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KRISHNA KANTA HANDIQUI STATE OPEN UNIVERSITY

Patgaon, Rani Gate, Guwahati-781017

SEMESTER 1

MA IN ENGLISH

COURSE 3: ENGLISH DRAMA: ELIZABETHAN TO RESTORATION

BLOCK 1: MARLOWE AND JOHNSON

CONTENTS

Unit 1: Introducing Renaissance Drama

Unit 2: Christopher Marlowe: Life and Works

Unit 3: Christopher Marlowe: *The Jew of Malta*

Unit 4: Ben Jonson: *Volpone* (Part I)

Unit 5: Ben Jonson: *Volpone* (Part II)

REFERENCES : For All Units

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SEMESTER 1

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DETAILED SYLLABUS

Unit 1 : Introducing Renaissance Drama **Page : 7 - 26**

History of Drama, Drama in the Renaissance Period: The English Society of the Time, Condition of Staging Plays and Playhouses, Private Playhouses, Playwrights and the Condition of Productions, Pre-Shakespearean Playwrights: The University Wits (John Lyly, George Peele, Robert Greene, Thomas Nash, Thomas Lodge, Thomas Kyd, Christopher Marlowe), William Shakespeare, Post-Shakespearian Playwrights: Ben Jonson, Francis Beaumont, George Chapman, John Marston, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Middleton, Thomas Heywood, John Webster, Cyril Tourneur

Unit 2 : Christopher Marlowe: Life and Works **Page : 27 - 38**

Christopher Marlowe: The Playwright, Sources of the Play *The Jew of Malta,* Critical Reception of Marlowe

Unit 3 : Christopher Marlowe: *The Jew of Malta* **Page : 39 - 54**

Act wise Summary of the Play, Critical Commentary on the Play, Major Themes, Major Characters

Unit 4 : Ben Jonson: *Volpone* (Part I) **Page : 55 - 66**

Ben Jonson: The Playwright, Jonsonian Comedy, Critical Reception of Jonson

Unit 5 : Ben Jonson: *Volpone* (Part II) **Page : 67 - 84**

Sources of the Play *Volpone,* Act wise Summary of the Play, Critical Commentary on the Play, Major Themes, Major Characters

COURSE INTRODUCTION

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 your convenience, this Course is divided into three Blocks. **Block 1** shall deal with Renaissance Drama with reference to Marlowe and Jonson, **Block 2** shall exclusively deal with Shakespearean Drama, and **Block 3** shall deal with Jacobean and Restoration Drama with reference to John Webster and William Congreve.

Block 1 : Marlowe and Johnson comprises five units, which are as the following:

Unit 1 shall introduce you to English drama, especially of the time called the Renaissance. 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. 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.

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. You 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. You 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. 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.

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*

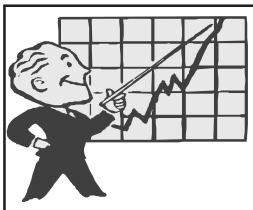
written at the end of the 15th century is the earliest extant purely secular play in English. He had already written a morality play entitled *Nature*. Medwall was one of a group of early Tudor playwrights that included John Rastell and John Heywood, who ended up being the most important dramatist of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

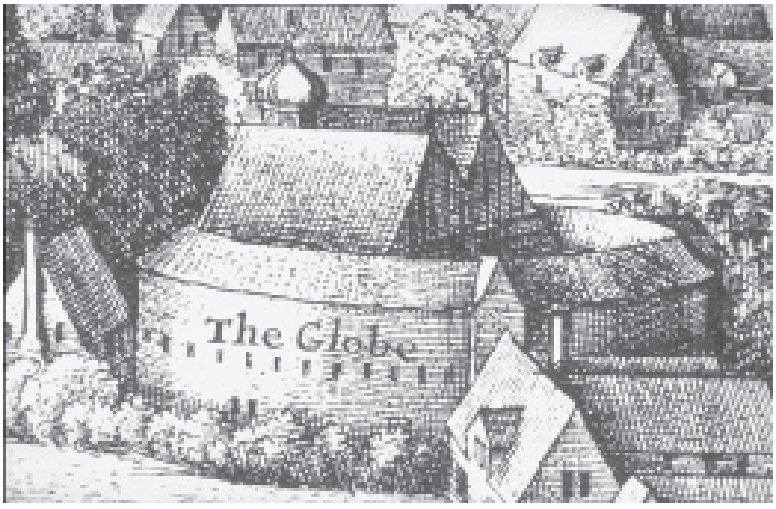
Subsequently, there was a substantial increase in the number of university educated secular professional playwright. The first ones to exploit this situation was a group of writers known as the **University Wits**, young men who had graduated from Oxford or Cambridge with no patrons to sponsor their 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.

