



Block

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DOCTOR FAUSTUS

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Welcome to MEG-2 – the Masters in English course on British Drama. This course is divided into **NINE** Blocks, and what we have attempted to do in this course is to seek the high moments of British Drama and expose them to you. This proved to be an enormously difficult task since we not only had to select texts/dramatists which were representative of their ages, but all this had to be done within the parameters of **NINE** blocks! After a great deal of discussion and deliberation we finally made the selection. The first four blocks are devoted entirely to the plays of the Renaissance period, or the Elizabethan Age, as it was in this period that English drama reached its high water-mark with Marlowe, Shakespeare and Jonson. We have skipped over parts of the 17th and 19th centuries and the whole of the 18th century as this period was more fertile in the output of novel and poetry than in the output of drama. The latter five Blocks include playwrights who lived and wrote from the late 19th century to the mid 20th century. We are sure that the final selection in the nine Blocks will familiarize you with dramatists most representative of their times and their best works that framed the high moments of British Drama.

English Drama had its origin in the religious plays of the Middle Ages called the Mystery and Miracle plays. The Mystery plays were a spectacular presentation of the Biblical stories and the Miracles were enacted in honour of saints whose lives they depicted. In the 15th century, the religious contents in these plays were replaced by allegory and were called the Moralities, in which the characters were abstractions like Love, Life, Death, Greed, Repentance etc. The first true play in English with a regular plot, divided into acts and scenes is probably a comedy *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553) by Nicholas Udall, followed by another comedy *Gummar Gorton's Needle*. The first tragedy was *Gorbuduc* (1561) by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton.

The comic element introduced in the Moralities, to keep the audience in good humour, soon developed into a regular dramatic composition called the Interlude. The advent of Renaissance in England introduced the classical drama of Greece and Rome into England. A group of young writers like Lyle, Lodge, Greene and Peele collectively called the University Wits, started producing plays based on classical models. However, these at best, were experiments.

It was Christopher Marlowe who burst upon the English literary scene with his *Tamburlaine The Great* in 1587 and ushered in the great age of Elizabethan drama. He was the first to write a love tragedy in English (*Dido*), to establish a stock character, (*Jew of Malta*), and to start the tradition of heroic drama (*Tamburlaine*). His innovation, the "mighty line" or the blank-verse was used by Shakespeare to great dramatic effect. His *Edward II* not only brought the history play to maturity but also with *Doctor Faustus* marked the true beginnings of English tragedy.

Now let us take up each Block of this Course one by one.

Block I *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe.

Doctor Faustus is a play that has no real imitators in English drama; it is a unique achievement ranking among the tragic masterpieces of all time. The play portrays the damnation of a human soul with greater tragic power than it had ever before been portrayed in drama, evoking terror, pity and a sense of human loss that are the ingredients of tragedy.

But perhaps the greatest tragedies in English Literature emanated from the pen of that great bard from Stratford – Shakespeare. **Block II** contains *Hamlet* the first of Shakespeare's great tragedies. *Hamlet* is called upon to avenge his father's foul

murder but the delay in carrying out his revenge turns him from a mere avenger to a highly complex character.

Block III contains *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to give you an idea of a fantasy play and to show how Shakespeare could churn out a romantic fantasy as easily as a tragedy. The approaching wedding of the Duke of Athens brings Oberon, the king of the fairies, his queen Titania and his attendant Puck, to the woods near Athens. Supernatural meddling by Oberon and Puck impel the action forward. This play's universal and constant appeal lies in Shakespeare's creation of a dream world where reality and reason give way to fantasy.

Block IV deals with *The Alchemist* by Ben Jonson. Long overshadowed by his great contemporary, Shakespeare, Ben Jonson is today considered a great comic dramatist and a caricaturist of the stature of Charles Dickens. The dramatic genre associated with Jonson is the "comedy of humours" focusing on the predominance of one or the other of the four humours, controlling the human body, and the consequent imbalance or a characteristic whim that developed in the individual's temperament. *The Alchemist* focuses on man's greed. It is a study of quackery on one side and of gullibility on the other. It is an account of the gulling of an assortment of dupes by two men – Subtle and Face who pose as alchemists having the ability to transform base metals into gold. For sheer fun and high spirits, Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* must take first place. However in constructive skill it is inferior to *The Alchemist*, whose perfect plot was celebrated by Coleridge as among the three greatest in all literature.

