artefacts and culture. Satiric as the dominant note is, the play takes upon Vittoria Corombona, who is at the centre of showing adultery with the Duke of Brachiano. In fact, much action follows the relationship, and almost all the characters are impacted by this to a great extent. Here it is worth mentioning that adultery apart, there are scores of other issues such as

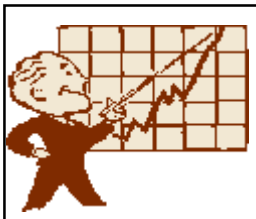
power, authority, ambition, revenge etc. that have attained new dimension, and they make an interesting study in connection with the most thrust area. For instance, centering Vittoria and Brachiano's relationship, Flamineo's ambition and sense of power and authority fabricate themselves in a new light. Truly speaking, this aspect to Flamineo could hardly be studied all alone. What it warrants is the close proximity it maintains to the main theme.

It is true that the play is in line of the emerging scenario of the early 17th century, most particularly its degeneration. This basic side is presented convincingly; there is no doubt about it. However, this is not an end in itself since the development gets a treatment reminding us of an attitude that is very much Elizabethan. Although the line of demarcation between good and evil is ambiguous in the play, evildoers are not allowed to have their free run. They are punished, and there is no excuse to them. Of course, their punishment comes late, and the misdeeds incur much damage and irreparable loss before they are addressed. The cruelty and hypocrisy of Brachiano, Flamineo, and Lodovico do not last forever because their death has made it impossible to enjoy the blessing or advantage they are madly fond of. But it is too late, and hence innocents such as Camillo and Isabella have to suffer the casualty. Whatever it may be, Webster's sense of poetic justice is not missing from the play altogether.

Most often complaint is lodged against Webster in regard to weak plot construction in his plays. The idea of a close-knit plot, which had been a major area of interest for the preceding Renaissance thinkers and writers, is not at its best with Webster. Such an assumption seems to be pronounced in *The White Devil* too since there are certain episodes that do not have much connection to the principal area of interest, and they have little to do with the enrichment of the plot structure. However, this is partially true because the superficially added episodes do not obstruct the usual course of action along what is intended by the dramatist. As such, the plot in the play does not deserve much blame as is usually thought of Webster's handling of it. Another significant aspect that draws attention in course of reading the play is Webster's mastery over characterisation. This accomplishment goes a long way in accelerating the pace of action. Almost

all the characters are beautifully drawn, and the weightage given to them relates to Webster's meticulous skill and technical excellence. Vitoria, Flamineo, Brachiano, Francisco, and Monticelso have been beautifully developed, and they serve an inseparable entity to the plot. In addition to this, the minor characters are also given much attention, and they are no less insignificant. Each of the characters has the distinctive part to play, which one can notice through one's reading.

However, the most important side that seems to be missing is the sense of humour. In the whirlpool of revenge, ambition, greed, adultery, betrayal etc, everything turns serious and grim. Though light-heartedness is not a defining trait of tragedy or melodrama, serious overtone may not be an acceptable development for theatre-goers and readers all the time. As we find in the writings of Shakespeare, there is a fine amalgam between seriousness and light-heartedness, which has been beautifully presented. Even in his tragedies, lighter touch is not missing. Of course, it is tactfully handled so that tragic effect is sustained throughout. Readers and spectators get different tastes, and this is what could not be expected from *The White Devil.* However, it is understood that the play introduces what we call horrid laughter, and the loss of genuine laughter or humour is sought to be compensated with this. This distinctive aspect has been well pronounced in a few instances. Brachiano's urgent need of clarification from the conjurer in spite of his presence at the proceeding of death to his wife, Isabella, and rival, Camillo; Francisco's interest in playing football with the skull of Brachiano after the former's encounter with the ghost of Isabella are some of the striking sights that provide horrid laughter in the play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Comment on Webster's engagement with the theme of adultery.

Q 2: Do, you agree that plot construction is not at its best with Webster?

13.3.1 Critical Commentary of the Play

John Webster's *The White Devil* is one of his most successful plays that consolidated his place as dramatist in the post-Shakespearean period. Given the popularity and dignity of fame Webster enjoyed, the play could be termed as a prelude to *The Duchess of Malfi,* another successful play to his credit. Customarily, the play is ascribed to the famous revenge tradition of the Elizabethan age and of the succeeding decades. To validate the undercurrent theme of revenge, we may refer to the revengeful attitude of Francisco, Monticelso, and Lodovico. While reading the play, we find Francisco taking the resolve to avenge the death of his sister, Isabella, and he succeeds in the mission. Monticelso also demands revenge upon Vittoria, the cause being her adultery and the death of Camillo. Even Lodovico has his grievances against Brachiano and Flamineo. All this constitutes major part in realising vengeance the characters go through. However, the revenge as articulated in the play does not seem to be of the type produced in the earlier decades. In Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* or Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus, Hamlet*, among others, revenge has its own religion or ethics that hardly reverberates in Webster's *The White Devil.* Francisco has the justification to avenge the death of Isabella, but his ambiguous relationship with the sister, and extensive help from equally corrupt Lodovico and Gasparo in fructifying the revenge appear critical of the ethical dimension of the said motif. Similarly, Monticelso's vengeance against Vittoria is more of social rank and gender question than of a serious concern at adultery or the death of Camillo. As we observe that Vittoria is not the only person responsible for her first husband's death; indeed other people, especially Brachiano are more active in this regard. Holding the trial meant for the inflicting punishment on Vittoria is partial in nature. Lodovico's grievances against Brachiano and Flamineo are more personal having much to do to his weighty expectation and its least consideration.

The play is titled, undoubtedly, after Vittoria Corombona, regarded as a devil in white complexion. Usually, the devil is attributed to the black, which is a recurring motif in the European and American socio-cultural set up. Here, Webster is an exception seeking to show devilish nature in people without following conventional code and assumption. However, as the title goes, Vittoria is not the only devil in the play; rather she acts a part of the larger spectrum of people equally mischievous, malevolent or what is popularly called devils. We see Brachiano, Flamineo, Monticelso, and Lodovico continuing a life of adultery, greed, partiality, selfishness etc. inflicting much pain on others. Without their part, the attribute of a devil as given to Vittoria appears half-hearted. They make her life act the way that is hardly permissible in a civilized society. Indeed, she is a victim to a pre-eminently male-dominating structure mostly articulated through Monticelso. The devilish nature of most of the male characters is more pronounced than that of Vittoria. In this connection, one may remember that most often women characters in Webster's plays are treated as commodity, and they are expected to have endurance and patience while attending the company of men. In *The Duchess of Malfi,* the title character speaks of endurance, not of complaint. Although Vittoria is feistier, and she defends her with strength and vehemence in the trial scene, she cannot stand the test of circumstances conditioned by the male members, especially Flamineo and Monticelso. Isabella and Cornelia too are not presented favourably. Isabella's meekness, and Cornelia's favouritism and mercenary motif fail to cut a decent image of these women.

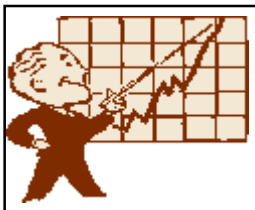
It is interesting to note that the play is a microcosm of Italy with people being drawn from a great variety of professions in the country. As such, aristocrats, churchmen, courtesans, and courtiers throng the play, and they provide different tastes with readers and theatregoers. What is striking about these people is that they maintain their stance as permissible within the bounds of their class. As long as they carry out the norms and cultural baggage, everything

turns good and acceptable. Once the set pattern is sidelined or challenged, complicacy arises, indeed in impunity. This happens to Vittoria and Flamineo, and they face the consequence. When Vittoria is accused of adultery, and held guilty of Camillo's death, she extends strong defense and points out the faulty system of judgment. Doing this, she challenges a set pattern that is simply unruly and unjust. This makes the concerned authority go mad, and Vittoria is made subject to the position of "convertites" as a measure of punishment. Although Flamineo acts as villain and makes every conceivable effort to turn the relation between Brachiano and Vittoria a reality, he also perishes in the process. Everything is set for Flamineo, and he has to lead life within the bounds. But he surpasses the limits when he tries heart and soul to undo his economic impairment. Is fact, he is expected to sustain the condition he has been placed upon so long. Of course, his approach to addressing the present condition itself is not sound, which also has its part in his downfall. What we notice is a strong structure that conditions human life along an expected path, and those who transcend or challenge are punished.

Another significant aspect worth mentioning is the unhealthy image of the Popish authority the play has convincingly presented. As the setting is Italy, and much action takes place near Rome, an established hub of the Pope, it is natural to get the action impacted by the all- powerful institution. This is what Cardinal Monticelso has been assigned to in the play. It is true that the scenes relating to Monticelso give the touch of a public figure in the otherwise family play. Each of the characters is more concerned with personal matter. However, Monticelso has nothing personal to gain. Unfailingly, he acts a public figure, which is connected to the Popish authority. In close association with Francisco, he implements the authoritarian stance, and his role is more pronounced in the trial scene. Taking adultery between Vittoria and Brachiano, and Camillo's murder as core issues, Monticelso is found more opposed to Vittoria, something that goes along gender bias as permeated through the Church

authority. His recourse to partial judgment brings down the image of the authority, and Webster's satiric stance in addressing the case turns out more visible. In addition to this play, Webster's other master piece, *The Duchess of Malfi,* also presents the coarse and cruel nature of the Cardinal. The sight of the Duchess being strangled by the Cardinal's murderers is quite alarming. The Cardinal in *The Duchess of Malfi* is more uncompromising than Monticelso in *The White Devil.* However, in both the cases, the Cardinals appear inhuman, and it is an irony that their position meant for the well-being of humanity does the opposite, most often resulting in its extremity.

Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* is more durable than his *The White Devil*, because the plot of the former is less chaotically framed, and this has posed doubt about the serious complaint lodged by critics against his poor plot construction. Of course, *The White Devil* is somehow missing the edge of the later play. Most of the episodes do not seem consonant with what the title suggests or stands for. If we follow the significance of the title, there is very little resemblance to be gained when consideration is accorded to the course of action. The villainy or devilish nature of most of the male characters seems more redundant than that of Vittoria, which goes against the significance of the title. However, the play has reached the public especially for critiquing corruption in the elite class, and presenting characters in their ambiguity. In addition, the linguistic quality enriched in images of animals, plants, money etc, is an added charm. Webster's high poetic acumen and excellence in artistry seem to have compensated the void as perceived in the play.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: Can we take Vittoria to be an essentially devilish character?

Q 4: In what way, does the play provide a microcosm of Italy?

13.3.2 Major Themes

Webster's *The White Devil* comprises a number of themes that make the play quite interesting. Taking a close look at the themes, we may discern the great variety of tastes that Webster intended to provide with fond readers and theatregoers. Let us discuss each of the themes embedded in the play.

***Revenge**:*

Revenge is one of the most dominant themes in the play. In fact, Webster wanted to follow the famous revenge tradition that enjoyed its peak of height in the preceding decades. Though the play is not woven completely along the mark of genuine revenge tradition, there are certain episodes that pin up the fabric of revenge throughout. Hence, we may refer to secret murders of harmless persons, ghostly visitation, feigned madness, and the devastating final scene as some of the recurring features that stand close to the revenge tradition. Much action takes place under the pall of vengeance that most of the characters like to follow. Francisco takes the resolve to avenge the death of his sister, Isabella, and he is successful. He has the right cause to take up the action, but his close entanglement to mischievous Lodovico and Gasparo does not seem favourable. Even the ghosts of Isabella and Brachiano appear to Francisco and Flamineo respectively reminding them of the urgency in taking revenge. Earlier before her death, Isabella demands divorce from Brachiano when she comes to know his adultery with Vittoria. Indeed, Isabella's developing mindset is largely conditioned by her vengeance at illegitimate relationship. The revenge as pursued by most of the characters results in much casualty. However, the dramatic curve gets an edge as the revengeful attitude of the characters gets realised.

***Ambition and power**:*

Ambition and power is another important theme in the play. Though they are different in nature, they appear as inseparable

entities, provided the concerned take recourse to them. When we read the play, it is Flamineo who manipulates the action in accordance with his vested interests. He cuts his image as an ambitious personality, and tries to undo the financial disparity he has experienced over the years. Behind financial gain, his is a motif unfailingly related to taking hold of power. For him, sound financial condition is a prelude to quench one's thirst in a given socio-political set up. Like Flamineo, Francisco's close ally, Lodovico also turns out a power monger. By giving all out support to Franciso, he tries to undo the dark chapter of banishment and loss of power. That is why he comes out more cruel and dramatic in following the mandate of Francisco. If Flamineo and Lodovico try to get hold of power, the Duke of Francisco capitalises his power to oust the Duke of Brachiano, and punish him because of his betrayal with Isabella and subsequent murder. Cardinal Monticelso also uses his power, Popish as it is, to undermine the status of woman. His treatment of Vittoria in the trial scene establishes the bias he carries out in the profession. Even Vittoria's ambition to better her position and status in society becomes visible. She betrays Camillo and develops relation with Brachiano. What leads her to take such a stance is nothing but her utter disregard at the condition with Camillo. Of course, she is motivated by Flamineo in this regard, and this proves her fragility of character to some extent.

***Appearance and Reality**:*

Both appearance and reality act as contrasting elements in the play. The deceptive nature of appearance poses difficulty for readers and theatregoers in framing sound image. Perhaps, this contributes to the accomplishment of ambiguity Webster was very fond of in his dramatic pursuits. It is found that Francisco and Monticelso are noble by birth and in status, but this is not maintained in reality. Their nobility is missing, and they come close to Flamineo and Lodovico. Though Monticelso is a Cardinal, he is a seeker of blood and hatred in reality. With him, Webster has presented the

darker side of religious institution as operational in society. Similarly, Brachiano and Flamineo are villains, but the way they behave and appear is hardly understandable to readers and spectators. It is through action that their villainy comes at the surface level. Indeed, the theme helps a lot in giving momentum to the action of the play, and it also warrants careful reading to discern the underlying charm.

Misogyny:

There is a genuine contempt being shown for women in the play. Most of the male characters do not seem to have decent approach to their female counterparts. Cruel and mischievous as he is, Flamineo utters words that go against the interest of women including his mother and sister. He generalises women as the embodiment of all that is not acceptable in a world of activity and progress. The way he uses Vittoria to win over the love of Brachiano is a pointer towards commodification of women in a male-dominating structure. Monticelso is another person to have shown misogyny in its extremity. He uncompromisingly tries to hold Vittoria responsible for the adultery she develops with Brachiano. But, she counters, and never lets her being swept away by his terse arguments. Again, Brachiano's betrayal with Isabella relates to the least regard accorded to women. Having known her husband's secret union with Vittoria, Isabella tries to persuade him into her fold, but in vain. Then she becomes arrogant and offended. However, her arrogance is found to be more directed towards Vittoria than Brachiano. This points out the effect of system women are placed upon, and by coming under this, they start finding out fault with the same sex.

Individualism*:*

Individualism is another theme of importance in the play. Interestingly, the theme centres on anarchic individuals and oppressive rules that govern a given society. As the play opens, we find murderous Lodovico voicing out his concern at establishing his lost position, which is a consequence of banishment. Then Brachiano's turn comes up, and his individualism is pronounced to

a great extent. He intends, also does, to divorce his wife, Isabella, and follow desires for Vittoria. The adultery he follows seems to be an offshoot of individualism that is operational in his personality. Vittoria's response to Brachiano may also be taken as a measure to uplift her individual entity in the eye of others. However, it is none other than Flamineo who exhibits robust individualism in his approach to life. Whatever he does is directed towards personal gain, and he cuts the image of a genuine malcontent to satisfy the desires and expectations. Besides the personal ambience, oppressive social forces are equally harmful to the characters. As the social forces posed by Monticelso stand as obstacles to her union with Brachiano, Vittoria wants to do away with them. Similarly, Flamineo also is subject to the social structure that plans everything for him in advance.

***Medievalism**:*

The play also provides the taste of medievalism despite its production in the early 17th century. Many a good value of morality plays coupled with the charm of chivalry makes an interesting study for readers and critics alike. As the confrontation between good and evil or virtue and vice is an inseparable part of the medieval morality plays, there is no dearth of the element in the play. Here too, Cornelia stands for virtue and most of the characters including Flamineo, Lodovico, and Zanche for vice. In addition to this, many chivalric values such as Giovanni's suit of armor, frequent entries and exits of knights and ambassadors characterise the play.

13.3.3 Major Characters

In this section, we shall have a look at the important characters of the play *The White Devil*.

Vittoria:

Of all the characters, Vittoria Corombona reigns supreme in the play. She is adopted as a faithful study of Italian courtesan, a development that gained popularity in the 17th century. Study of

characters like Vittoria drew much attention from writers of the period. Hence, we find Evadne in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* or Bianca in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* as a faithful ally of Vittoria. She is a daughter of Cornelia, and sister of Flamineo and Marcello. Indeed, the play is titled after her, the objective being to establish her as a devil in white complexion. It is nothing but her adultery with the Duke of Brachiano that makes the people concerned, regard her as a devil. However, such a proposition is more of a mischievous and biased structure quite operational in society. What strikes us the most is her betrayal with husband, Camillo by developing incestuous relation with Brachiano. Of course, her growing weakness for Brachiano is largely accentuated by brother, Flamineo, who tries everything to undo his financial crunch in life. Her cruelty is very much pronounced when she is not moved at the death of Camillo. On the contrary, her mother, Cornelia is moved at the unfortunate death of son-in-law, Camillo. It is in the trial scene that Vittoria's image of a defensive and courageous personality gets well articulated. With her talent and presence of mind, she understands the partiality of judgment as adhered to by Monticelso and the rest of the lawyers. However, she never lets her down, and cuts an image of strong personality. She says, "I will not weep;/No, I do scorn to call up one poor tear/To fawn on your injustice." She is very straightforward, and speaks of Flamineo's inhuman nature. Though he is her brother, she is not blind to his faults and course of action. Hence, she says to Flamineo, "What have I gain'd by thee, but infamy?/Thou hast stain'd the spotless honour of my house,/And frighted thence noble society."

Brachiano:

Husband to Isabella and a duke, Brachiano plays a vital role in the play. Indeed, his relation with Vittoria, and his pro-active hand in the death of Isabella and rival, Camillo are all that makes his personality notoriously interesting. It is understood that the interest he draws is not of any positive quality; rather of something, which is

scarcely accepted in a decent society. As Vittoria's beauty and sexual attraction distracts the celibacy of his married-life, he seems to appear as a weak personality. This is more articulated under the spell of Flamineo. After all, Flamineo is a secretary to him, and a gap should be maintained to some extent. However, this what misses from his rapport with Flamineo. Besides betraying Isabella, Brachiano also fails as a father since the duties to Giovanni are not found being attended. He turns out as victim to the vengeance of Francisco. However, the prospect of painful death overpowers him in the strongest measure. He expresses fear, "On pain of death, let no man name death to me:/ It is a word infinitely terrible." This related to the intensity of love he has for life and its charm. Ironically, his fear becomes a reality as he is poisoned and then strangled to death. As his ghost appears to Flamineo, throws earth upon him, and shows the skull, he provides the element of horror, besides forecasting the tragic downfall of Flamineo.