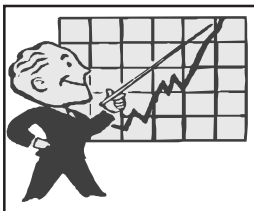
The establishment of the first Blackfriars playhouse between 1576 and 1584 marked a major innovation in offering to a select audience a sophisticated alternative to the dramatic fare provided at the adult public theatres. The dramatic activities of the boy players took on a quasi-professional status 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 No 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 No 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 No 3: Passion Play… …Miracle Play… …Mystery Play… …Morality Play… …Interlude

Ans to Q No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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.

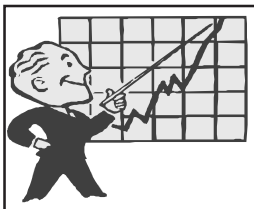


LET US KNOW

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.

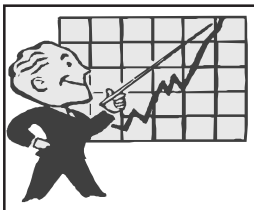
Marlowe scholars would like to agree that the earliest surviving text of the play is the 1633 Quarto. The entrepreneur behind the play's revival was Thomas Heywood. This 1633 Quarto forms the basis of the Penguin edition of 2003. The editors, Frank Romany and Robert Lindsey, argue that Heywood had little 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?

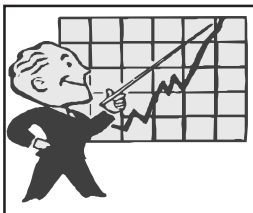
Q 6: Do you think that the sources of the play are historically authentic?

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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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

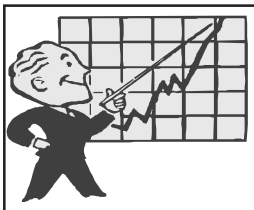
This act begins with Ithamore having feelings for Bellamira who later turns out to be a prostitute. This act also introduces the audience to the sub-plot of Billamira and Pilia Borza. Mathias and Ludowick kill each other in the dual originally planned by Barabas. Their friendship had been so close that 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

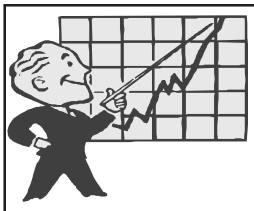
say: “who is honour’d now but for his wealth?”, Marlowe was representing how the commercial aspect of an urbane society was gradually becoming a feature of the Renaissance. Barabas tops this remarkable career by poisoning an entire convent of nuns just to be revenged on his daughter Abigail for her conversion 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.



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3.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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*

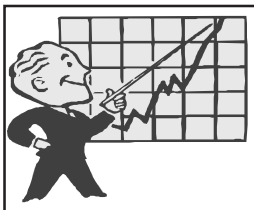
Dramatic Poesy (1668) for the virtues of correctness, judgment, satirical power and technical excellence. Jonson wrote realistic comedies, which held the English stage for a long time. Harry Levin wrote in the *Introduction to Selected Works of Ben Jonson* (1938) that the comedy of humours was "seized 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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*]

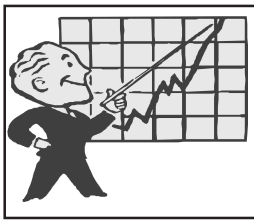
In the play *Volpone*, Ben Jonson fuses a wide range of different materials–classical, humanist, medieval and contemporary—much of which are satirical in origin. The basic motif of legacy hunting is derived from three classical works—Horace's *Satires,* Parts of Petronius's *Satiricon*, and Lucian's *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."



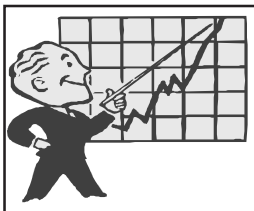
LET US KNOW

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.

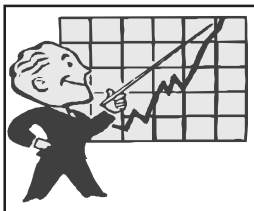
Gold Rush:

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

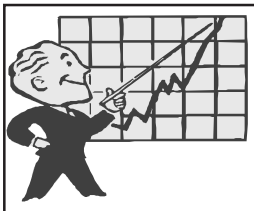
Jonson's method of characterisation is opposite to that of Shakespeare. Where Shakespeare's characters are human beings, objectively drawn 'round' characters, those of Jonson are flat and types. As Shakespeare's characters can come out of the world of the play to our midst, Jonson's are incapable of 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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 No 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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