In the post-Shakespearean drama, we have playwrights like Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, Webster, Heywood, Massinger, Ford, Shirley and a score of others who produced significant work only to be overshadowed by the genius of Shakespeare.

The Puritan age frowned upon all theatrical activities, hence there was no dramatic output. The Restoration period threw up the "Restoration Comedy" by Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh and Farquhar but it could not stand the test of time and appealed only to a dissolute few.

The only dramatist of note after the Restoration was Sheridan (1751-1816). With his comedies like *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*, the great age of artificial comedy came to an end.

Then came Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) with *A Woman of No Importance*, *Lady Windermere's Fan*, *The Ideal Husband* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*, all engaging comedies, but his influence upon the stage was that of a wit, not of a craftsman.

Galsworthy, Granville Barker, J.M. Barrie and George Bernard Shaw are the outstanding dramatists of the late 19th and early 20th century – of which Shaw's name became a by word throughout the civilised world. Whereas Galsworthy wrote the problem plays, Shaw came up with the Play of Ideas.

We have included for your study in **Block V**, Shaw's *Pygmalion* in which he dramatises the Greek Myth of a sculptor who fell in love with an ivory statue, which at his prayer, was changed into a living woman. With his propensity for making a burlesque of whatever subject he touched, Shaw ignored the original theme, the love of beauty, and turned a girl of the slums into a woman of fashionable society by giving her a few lessons in correct speaking.

In **Block VI** we have included John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*. The first performance of this play in 1956, is commonly accepted as the beginning of a new age in the British theatre. Osborne gave the first of the "anti-heroes" in Jimmy Porter, the working class intellectual rebel of *Look Back in Anger*. Though never at his strongest with plot construction, as his other plays *Luther*, *The World of Paul*

Slickery etc. show, technically Osborne's main achievement is still *Look Back in Anger*.

We have included a T.S. Eliot play in **Block VII** so that you do not miss out on a writer who has become a part of the 20th century consciousness. *Murder in the Cathedral* revolves around the assassination of Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury in 1170. This most admired of Eliot's dramatic works owes its verse form to the medieval morality play *Everyman* and its dramatic form to Greek tragedy, medieval morality plays, and church ritual. It is not merely a presentation of a historical event but an examination of it through a variety of perspectives.

To give you a taste of Irish drama, we have included in **Block VIII** an Irish dramatist John Millington Synge whose plays on Irish themes brought the Irish drama out of obscurity and on to the international scene; *The Playboy of the Western World* is Synge's masterpiece. It is a satiric and ironic tragi-comedy in three acts presenting a weak protagonist Christy Mahon who is transformed into a triumphant playboy by the repressed people of Mayo village for his alleged deed of parricide, only to be turned upon by them when he tries to "kill" his father a second time in their own backyard.

Block IX introduces you to the theatre of the absurd which attracted world wide attention with the staging of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1953. The absurd drama presented the absurdity of human condition through a pattern of images. The drama lacked plot and real characters and the language used was a meaningless patter. No matter how frivolous it appeared or how comic its characters were, the subject matter of the absurd drama was serious. *Waiting for Godot* is a play about two lost tramps waiting for Godot to appear. The subject is not Godot, but waiting. Godot quite simply represents the object of our waiting: a person, a thing, an event or even death. Another play by Beckett in this last Block is *Endgame*. *Endgame*, a term used for the third and final game of chess, designates the end of many things, perhaps the end of life itself. The play is about the lack of meaning that life provides.

So students — here's hoping you all will go through the texts of all the ten plays included in the NINE Blocks to savour for yourselves the real essence of drama.

HAPPY READING!



**The Tragical History of *Doctor Faustus*. Oregon Shakespearean Festival, 1979. Photo :
Hank Kranzler**

UNIT 1 CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE AND THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

Structure

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- 1.13 Summing Up : The Modernity of Elizabethan Tragedy
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1.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit helps you to understand the Elizabethan drama of which Christopher Marlowe is one of the chief representatives. The focus in this unit is on the distinctive growth of Elizabethan comedy and tragedy. An attempt is made to show how tragedy effectively reflects the cultural aspirations and the keen intellectual sensitivity of the Elizabethans.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Christopher Marlowe is the originator of the mature English tragedy. Between the playwrights who preceded him like Thomas Kyd and those who succeeded him like