Flamineo:

Perhaps the most mischievous and cunning of all the characters is Flamineo, brother to Vittoria and Marcello, and son to Cornelia. Without him, the idea of the play hardly touches reality. Indeed, characters like Flamineo are very interesting to make study of since they garner the action the way they like. Very active and responsive as he is, Flamineo finds his close connection with Bosola of *The Duchess of Malfi.* Besides, Shakespeare also has capitalised characters like Iago in giving a distinctive colour to his plays in this direction. What Flamineo is obsessed with is his single-minded devotion to the betterment of financial crunch he is passing through all along. However, his approach to addressing this, and the measures he adopts are devoid of humanity. His obsession is so acute that he does not mind using Vittoria to win over the love of the Duke of Brachiano. Pushing Vittoria to adultery relates to the baser instinct he follows in materialising the hidden agenda. Apart from this, he appears as a constant companion to Brachiano, and most

often, he acts his mentor. Although he cuts his image as a courageous and uncompromising personality, he is not free from superstition. Hence, he does not like Brachiano taking his name when the latter is on the verge of death. He says, "I do not like that he (Brachiano) names me so often,/Especially on's death-bed; 'tis a sign/I shall not live long." However, his most inhuman nature comes up when he kills his brother, Marcello. It is true that he gets punishment at the end, but much action takes place before judgment is levied upon him.

Francisco:

Francisco De Medicis, Duke of Florence, is one of the major characters in the play. What is interesting about Francisco is that he takes up two different roles considering the need of hour. At first, he appears as duke in most of the scenes, and then a Moor by the name of Mulinassar in Act V. This relates to his capacity of making adjustment in accordance with what situation demands. However, the most significant aspect to his character is vengeance, largely conditioned by the injustice done to Isabella. His deep love of sister may easily be discerned, and he takes the resolve to punish Brachiano that results in success. Indeed, Francisco's motif of revenge has oriented the play along the tradition of revenge to a great extent. There is no denying the fact that Francisco avenges the death of Isabella, but his opposition to Brachiano is also a development based on his secret love for Vittoria, something that has not been developed in a great degree. Though he does not confess it to her, he intends to keep her fond memory in versification. Thus he says, "I am in love,/In love with Corombona; and my suit/ Thus halts to her in verse." In combination of all this, he takes revenge upon Brachiano with co-operation from Lodovico, Gasparo, and Antonelli. Cardinal Monticelso's close rapport with Francisco also establishes him as an influential figure having wide-spread network. Though he has a genuine ground to develop vengeance, accomplishing the said motif with the help of equally hypocrites like Lodovico reduces the dignity of revenge to a great extent.

Monticelso:

It is through Monticelso that Webster has presented the institution of church as all influential in a given society. He is a public figure, and his inclusion has extended the bounds of the pre-eminently family play. However, Monticelso is not presented in favourable terms; he is someone unfailingly connected to bias, prejudice, and gender discrimination. In the trial of Vittoria, he accuses her in strong measure, and holds her solely responsible for adultery with Brachiano. He is so enraged at the development that he does not mind using foul language as well in the pursuit of judgment. Although a Cardinal of high stature, as people would like to acknowledge him, Monticelso cannot maintain it. He is so associated with Francisco that he forgets the dignity usually assigned to a Cardinal. Though a negative character as such, Monticelso is active and resolute in taking the course of action. He also constitutes the element of irony, usually taken for doing good to others, does the opposite, and the touch of humanity is completely missing from him. Satiric portrayal of Monticelso is what has been intended in the play. The uncompromising nature of Monticelso is another defining trait to his personality. As the play progresses, he does not seem to have the same role as played out at the initial stage.

Lodovico:

There lies much significance in the character of Lodovico since the play starts in his conversation with close associates, Antonelli and Gasparo, and interestingly the last scene also sees him in the company of Giovanni. No other character in the play makes such a presence a reality. In the very first scene, Lodovico represents his decayed lot, and it is a sign of most of the Italian counts passing through deep financial crunch. This apart, what is so striking about Lodovico is his uncompromising revengeful attitude that finds a decent ally in Francisco. This seems true that Lodovico's association with Francisco is more of undoing his present financial condition. So he does everything as Francisco wants. But the most potent

cause conditioning his stance is his hard-core intention to take revenge upon Brachiano. This is what Francisco wants too with a view to avenging the death of Isabella. It is in front of Monticelso that Lodovico exposes his inner sexual weakness for Isabella, and she is killed in the plan hatched by Brachiano, Lodovico's rivalry goes farther developing himself an avenger. He says to Monticelso, "Sir, I did love Brachiano's duchess dearly,/Or rather I pursued her with hot lust,/Though she ne'er knew on't." Though a hypocrite at the fullest, Lodovico is a firm and resolute character. He assumes a kind of position that is no less in stature when compared to that of Flamineo.

13.3.4 Webster's Art of Characterisation

Webster has shown great mastery over characterisation in *The White Devil.* It is widely acknowledged that in both the tragedies, *The White Devil,* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, he has created a few characters that have assumed an identity of their own, and they are much in circulation among the readers and theatregoers. They are not mere characters. What they stand for is an inseparable entity to respective plot, and both plot and characterisation maintain their close proximity. Giving a vent to his acumen in characterisation, Webster has enriched the world of *The White Devil* with a number of characters drawn from Italian aristocrats, churchmen, courtesans, and courtiers. Drawing characters from various classes, Webster has created a society of mixed colour and composition. However, all the characters are not uniformly developed. If a few characters are given much focus, there are certain others who could not be measured at the same level. Of course, this has been done keeping in view the requirements of the course of action and turn of events. In addition, characters appearing in disguise constitute another important criterion as far as Webster's art of characterisation is concerned.

Through characterisation, Webster intends to provide a wide-ranging scenario as existed in the later 16th and early 17th centuries.

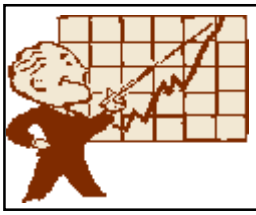
It is true that he made use of different sources in writing down the play and a few of its characters. Maintaining an open eye to the available sources he showcases how well read and well-informative he was. However, novelty and ingenuity could be observed in the modification he has made in characterisation based on different sources. For instance, Flamineo and Marcello, as they appear in the play, bear little resemblance to their historical prototypes. Besides, giving Cornelia a strong moral nature, focusing Giovanni's role, and making Francisco pre-eminently a revengeful personality, Webster exhibits adaptability as a marked development in his art of characterisation.

The White Devil, and *The Duchess of Malfi*, are based on women as protagonists. Of course, their tragic downfall counts for in the plays. They meet with catastrophic end because of the male-dominating social structure they are placed in. The tragic dimension they experience in life is not of a Shakespearean type, in which individuals are mainly responsible for what they confront at various moments. However, we cannot rule out what is popularly called 'error of judgment'. Vittoria's decision to develop incest with Brachiano after getting married to Camillo is not acceptable in a civilised society, and many ups and downs could be noticed in the aftermath of the relationship. However, Vittoria is partially responsible for the tragic phase in life since an all-powerful social structure as conditioned by Flamineo and Monticelso has its major role in inculcating the turn of life, but for the worst. Keeping in view his hidden agenda, Flamineo utilises Vittoria for his own benefit. Similarly, Cardinal Monticelso sets everything that goes against Vittoria's interest. As in *The White Devil,* the Duchess in *The Duchess of Malfi* turns out a victim to male chauvinism run by her two brothers, and their close associate, Bosola. Hence, the tragic downfall the two women protagonists have experienced owes much to an outside agency, and this is what makes the study of the text quite fascinating and effective as well.

Although Webster takes up Vittoria as a central character and the intention of showing her a devil is very much present, the course of action the play initiates in succeeding phase does not seem so responsive to showing her in that light. Apart from adultery, much of her action cannot be categorised into the mode of devilish or cruel nature. In fact, her characterisation is more of victimisation than of a fault on her own. The male members appear more devilish than Vittoria does. Flamineo, Monticelso, Lodovico, Gasparo, and Antonelli are all hypocrites, and the play seems to have thrown much light on them, not on Vittoria of the same proportion. This relates to the non-conformity between the title and the mode of action most of the characters take recourse to. Vitoria apart, rest of the women characters do not have the same treatment too as their male counterparts have enjoyed. Whether it is Isabella or Cornelia, we do not find her assuming significant role in the play. Isabella is betrayed by Brachiano, and when she comes to know of this, there is hardly any space given to her characterisation so that she could have taken an acceptable measure. It is her death that quickly follows the knowledge of Vittoria and Brachiano's infamy. Another interesting aspect to be noticed about Isabella is also her victimisation to a patriarchal norm when she holds Vittoria mainly responsible for Brachiano's betrayal. It is true that Cornelia has been presented in favourable terms. She is a virtuous lady standing in favour of nobility. When Camillo dies, it is none other than Cornelia who feels sad at the unexpected demise of her son-in-law. But her role is not given due space, and she fails to convince others along the line of humanity and fellow-feeling. She is, so to speak, sidelined in the whirlpool of revenge, hatred, and enmity most of the characters would like to follow as normal routine in life.

The play introduces a number of Moorish characters, and they have given an added weightage to Webster's art of characterisation. It is through minor characters that the technique has been realised. As such, the play presents Zanche, servant to

Vittoria, and Jaques, servant to Giovanni as Moors. Even a central character like Francisco, Duke of Florence, disguises himself as a Moor by the name of Mulinassar. Of course, his disguise is intended to scale success, viz. to take revenge upon Brachiano. Here Webster has shown great skill since the characterisation succeeds in yielding the desired goal of Francisco. No one suspects the Moorish manner as showcased by Francisco. In addition to this, inclusion of the Moorish characters points out to the proximity of the Ottoman Empire or 'Oriental' mystery as well. Thus, it opens up new areas of study concerning the play. Besides, Lodovico and Gasparo's appearance as Capuchins in the second half of the play is another aspect to characterisation. Apart from imparting pictorial quality to the play, it represents the taste of Roman Catholicism. Thus, a great variety of tastes could be noticed here. Interestingly, the court as presented in the play is found being frequented by a number of foreign ambassadors. This relates to the close contact the court used to maintain in relation to various matter and issues.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 5: Comment on Webster's art of characterisation.



13.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we came to know about Webster's practice of drama, especially in his play *The White Devil.* He occupied an important position among the post-Shakespearean dramatists. Though he tried hand in tragi-comedy, he was not as much successful as he was in writing down tragedy. Webster's *The White Devil* is one of his most successful plays. While reading the play, we come across a number of key areas such as lust, ambition, power, betrayal, mortality, femininity etc. All these make the play

quite interesting. Although the play is an accomplished work of art, there are certain areas that fall under scanner of a critical eye. The play involves a host of major themes that have opened up new vistas of interest in the play. Revenge, appearance and reality, ambition and power, individualism, and medievalism are some of the themes drawing wide-ranging attention. With various characters, the action of the play makes smooth run. As such, characters like Vittoria, Flamineo, Brachiano, Francisco, Monticelso, Lodovico have been given due consideration.



13.5 FURTHER READING

Berry, R.(1972). *Art of John Webster.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Forker, Charles R.(1986) *Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster.* Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Grierson, J.C.(1958). *Cross-Currents in 17th century English Literature*. New York: Harper and Brothers.



13.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Adultery or illicit relationship affected the sizeable section of people in the aftermath of Queen Elizabeth's reign. In this sense, the play was a due response to the background or what time demanded.

Ans to Q 2: Perhaps true… …certain episodes of the play do not have much connection to the principal area of interest… …however such episodes do not obstruct the usual course of action along what is intended by the dramatist… …as such, the plot in the play does not deserve much blame as Webster himself wanted it like that.

Ans to Q 3: Usually, the devil is is a recurring motif in the European and American socio-cultural set up… …Webster is an exception seeking to show devilish nature in people without following conventional code and assumption… …Vittoria is not the only devil in the play; rather

she acts a part of the larger spectrum of people equally mischievous, malevolent or what is popularly called devils.

Ans to Q 4: The play is a microcosm of Italy with people drawn from a great variety of professions… …aristocrats, churchmen, courtesans, and courtiers throng the play… …these people maintain their stance as permissible within the bounds of their class… …as long as they carry out the cultural norms everything is good and acceptable… …once that pattern is dismantled complicacy arises as you can see in the case of Vittoria and Flamineo.

Ans to Q 5: Through characterisation, Webster intends to provide a wide-ranging scenario as existed in the later 16th and early 17th centuries… …this also displays how well read and well-informative he was… …novelty and ingenuity could be observed in the modification he made in characterisation… …Flamineo and Marcello bear little resemblance to their historical prototypes…. …giving Cornelia a strong moral nature, focusing Giovanni's role, and making Francisco pre-eminently a revengeful personality, Webster exhibits adaptability as a marked development in his art of characterisation.



13.7 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Write a note on Webster's contribution to the field of drama. Do you think his writing is completely in line of the famous revenge tradition? Give a reasoned answer.

Q 2: What are the various issues and ideas you get in reading Webster's *The White Devil*? Which of the issues have been given major thrust in the play?

Q 3: Discuss the significance of the title "The White Devil". Do you consider the title as apt and appropriate?

Q 4: How does social structure affect the life of individuals? Is there any resistance posed to the all-engulfing structure? How much the conceivable resistance is successful in the play?

Q 5: Write a note on the depiction of women characters in the play. Do you find women issues being faithfully presented in the play?

Q 6: Make a comparative study between Brachiano and Francisco. What are the major causes leading to the vengeance for each other?

Q 7: Webster's *The White Devil* is widely accepted as a grim and serious play. Do you agree? If yes, give reasons in support of your position.

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UNIT 14: WILLIAM CONGREVE: *THE WAY OF THE WORLD* (PART I)

UNIT STRUCTURE

14.1 Objectives

14.2 Introduction

14.3 William Congreve: The Playwright

14.4 Act wise Summary of the Play

14.5 Critical Reception of Congreve's *The Way of the World*

14.6 Let us Sum up

14.7 Further Reading

14.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

14.9 Possible Questions

14.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss Congreve's life and literary works in detail
- identify the sources Congreve made use of in the play *The Way of the World*
- make a summary of the play
- discuss the place Congreve enjoyed as playwright.

14.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to William Congreve and his play *The Way of the World.* Though not well received during its time, this play is the most finished of William Congreve's comedies. Congreve was a prolific writer of comedies with his brilliantly drawn characters and satiric portrayal of high society. Their witty dialogues, skilful plots and perfectly crafty deployment of contrasting characters and themes mark his comedies. They explore social values, marital practices and the intrigues and deceits carried out in high society. Congreve has more feeling for the individual and is very subtle with his/her emotions, thus probing deeper than any of his contemporaries.

In this unit, we shall not only discuss the life and works of Wliiam Congreve but will also get an opportunity to read the summary of the play. You will find that wit is a major instrument in the play and it serves to highlight the brilliance of the characters and their dialogues.

14.3 WILLIAM CONGREVE: THE PLAYWRIGHT



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William Congreve was one of the most influential of English dramatists of the Restoration period, who helped shape the English Comedy of Manners with his brilliant and satirical portrayal of the fashionable society of England coupled with excellent comic dialogues and an intense scrutiny of the affectations of his time. Let us now discus the life and works of William Congreve.

Congreve was born on 24th January, 1670 at Bardsey, near Leeds. His father became a lieutenant in the Irish army in 1674 and in 1782; he joined the regiment of the Duke of Ormond. Congreve attended Kilkenny School, which was the Eton of Ireland. In April 1686, he entered Trinity College, Dublin, from where he received his M.A. in 1696. Here, Jonathan Swift became a near contemporary and a lifelong friend. It was here that Congreve's interest in drama originated. In 1691, He entered the Middle Temple as a law student, but never really practised it as his real love was for the theatre. Then he began his literary career by publishing a light, but delightful novel *Incognita* or, *Love and Duty Reconcil'd*. Congreve became a protégé of John Dryden and even collaborated with Dryden in his translation of the satires of Juvenal and Persius (1693). He became a prolific writer of comedies with his brilliantly drawn characters and satiric portrayal of high society. He lived in comfort and his friendships with numerous literary luminaries like Swift, Alexander Pope, John Gay, and Richard Steele were warm and constant. Congreve was also a great friend of the actress Anne Bracegirdle, who was also thought to be his lover, but the nature of their intimacy was never really determined. However,

in his later years, he was very attached to the second Duchess of Marlborough, with whom he almost certainly sired a daughter, Lady Mary Godolphin, later Duchess of Leeds. Congreve never really recovered from a fall suffered in a carriage accident in 1718, and died in January, 1729, leaving a large legacy of his fortune to the Duchess of Marlborough. He was laid to rest in Poet's Corner, Westminster Abbey.

Congreve's first play *The Old Bachelor*, which was published in 1693, made him famous. His popularity was further confirmed by the success of his two other plays, *The Double Dealer* (1693) and *Love for Love* (1695). *The Old Bachelor* appealed to the audiences, because it handled the themes they were familiar with. He wrote a single tragedy titled *The Mourning Bride* (1697), which was self-consciously poetic. Their witty dialogues, skilful plots and perfectly crafty deployment of contrasting characters and themes mark Congreve's comedies. They explore social values, marital practices and the intrigues and deceits carried out in high society. Jeremy Collier lashed out at Congreve and Vanbrugh in his *Short View on the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage* (1698), to which Congreve responded with his *Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations* (1698). Collier's attack so stung Congreve that it led to a diminution of his interest in the theatre, though he remained involved in the management of Lincoln's Inn Theatre until 1705. However, he published only one more comedy, *The Way of the World* (1700), a masterpiece of comedy of manners. He continued to write in the 18th century, publishing one masque *The Judgment of Paris* (1701), an operatic piece called *Semele* (1710), a prose tale titled *An Impossible Thing* (1720), an edition of *The Dramatic Works of Dryden* (1717) and a number of poems.

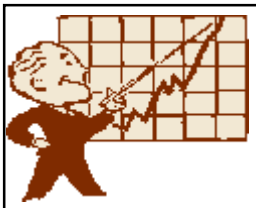
Congreve is without doubt one of the outstanding writers of the English comedy of manners which takes as its main theme the manners, follies and foibles of the class to which it was addressed. It also deals with the imitators of French customs, conceited wits and fantastic characters. Restoration comedy is a kind of critical comedy, aimed at curing excess, and "bringing the sword of common sense" to bear upon the extravagant assumptions of the age. Congreve rises above his contemporaries in his

delicacy of feeling and perfection of his phrasing. William Hazlitt praised Congreve thus: “Every sentence is replete with sense and satire, conveyed in the most polished and pointed terms.” George Meredith was of the opinion that: “He is at once precise and voluble...in this he is a classic, and is worthy of treading a measure with Moliere.” Congreve has more feeling for the individual and is very subtle with his emotions, thus probing deeper than any of his contemporaries. A sensitive craftsman, he wrote thoughtfully conceived and expertly contrived works. Though not equal to Moliere, he can be called the nearest English approach to him. Congreve, like other comic dramatists, reflected the manners of the period but at the same time sought to improve his audience through satire, in the manner of Ben Jonson.



LET US KNOW

In Giles Jacob’s *Poetical Register* (1719), Congreve’s character is described as being “so far from being puff’d up with Vanity…that he abounds with Humility and good Nature. He does not show so much the Poet as the Gentleman.” The last phrase may be taken as a comment on the infamous meeting with Voltaire who came to England in 1726 to extract what he could from the great writer of English comedy. The fatigue stricken and ailing Congreve was not interested in discussing the finer nuances of comic writing or a play he had written some 30 years earlier. He famously told Voltaire that he would be glad to talk on general subjects, “on the footing of a gentleman”, but not on subjects where he would be expected to display expert critical knowledge.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: Who were the famous literary luminaries with whom Congreve shared friendship?

Q 2: Name some of Congreve’s successful works.

Q 3: What are the most significant characteristics of Congreve’s plays?

14.4 ACT WISE SUMMARY OF THE PLAY

[Adapted from National Arts Centre Study Guide available in http://www.nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/0708/the way of the world guide.pdf]

Prologue:

It tells the audience that writers are fools, who gamble that their audience will like their offerings, and Congreve throws himself on the mercy of the audience. He tells them not to accept a satire, since they are already perfect.

Act I

This act is set in a men's club famous for social gatherings, gossips and gambles. Mirabell is losing at cards to his friend, Fainall. He tells Fainall that Mrs. Millamant humiliated him in public the previous night. Millamant is heir to a fortune which depends on whether her aunt Lady Wishfort approves of her marriage. Mirabell had pretended to love Lady Wishfort in order to get closer to Millamant and her friend Mrs. Marwood. Humiliated, Lady Wishfort would obviously not approve of Mirabell's marrying her niece. This situation helps in the development of the plot of the play in the subsequent acts. An obsessed Mirabell tells Fainall that Millamant puts up with Witwoud and Petulent, two coxcombs and fools, and confesses that he likes her in spite of all her faults. A letter arrives from Wilful to his half brother who is playing card at the club telling that he is planning for travel abroad for the first time as he is young enough to go on adventuring even at the age of 40. Subsequently, the other half brother Witwoud describes Petulant's faults as virtues, and misunderstands the insults inflicted on him by Mirabell and Fainall as jokes. The plot advances with Mirabell coming to know that Lady Wishfort is planning to marry her niece Millamant, to Mirabell's uncle who is visiting London hoping to disinherit Mirabell. The act ends with a couplet by Mirabell, stating that Petulant's behaviour is not wit but ignorance.

Act II

This act introduces the women characters of the play. It is set in St James' Park, a famous place known for promenade. Mrs Fainall and Mrs. Marwood discuss the nastiness of men. Fainall and Mirabell meet the ladies and gradually we learn that Fainall and Marwood are lovers, and that Mirabell

and Mrs. Fainall too had an affair once. Mrs. Marwood and Fainall quarrel and she covers her tears with a mask as Mirabell and Mrs. Fainall enter. Mrs Fainall tells Mirabell that she despises her husband and that once she loved Mirabell 'without bounds'. But she finally married Fainall only for her own benefit and reputation. Mirabell too tells her the intrigue he is currently planning. Mirabell's servant Waitwell has married Foible who is a maid to Lady Wishfort. But, Waitwell pretends to be Mirabell's uncle Sir Rowland who seeks to woo Lady Wishfort. When she discovers the truth, she is so embarrassed that she will allow Millamant to rescue her and to marry Mirabell, to save her own reputation. Millamant arrives and we finally meet both Mirabell and Millamant together. Witwoud, as usual, follows Millamant who jokes that she and her maid Mincing, use his letters to pin up their hair. Mirabell wants to know why Millamant snubbed him in public and asks her why she spends time with fools. She instead says that she knows of his intentions. Mirabell now faces the real problems in love. At the end of this act, we meet the newly married servants Foible and Waitwell. Foible, Mirabell's confidant tells him that she has pretended to show Sir Rowland lady Wishfort's picture to inflame his desire for her, and is planning to report this impatience to Lady Wishfort. But, Foible panics as she feels that masked Mrs. Marwood will report to her Mistress Wishfort about her seeing Foible and Mirabell together. Mirabell asks Waitwell to transform into Sir Rowland.

Restoration Comedy

A kind of English comedy flourishing during the Restoration period. Usually the form of the 'Comedy of Manners', the plots of the Restoration comedy, were based mainly on the complex intrigues of the marriage market. However, you should note that the cynical approach to marriage and sexual infidelity in Restoration comedy invited serious accusations of immortality. George Etheredge's *The Man of Mode* (1676), William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) and William Congreve's *The Way of The World* (1700) are famous examples of Restoration Comedy.

Act III

This act takes place in Lady Wishfort's home. She is bidding her servant Peg to give her a proper makeup. Mrs Marwood arrives and tells

Wishfort that she saw Foible with Mirabell. Wishfort asks Marwood to hide in the closet when Wishfort would question Foible. Foible instead succeeds in lying and states that Mirabell insulted Lady Wishfort again by calling her old, and tells that Sir Rowland will be there soon. Lady Wishfort, now in great need of her makeup, because she is desparate for a husband, does not want to make the first move. Mrs Fainall enters and tells Foible that she knows of the plot against Lady Wishfort. Foible tells Mrs Fainall that she is worried about Mrs. Marwood who had seen her and that Marwood likes Mirabell. But, they are unaware that Mrs Marwood is overhearing everything from the closet. After they depart, Mrs. Marwood resolves to ruin everything for Mirabell and suggests Lady Wishfort that she marry Millamant to Witwoud. Wishfort likes the idea. Millamant enters with her maid, Mincing and Marwood tells that her love is known, and that she need not pretend. Both accuse each other but then both say they hate Mirabell. Marwood warns Millamant that her happiness may be changed sooner than she thinks. Sir Wilfull enters to meet his half brother Witwould who pretends not to recognize his country brother. Instead, he, with Petulant, makes fun of Wilfull for his country manners, and Wifull, in return, calls him a fop and dandy. Marwood tells Fainall of Mirabell's plot. Fainall is outraged and upset after getting to know that his wife was involved with Mirabell before, and she had outwitted him now. Mrs. Marwoud wants to prevent any chance of Mirabell's getting Millamant's fortune and suggests a plot of her own: if they tell Wishfort of her daughter's behaviour with Mirabell, she will then be desperate to do anything to save Mrs. Fainall's reputation. Mrs. Marwood plans to write a letter to Lady Wishfort.

Act IV

Lady Wishfort works out the best pose for Sir Rowland. Foible tells her that Wifull is getting drunk and Wishfort sends for Millamant so that she won't be left alone with Sir Rowland. The next scene is the famous Proviso scene in which Mirabell and Millamant, equally strong-willed, discuss in detail the conditions under which they would accept each other in marriage, showing the depth of feeling for each other. Each is anxious to preserve their independence. The two eventually agree on their contract. Mirabell finally proposes to Millamant and, with Mrs. Fainall's encouragement (almost

consent, as Millamant knows of their previous relations), Millamant accepts. Mirabell leaves as Lady Wishfort arrives with Sir Wilfull. He is loud, drunk, agreeing to marry Millamant, and singing and discussing travel plans. He smells so terrible that Millamant and Fainall leave and Witwoud takes him away at Wishfort's behest. Then, Waitwell enters disguised as Sir Rowland. He pretends to be madly in love with Wishfort who readily agrees to marry him. Lady Wishfort later gets a letter telling her about the Sir Rowland plot and Waitwell tells that it is another trick of Mirabell. Sir Rowland takes the letter and accuses Mirabell of trying to sabotage their wedding. Lady Wishfort agrees to let Sir Rowland bring a marriage contract that night.

Act V

The setting is still Lady Wishfort's home. Wishfort has found out the plot, and Fainall has had Waitwell arrested. Mrs. Fainall tells Foible that her previous affair with Mirabell is now public knowledge. Lady Wishfort appears with Mrs. Marwood, whom she's thanking for unveiling the plot. Then she attacks her daughter for her bad behaviour, finding it all the worse since she herself has always been a model of virtue. Fainall then appears and uses the information of Mrs. Fainall's previous affair with Mirabell and Millamant's contract to marry him to blackmail Lady Wishfort, telling that she should never marry and that she is to transfer all the money over to him. Mrs. Marwood horrifies Wishfort with the description of a possible court scene and its social ramifications. Lady Wishfort tells Mirabell that she will offer consent to the marriage if he can save her fortune and honour. Mirabell calls on Waitwell who brings a contract from the time before the marriage of the Fainalls in which Mrs. Fainall gives all her property to Mirabell. This neutralises the blackmail attempts, after which Mirabell restores Mrs. Fainall's property to her possession and then is free to marry Millamant with the full 6000 pounds inheritance. This act ends with a quatrain on adultery.

Epilogue:

The closing lines in the epilogue speak to the drama critics in the audience, making sure that they all know that no single person is the butt of the play, but that it is 'the times' that have been satirized.

14.5 CRITICAL RECEPTION OF *THE WAY OF THE WORLD*

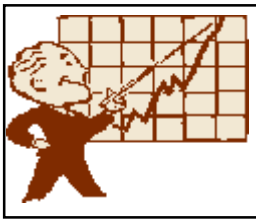
Many critics consider the play to be a study of the battle between good and evil, rather than of the characteristically Restoration conflict between the witty and the foolish. Edith Evans' performance as Millamant in 1924, revealed the full power of Congreve's theatre. Evans portrayed Millamant as a woman suspended between a thorough disillusionment with a shallow society and the insatiable desire of flesh and spirit to find the security of love. *The Way of the World* can be ideologically read as a key text for understanding the intellectual, political or social culture of Congreve's period. In a materialistic society engaged in a ruthless pursuit of wealth, the social world can be construed as being controlled by the "true wit" of the idealised pairing of Mirabell with Millamant. The fact that the play initially failed to set the stage on fire may well be because of its complex morality and intellectualism. The plot is a bit difficult to follow and the familial relationships are slightly bewildering. Nevertheless, Congreve's satire raises moral issues and his world relates to the skeptical philosophy of Locke. Mirabell and Millamant, as members of an emergent middle class, freely engage in a contractual marriage based on love.

The play *The Way of the World* historically and culturally attempts a negotiation between the old world of the Restoration and the emergent culture of the new century. According to Andrew Varney:

"Wit was the dominant mode of the late seventeenth century, specifically the period of what might be called the long Restoration, from 1660 to 1700, and it was not just a cultural fashion but an aggressive and assertive articulation of the aristocratic, quasi-aristocratic and 'wannabe' aristocratic elite that, with increasing precariousness, held centre-stage in public life. Wit dominated in the re-opened public theatres, and it was the celebrated quality of private verses." (Varney:35)

The world of wit serves to distort the very words which make the quality of existence intelligible. And in order to find a way out of this world, it will have to be negotiated in new terms. This is what is attempted in the

famous 'Proviso' scene when Mirabell and Millamant negotiate the legal terms on which they might be able to live together as man and wife. The play seems to be more important in its parts than its whole. Congreve has a sharp eye for certain situations- the gross self-deception of Lady Wishfort, the backbiting of Witwoud, the inability of Millamant, who loves Mirabell "violently", to say more to his face than that she 'might by degrees dwindle into a wife', or the love that Mirabell feels for her. Mirabell and Millamant retain their individuality and never compromise of their liberty. The play is a battle of wits and not of words, and the most artful plotter is the victorious one. And, as Varney says, "The play may not be opening up a way out of the world as much as securing a temporary respite while the rules are transcribed into new terms." (Varney: 48) Charles Lamb was one of the earliest critics to write in defense of the Restoration comedy in general and to comment on Congreve's method of characterization in *The Way of The World* where one would not love or hate the characters if they are not approached from any moral prejudice. Later L. C. Knights in the 20th century, who represents a new approach to the study of Restoration Comedy, finds nothing worthwhile in this type of Comedy. Before him, Bonamy Dobree considered Restoration Comedy as an accurate mirror of the society and reserved high praise for Congreve's plays.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: What makes *The Way of the World* a representative play?



14.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit, must have acquainted you with the life and works of William Congreve, the great Neoclassical dramatist who shaped the English Comedy of Manners through his brilliant comic dialogue, his satirical portrayal of fashionable society, and his ironic scrutiny of the affectations of his age. The play *The Way of the World* conforms to all these

characteristics; it is a play about human adjustment as well as human responsibilities. You will admit that there is nothing like the brilliance, depth of emotion and profundity of the famous bargaining scene in the entire range of Restoration comedy. Finally, you have learnt what critics have to say about the play. Congreve, through this excellent play, reveals the great human paradox that art and nature must unite to create the artifice that is life.



14.7 FURTHER READING

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Womersley, David. (ed). (2000). *A Companion to Literature- From Milton to Blake*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Websites:

http://www.nac-cna.ca/pdf/eth/0708/the_way_of_the_world_guide.pdf



14.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Jonathan Swift, John Dryden, Alexander Pope, John Gay, Richard Steele, and so on.

Ans to Q 2: The plays*The Old Bachelor* (1693), *The Double Dealer* (1693), and *Love for Love* (1695). *The Way of the World* (1700)… …the masque *The Judgment of Paris* (1701)… …a prose work *An Impossible Thing* (1720)… …an edition of *The Dramatic Works of Dryden* (1717) and a number of poems.

Ans to Q 3: Congreve's comedies are marked by their witty dialogues, skilful plots and perfectly crafty deployment of contrasting characters and themes. They explore social values, marital practices and the intrigues and deceits carried out in high society.

Ans to Q 4: *The Way of the World* can be ideologically read as a key text for understanding the intellectual, political or social culture of Congreve's period. In a materialistic society engaged in a ruthless pursuit of wealth, the social world can be construed as being controlled by the "true wit" of the idealised pairing of Mirabell with Millamant. The fact that the play initially failed to set the stage on fire may well be because of its complex morality and intellectualism.



14.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Discuss the plot of the play *The Way of the World*. Is it intricate and lacking in coherence?

Q 2: How has Congreve given us a play which contains within itself "the artful Solution of the Fable"?

Q 3: Write a note on the life and works of William Congreve. In what ways, did Congreve popularise the Restoration comedy of manners?

Q 4: Do you think that the play revolves around the pursuit of wealth, or is it about sustaining human relationships in a materialistic world? Justify your answer.

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UNIT 15: WILLIAM CONGREVE: *THE WAY OF THE WORLD* (PART II)

UNIT STRUCTURE

15.1 Objectives

15.2 Introduction

15.3 Critical Commentary of the Play

15.4 Major Themes

15.5 Major Characters

15.6 Let us Sum up

15.7 Further Reading

15.8 Answers to Check Your Progress (Hints Only)

15.9 Possible Questions

15.1 OBJECTIVES

After going through the unit, you will be able to

- explain the important issues of *The Way of the World* based on your reading
- identify the major themes and characters in the play
- discuss the critical reception of the play
- appreciate the play in its totality

15.2 INTRODUCTION

This is the last unit of the Block as well as of the Course. Here an attempt has been made to provide a discussion of the different important aspects like themes and characterisation in William Congreve's play *The Way of the World*. You have already learnt that the play is centred on the two lovers Mirabell and Millamant. In order for them to marry and receive Millamant's full dowry, Mirabell must receive the blessing of Millamant's aunt, Lady Wishfort. Unfortunately, Lady Wishfort is a very bitter lady who despises Mirabell and wants her own nephew, Sir Wilfull, to wed Millamant. Another character, Fainall, is having a secret affair with Mrs. Marwood, a friend of

Mrs. Fainall's, who in turn once had an affair with Mirabell. In the meantime, Mirabell's servant is married to Foible, Lady Wishfort's servant. Waitwell pretends to be Sir Rowland and, on Mirabell's command, tries to trick Lady Wishfort into a false engagement. So, the play, as you will learn from this unit, is concerned with the problem of social living.

15.3 CRITICAL COMMENTARY OF THE PLAY

Congreve in the dedicatory Preface to the first edition of the play expresses his gratitude to the Earl of Montagu for "admitting me into your Conversation…in your Retirement last summer from the Town; for it was immediately after, that this Comedy was written." He started writing the play in 1699, and it was first performed in 1700, but as mentioned earlier, it was not as successful as his first play. However, Dryden considered it a moderate success and even Congreve writes in the Preface thus: "That it succeeded on the stage, almost beyond my Expectation." He goes on to comment— "but little of it was prepar'd for the general Taste which seems now to be predominant in the Pallets of our Audience." Therefore, it can be assumed that although the play was not expected to be well received, it became a moderate success. The play clearly proclaims what he has to say and is only marred by the artificial contrivances of the plot, a plot that is covered with the polish of elegant dialogues and wit.

Mirabell loves Millamant, and in order to marry her, he must win the consent of Lady Wishfort. Therefore, he pretends to make love to the aunt in order to conceal his suit of the niece. However, Lady Wishfort is only one of the obstacles. The deceit has been revealed to her by Mrs. Marwood, who is full of spite for Mirabell as the latter rejected her advances. Lady Wishfort now hates Mirabell and resolves to deprive her niece of the half of her inheritance, which is in her keeping if Millamant marries Mirabell. The latter contrives that his servant Waitwell will impersonate an uncle of his Sir Rowland, and will propose to Lady Wishfort, having however first married Lady Wishfort's woman, Foible. By this deception, Mirabell hopes to force Lady Wishfort to consent to his marriage with her niece. However, the plot is discovered by Mrs. Marwood, and also the fact that Mirabell has in the

past an affair with Mrs. Fainall, daughter of Lady Wishfort. She conspires with Fainall, her lover and Mirabell's pretended friend, to reveal all the facts to Lady Wishfort, and this conspiracy carries the play to the point of near-tragic confrontation. Millamant is also not easily won. She makes clear that she is not a milksop by laying down the conditions on which she would contemplate marriage to Mirabell in the famous "Proviso" scene in Act IV. When the villainies of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are exposed, the gullible Lady Wishfort, in gratitude for her release from Fainall's threats forgives Mirabell and consents to Millamant's marriage with him, thus bringing the play to a happy conclusion.

Act I gives us the exposition of the play by introducing almost all the male characters, informing the readers about the others and supplying all the background information. The opening scene between Mirabell and Fainall establishes Mirabell's love for Millamant, which is implied in Fainall's comment: "Confess, Millamant and you quarell'd last night." We also come to know about the main hindrance to the marriage—Lady Wishfort is in control of half of Millamant's fortune, and her prior consent is necessary for the money to be claimed. This constitutes the main problem of the play and everything gravitates towards it. Mirabell, as we already know, tried to trick Lady Wishfort once, and this was revealed to her by the spiteful Mrs. Marwood, and therefore the Lady is thoroughly incensed with Mirabell.



LET US KNOW

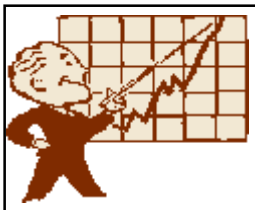
You must understand that the actual plot revolves around Mirabell's second trick, which is making his servant Waitwell pose as the former's fictitious uncle Sir Rowland, who would propose to Lady Wishfort. By Act II, everything is explained, and by its end, Waitwell leaves the stage to get into his Sir Rowland disguise, and the plan is well on its way to success. However, Act II also sets a subsidiary plot in motion. The reversal comes through Fainall and Mrs. Marwood.

Structurally, the centre of the play is Act III where Lady Wishfort enters the scene and the complications begin. Mrs. Marwood informs Lady Wishfort that she suspects Mirabell is up to some mischief, but Foible, Waitwell's wife, quickly saves the situation. But Mrs. Marwood secretly overhears the conversation between Foible and Mrs. Fainall, where they discuss the entire plot and also make a passing reference to Mrs. Fainall's earlier affair with Mirabell. However, at this very juncture, Congreve holds back the movement of the plot by introducing Sir Wilfull and his buffoonery and the readers' suspense and apprehension are sustained throughout the rest of Act III, and practically the whole of the next Act. At the end of the Act, Mrs. Marwood and Fainall meet to conspire about the plans of a counter attack.

The antics of Sir Wilfull fill up Act IV, and at the same time, the love between Mirabell and Millamant also moves towards its moment of exquisite consummation. Millamant surrenders to her love in Act IV, and Congreve's mastery over his dramatic art is superbly revealed in the proposal scene. Towards the end of the Act, Waitwell as Sir Rowland enacts his grotesque courtship of Lady Wishfort, and the famous bargaining scene or the "Proviso" scene also takes place now. Congreve conveys with absolute delicacy the poetry of the scene and the infinite superficiality of Mirabell and Millamant. Mrs. Marwood's anonymous letter to Lady Wishfort discloses the imposture of Sir Rowland, but Foible and Waitwell quickly try to avert a catastrophe by thinking up an excuse. Hence, Act IV ends on a note of suspense.

Act V holds the grand climax of the play. Waitwell and Foible's excuses have failed and Fainall and Mrs. Marwood demand the fortunes of Millamant and Mrs. Fainall from Lady Wishfort with threats and blackmail. When all seems to be going in favour of the villains, Congreve produces his *Peripeteia* or reversal of fortunes in the form of the black box. The black box, although totally unexpected, cannot be deemed as a *deus ex machina* to bring about a happy ending. In a society sustained by its legal systems, it is only natural that Mirabell, the Truewit of his age, will use such a device to protect the interests of Mrs. Fainall.

Congreve, as you will see through your reading of the play, enlivens the action with a fine *dramatis personae*, including fools like Sir Wilfull Witwoud, Lady Wishfort's boisterous and good-natured country nephew. They serve to highlight the stark contrast between the passionate and grasping relationship of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood, and the delicacy by which Mirabell tries to convince Millamant that love can survive into marriage even in a mercenary society. Congreve, like Terence, thus gives us a play which contains within itself "the artful Solution of the Fable." Following the comedies of Ben Jonson Congreve gives each of his characters a name, which highlights a particular quality. Thus, Fainall is deceitful; Mirabell is admirable; Petulent is disagreeable and Millamant has a thousand lovers. Marwood stands for her spite and Lady Wishfort longs for love and marriage.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: What is the main plot that sets the story in motion?

Q 2: Do you think that Act III is the centre of the play?

Q 3: What is the significance of the "Proviso" Scene?

15.4 MAJOR THEMES

You must have understood by now that the play is concerned with the problem of social living and the theme is established straightaway by the title "The way of the world". The phrase and its variations are repeated throughout the play, e.g. when Fainall says: "the Ways of Wedlock and this World" or when Mirabell mocks at Fainall by saying: "'tis the Way of the World, Sir; of the Widows of the World." Man has to survive according to the dictates of the world he lives in, and therefore, he has no choice but to maintain and contain the health of the society by protecting it from disruptive forces and also at the same time, maintain his own individuality and personality. This challenge is met with great élan by Mirabell and Millamant in the play.

There are two categories of people who endanger the smooth running of society- the fools and the knaves. The fools in the play are Petulant and Witwoud who try to outbid each other in affectations and are utterly worthless. But, the pair of unscrupulous lovers, Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are most dangerous as they use all means in their power to gain their objectives. It is difficult to decide who is the more despicable of the two. However, one may wish that such characters don't exist in society, it is not possible to get rid of all of them. To hope that evil will turn into good is to indulge in mere wishful thinking.

The plot of the play is built upon a "legacy of conflict" as Paul and Miriam Mueschke contends. A modern organised society is controlled by the institutions of wealth and power. Money could only mean inherited wealth in the refined society of the 17th century, and, therefore, all the characters become obsessed with acquiring it and the power that goes with it. Lady Wishfort appears to be looming large over all the other characters as only she seems to have control over the wealth in the play. However, as we all know that money becomes an instrument of power only when it is effectively and judiciously handled. Therefore, Lady Wishfort is turned into a helpless pawn at the hands of mischief makers as she misuses her power.

The power of the legal system in the civilised society of the 17th century could not be ignored, as it held the community together. The plots and counter-plots in the play revolve around the problem of the legal extraction of Lady Wishfort's wealth. All the conspiracies of Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are reduced to naught by the production of a legal document by Mirabell at the end. The black box, thus, becomes *law in action* and acquires a symbolic significance in the play.

You must understand that Congreve has no idealistic illusions about life. We have to live in a world, follow the ways of that world, and use the weapons of the world at our disposal to combat evil and thus protect ourselves. People like Fainall and Mrs. Marwood must be met and defeated on their own terms. Mirabell and Millamant are the true realists of the play and represent the *real* way of the world, as they never acknowledge defeat however difficult the circumstances may be. Fainall is a loser and talks of

an escape to “another world” when the ways of the world become too much for him. “(We) will retire somewhere, any where to another World” (Lines 226, Act II Sc i) Even Lady Wishfort proves herself an escapist when circumstances become too complicated for her to bear: “I would retire to Deserts and Solitudes, and feed harmless sheep by Groves and purling Streams. Dear Marwood, let us leave the World, and retire by our selves and be Shepherdesses.” (Lines 124-25 Act V Sc i)

Congreve analyses from all angles how an individual while sustaining society can retain his own identity and shows how the conflict can be resolved through the characters of Mirabell and Millamant. The phrase “the way of the world” is always used in the context of marriage as the play revolves around the problems of marriage relationships. At the end of the play, Congreve emphasises the moral “That Marriage Frauds too oft are paid in kind.” You will observe from your reading of the play that Congreve is not bothered with the excitement of falling in love for the first time, or the stages of love, but by the problem of working out a permanent and compatible relationship between people who are already in love or have been in love. It is a play about adapting and adjusting with people and circumstances and carrying out one’s duties responsibly. Much of what happens in the play appears to be the consequences of past actions and past misdeeds or follies.

Mirabell and Millamant are the ideal pair of lovers and can be contrasted with the ill-matched couples, the Fainalls and Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. Their love story pursues an independent course of its own, indifferent to the quarrels over property and wealth. Love can be sealed with marriage for them only when they come to terms with each other on the basis of mutual trust and honesty. Thus, Act IV becomes the crux of the play when the famous bargaining scene takes place. Congreve achieves the pinnacle of his art by the sheer depth of emotion and profundity of thought enacted in it. Even though Millamant is deeply in love with Mirabell, she is wary that marriage might turn him into a complacent husband, and reduce her to a mere wife, thus leading to a loss of her identity. She plays around with Mirabell and eludes him to a degree that leaves him in a daze. Her

arrogance can be deduced from her haughty remarks: “Lord, what is a Lover, that it can give? Why one makes Lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases: And then if one pleases one makes more.” (Act II Sci)

In the Proviso scene, even though Millamant admits to herself that “if Mirabell shou’d not make a good Husband, I am a lost thing; — for I find I love him violently” (Act IV Sc i), the two must face each other not as lovers but as rational human beings, because only reason, rather than emotion, can lay the foundations of a rock solid marriage. You will find it interesting to note that Congreve makes them use legal language, because in a society where the legal system holds its sway, the personal equation of marriage must also be worked out in terms of a contract. Millamant thus bargains for her privileges, her liberty, her right to privacy, and her freedom to meet whom she pleases. She will agree to marry Mirabell if “These Articles subscrib’d.” Mirabell, on the other hand, also has his own Provisos, and using the same legal jargon, lists his articles of contract so that he may be protected from the tyrannies of the women. The scene scores high on the brilliance scale because of its sheer artificiality, for no real man or woman will use such type of language on the eve of their betrothal. You will decipher from your reading of the play that Mirabell and Millamant represent the entire humanity and not merely themselves at this moment. The artificiality of the scene is more than a literary device. Human relationships survive on the basis of mutual give and take which involves self-control, intellectual discrimination and a sense of decorum. Congreve in his play reveals the great human paradox that art and nature must unite to create the artifice that is life.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 4: Comment on the title of the play?

Q 5: What role does the thirst for wealth play as a theme in the play?

Q 6: Which two categories of people are depicted by Congreve in the play?

15.5 MAJOR CHARACTERS

The Way of the World is portrays a number of interesting characters. Let us discuss some of the important characters in the play.

Mirabell:

Mirabell is the Truewit of his age and possesses all the characteristics of the urbane gentleman. He outsmarts Fainall in their conversations and dazzles the readers with his dexterity in wordplay. Mirabell is never witty just for the sake of being witty; wit is compliant with his moral sense. He is in no way interested in frivolous conversation and even advises Millamant to avoid "the Conversation of Fools". His seriousness and ethical nature distinguish him from the other characters in the play. You will notice his shrewdness, good judgment and wisdom in the way he arranges legal protection for Mrs. Fainall's wealth. Mrs. Marwood's nefarious plans fail to deter him, and he meets them with great poise. Mirabell's passion and love for Millamant does not overrule his judgment and he describes himself to Fainall as "a discerning Lover", who has taken Millamant "to pieces, sifted her and separated her Failings…study'd 'em, and got 'em by Rote." (Act I Sc i) He has learnt to love Millamant with all her faults and therefore he is confident that it will stand the test of time. Congreve has also allayed our suspicions regarding Mirabell's relationship with Mrs. Fainall by making him protect her wealth, and reputation. The affair, it is obvious, began and ended with mutual consent as Mrs. Fainall never accuses Mirabell of cheating her, and in fact remains his friend and ally throughout. However, as Fainall is a notorious character, Mrs. Fainall's life is ruined, and Mirabell has to be blamed for her situation. Therefore, Mirabell cannot be called a perfect person. But you must realise that Congreve knew what he was doing, because if Mirabell was portrayed as a wholly virtuous and good person, then he would not have attested to being a man of the world, affected by its ways. He would have become an ideal character, and Congreve's realistic assessment of life does not allow for perfection either in man or in society.

Millamant:

Millamant is a total delight with her exuberant personality and natural grace. She is confident of Mirabell's love for her and accepts the adoration

of men without any affectation. She is fearless and knows how to speak her mind without any qualms. However, Millamant's gaiety is also the façade behind which she hides her true self; her charming personality is infectious, but she must have her "faithful Solitude" and her "darling Contemplation". When the moment for surrendering to Mirabell draws near, there occurs a great turmoil within her mind, and even though she maintains a cool demeanour, we can sense a tenseness underlining whatever she does. Her speeches become halting and her restlessness makes her break one fan and nearly break another. But her anxiety never allows her to make a public display of her affection and love for Mirabell, for she considers it to be too private and precious. Only once does her mask fall, when she confesses to Mrs. Fainall: "I love him violently." (Act IV. Sc i) Millamant thus holds the readers in thrall and remains one of the great heroines of literature. Mirabell and Millamant together remind us of the great pair in Shakespeare's Much Ado About Nothing– Beatrice and Benedick.

Mrs. Fainall:

She is a good woman despite the fact that she had a past indiscretion with Mirabell, and is now able to take genuine pleasure in the happy affair between the latter and Millamant. However, she is a commonplace woman and pales into insignificance when compared to Millamant, and it is through her that Congreve is apprising us of the fact that a price has to be paid if the well-being of the society is to be preserved. Mrs. Fainall becomes a kind of sacrificial offering at the altar of society because of the unhappy and frustrated life she leads.

Fainall:

He is a cunning person, and not a Truewit, but his perverted ego makes him cynical rather than witty. A tinge of unpleasantness colours his speeches: "I'd no more play with a Man that slighted his ill Fortune, than I'd make Love to a Woman who undervalu'd the loss of her Reputation." (Act I. Sc i) Fainall has no sense of morality and his mercenary attitude makes him run through Mrs. Marwood's wealth, and also boast that he married only "to make lawful Prize of a rich Widow's Wealth". He is a despicable character and is full of contempt for his wife, and even draws sadistic

pleasure from mentally torturing and terrorising Lady Wishfort. His bestial characteristics are evident in the animal imagery scattered through his speeches. So, whenever Fainall is faced with a situation which goes beyond his control, he flees the scene and retreats ignominiously. He is very surprised by Mrs. Marwood's passion and unrealistically talks of an escape to another world. His wife's infidelity enrages him, but he is at a loss how to proceed thereafter. At the end of the play, Fainall loses everything and his cunningness remains just that; as he lacks the maturity of wisdom, the wise are left to govern the world. Fainall's relationships with Marwood is antagonistic in the sense that he is full of jealousies, doubt and bitterness. He can be absolutely cynical when he tells his wife "Your body shall be naked as your reputation."

Mrs. Marwood:

She is one lacking the wittiness of Fainall, her partner in crime, but she is more cunning and has that particular kind of female viciousness. She dons a sophisticated social mask, and when in a weak moment in St. James's Park, her resolve cracks, we are left astounded at the violence of her passions: "I care not-Let me go- break my Hands, do- I'd leave 'em to get loose." (Act II Sc i) Although Mrs. Marwood is Fainall's mistress, she is actually in love with Mirabell and this unrequited love is the motivating force behind all her actions. She tries her level best to thwart the relationship of Mirabell and Millamant, but all her machinations go in vain. When she gets to hear about what Foible has to say that "Mr. Mirabell can't abide her", she becomes blinded by anger and thoughts of revenge. She does not think of an escape like Fainall did, but carefully works out the details of her plot, and with utter ruthlessness, brings Lady Wishfort down to earth. However, the civilized society has no place for people like Mrs. Marwood, and she eventually succumbs to defeat. She leaves the stage in a fit of impotent rage: "Yes, it shall have Vent-and to your Confusion, or I'll perish in the Attempt." (Act V Sc i)

Lady Wishfort:

She has a central role to play as she is in control of everyone's fortunes. She reveals herself as a person with a rich, imaginative and vivid

mindset. However, her self-deception in refusing to accept her advanced years and the decay of her youthful beauty mars her intelligence and makes her vulnerable. She is secretly envious of her niece, Millamant's beauty and at one time even states incredibly that her portrait makes her more beautiful than her niece: "You see that Picture has a sort of a – Ha Foible?—A Swimmingness in the Eyes—Yes, I'll look so—My Niece affects it; but she wants Features." (Act III Sc i) We may pity Lady Wishfort because she pines for a lover in order to convince and reassure herself that she is still beautiful, but her low self-confidence makes her behave foolishly. The scene with Sir Rowland thus becomes a parody of all love-scenes, and she loses all sense of proportion. Her insistence that she is not making "a Prostitution of Decorums" is only a wretched emphasis of her yearning for "the Iterationof Nuptials". Lady Wishfort is weakened by her genuine love for her daughter, and her fascination for Mirabell. When Millamant assures her that Mirabell will go away for ever, we find both relief and regret manifested in her speeches. She remains under Mirabell's spell and never quite succeeds in freeing herself from his hypnotic charm. The exaggeration of her character turns her almost into a caricature, and had she not been so grotesquely comic, she could almost have become tragic.

Witwoud and Petulant:

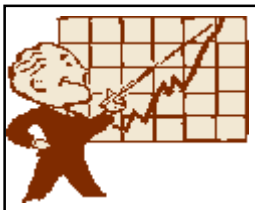
They are the Fools in the play. They do not really deserve separate discussion were it not for the fact that their presence in society is a matter of great concern, for their affectation breeds artificiality and robs a sophisticated society of its naturalness. Witwoud is so full of himself that he thinks he is the greatest intellectual and ridicules all and sundry, especially Petulant. The latter, on the other hand, delights in contradicting everyone, particularly Witwoud, and is even rude towards Millamant. Congreve is lenient towards them, and at the end of the play, they even help in the final overthrow of Fainall.

Sir Wilfull:

Much of the laughter in The Way of the World is provided by Sir Wilfull with his ridiculous behaviour and mannerisms. Congreve exposes the snobbishness of urban society through the character of Sir Wilfull and

how he is looked down upon by the refined society. Millamant has nothing but contempt for him, and he behaves like a buffoon in her presence. However, even though he may lack the social finesse, Sir Wilfull's commonsense and honesty is a sharp antithesis of Witwoud's sham personality. He willingly tries to help Mirabell and Millamant when they are in trouble, and displays courage in defying Fainall's "Instrument" by drawing his sword, and preventing him from attacking his wife. Congreve shows that Sir Wilfull has values even though he may be a boor, and also, unlike his brother, he never sacrifices the integrity of his nature.

Thus, Congreve follows a symmetry in balancing the characters and the movement of the plot. The ideal pair of lovers, Mirabell and Millamant is balanced by the adulterous pair, Fainall and Mrs. Marwood. Above them is Lady Wishfort who lives in a total illusion of having the wedded bliss, and between them is Mrs. Fainall, who lives in a disillusioned reality of an unhappy marriage. Lady Wishfort with her legal control over everyone's fortune, is the root of all disharmony and confusion, but antithetically, she also holds all the characters and the play together, including Sir Wilfull, Witwoud and Petulant in the implications of family relationships.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 7: Can you call Mirabell a perfect character?

Q 8: Do you agree that Congreve presents the characters in a balanced way ?

Q 9: What role does Mrs. Wishfort play in the plot of the play?



15.6 LET US SUM UP

As you have finished reading the unit, you have learnt that the play The Way of the World is one of Congreve's most famous plays. It is centred on the two lovers Mirabell and Millamant. However, the play is concerned with the problem of social living. The plot of the play is built upon a "legacy

of conflict" as the institutions of wealth and power control modern organised society. All the characters become obsessed with acquiring wealth and the power that goes with it. Lady Wishfort appears to be looming large over all the other characters as only she seems to have control over the wealth in the play. However, finally she is turned into a helpless pawn at the hands of mischief-makers as she misuses her power. The plots and counter-plots in the play also revolve around the problem of the legal extraction of Lady Wishfort's wealth. Thus, this play throws light on many of the social aspects of the 17th century English society.



15.7 FURTHER READING

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15.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q 1: Mirabell loves Millamant, and in order to marry her, he must win the consent of Lady Wishfort… …Mrs. Marwood exposes Mirabell as the former rejected her advances… …Lady Wishfort now hates Mirabell and resolves to deprive her niece Millamant of the half of her inheritance which is in her keeping if Millamant marries Mirabell… …this is what sets the main story in motion.

Ans to Q 2: Yes,… …Mrs. Marwood informs Lady Wishfort that she suspects Mirabell is up to some mischief… …Marwood secretly overhears the conversation between Foible and Mrs. Fainall, as they discuss the mischievous plot and also make a passing reference to Mrs. Fainall's earlier affair with Mirabell… …in this situation Congreve holds back the movement of the plot by introducing Sir Wilfull and the suspense and apprehension of the readers are sustained throughout the rest of Act III.

Ans to Q 3: In the "Proviso" scene, Congreve conveys with absolute delicacy the infinite superficiality of Mirabell and Millamant and their... …Mrs. Marwood's anonymous letter to Lady Wishfort discloses the imposture of Sir Rowland, but Foible and Waitwell quickly try to avert a catastrophe by thinking up an excuse…. …the "Proviso" scene holds the suspense in the play.

Ans to Q 4: It is very obvious that the play is concerned with the problem of social living and it is established straightaway by the title "the way of the world"… …this phrase has been repeated differently throughout the play… …it means that man has to survive according to the dictates of the world he lives in.

Ans to Q 5: A modern organised society is controlled by the institutions of wealth and power… …Lady Wishfort appears to be important as she seems to have control over the wealth… …but money becomes an instrument of power only when it is effectively and judiciously handled. Therefore, Lady Wishfort is turned into a helpless pawn at the hands of many mischief makers.

Ans to Q 6: The fools and the knaves… …the fools like Petulant and Witwoud try to outbid each other in affectations and are utterly worthless… …but the pair of unscrupulous lovers, Fainall and Mrs. Marwood are most dangerous as they use all means in their power to gain their objectives.

Ans to Q 7: Mirabell is the Truewit of his age and possess all the characteristics of the urbane gentleman… …his seriousness and ethical nature distinguishes him from the other characters in the

play…. …but Congreve has made us suspect Mirabell's relationship with Mrs. Fainall by making him protect her wealth, and reputation... ... therefore, Mirabell cannot be called a perfect person as Congreve's realistic assessment of life does not allow for perfection in man.

Ans to Q 8: It is very obvious… …the ideal pair of lovers, Mirabell and Millamant is balanced by the adulterous pair, Fainall and Mrs. Marwood… …on the other hand, Lady Wishfort's illusions and assumed bliss is contrasted against Mrs. Fainall's disillusionment of an unhappy marriage.

Ans to Q 9: Lady Wishfort is perhaps that character who controls everyone's fortunes… …although she is rich and imaginative, the decay of her youthful beauty mars her intelligence and makes her vulnerable… …she is secretly envious of her niece, Millamant's beauty which finally leads to the main intrigues of the play.



15.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: Millamant does not want to "dwindle into a Wife" and Mirabell also does not wish to "be beyond Measure enlarg'd into a Husband". Consider their relationships in terms of these comments.

Q 2: Discuss the characters of Mrs. Marwood and Fainall. How will you define their relationship?

Q 3: From your reading of the play what ideas do you have of the relationship between men and women in the 17th century England?

Q 4: Do you consider *The Way of The World* an intrigue comedy or a comedy of manners?

*** ***** ***



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