1.2 CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE

Christopher Marlowe (1564-93) is the most intellectual of the playwrights during the Elizabethan age in English literature. The period known for unprecedented literary activity in England, finds its genius, chiefly, in drama whose most eloquent spokesman was William Shakespeare. Marlowe is, undoubtedly, the greatest of Shakespeare's predecessors in drama. To him, goes the credit of heralding the powerful English tragic drama that remains, even today, as one of the chief achievements of English literature. Marlowe died very young, before he was thirty, in suspicious circumstances but left about half a dozen tragedies all written in a period of five years — *Tamburlaine* (1587), *Doctor Faustus* (1586), *The Jew of Malta* (1589), *Edward II* (1591), and *The Massacre at Paris* (1592). Endowed with vast biblical and classical scholarship, a rebellious spirit and poetic imagination, Marlowe marks the end of an adolescent phase in English drama and begins its mature tragedy. In effecting this transition, Marlowe had to attempt to reconcile the traditions of medieval Christianity with the rise of the Reformation, on the one hand, and reconcile these two with the continental Renaissance humanism and the revival of the fascinating classical learning and literature, on the other. Additionally, there was the linguistic and lyrical upsurge of the blank verse and its liberating tone of freedom from the rigors of metrical verse. Whatever Marlowe wrote was poignant, for he could never separate his personal yearnings from his dramatic reflections. A very striking personality and a powerful dramatist, he is a significant part of a still greater tradition of the Elizabethan drama—tragedy in particular, which was taking shape in his time. Marlowe is judged with a sense of regret that he died young and that his talents left many a masterpiece unwritten, especially in view of the fact that Shakespeare, similarly gifted could achieve greatness with longer years of life. On Marlowe's four hundredth anniversary, Harry Levin reassessed Marlowe's importance thus:

Marlowe must abide the question of history, which Shakespeare has all but overflowed. Yes, he is for all time, we must agree with Ben Johnson. And Marlowe then, was he primarily for his age? Certainly he caught its intensities, placed its rhythms, and dramatized its dilemmas as no Elizabethan writer had previously done, and as all would be doing thereafter to some extent...

Marlowe's output was meteoric in its development, and in its expression as well. In that sense, his end was not untimely, and it is futile to sentimentalize now over his fragments and unwritten master works. Shakespeare needed maturity to express ripeness, although he could never have matured without assuming first the youthful stance that Marlowe had made permanently his own. Insofar as he must seem for ever young, we are inclined to feel old as we belatedly reread him.¹

An understanding of this emerging tradition is necessary for clearer perspectives on Marlowe's dramatic endeavours and achievement.

1.3 ELIZABETHAN DRAMA: RELIGIOUS BEGINNINGS

One of the finest dramatic traditions in literature, the Elizabethan drama emerged in the middle of the sixteenth century in England in response to the growing needs of popular entertainment, national and cultural aspirations. To begin with, the

Elizabethans had to reckon with theatre as a vehicle for religious and moral instruction. After the decline of classical drama in Europe, the Middle ages witnessed the use of theatre in the church for religious instruction. This has, in fact, led to the rebirth of western drama after the Middle Ages. The antiphonal singing, the essential part of a Roman Catholic prayer in the church, displayed dramatic possibilities that could be effectively used for instructional purposes. Further, illustrations of the stories of the Old and New Testament, particularly during festivals like Christmas and Easter, through dramatic presentation, became an integral part of the Roman Catholic liturgy.

1.4 MIRACLE AND MYSTERY PLAYS

What began as a religious performance by the clergy extended itself to include lay performers. As the performances gradually became buoyant during the festivals, the clergy came to be excluded from participating in such joyous celebrations. The exclusion of clergy entailed the relaxation of church control over such performances, leading to the secular growth of, what is essentially, a Christian drama. This religious tradition of theatre became popular in England by the fourteenth century as Mystery and Miracle plays, the former dealing with biblical stories and the latter with the lives of the Christian saints. In course of time, cycles of plays evolved presenting various stories but with a singular theme. Though composed by the clergy, with a certain secular disposition, in iambic verse, the theatrical organization went into the hands of social and trade guilds associated with towns like York, Chester, Coventry, Wakefield and Lincoln. These cycles, largely bereft of any lasting literary value, facilitated the replacement of Latin by the vernacular as the medium of religion, the shift of theatrical activity from cathedrals to open public places, and in theatrical experience, a change from a sense of religious solemnity to the pursuit of popular taste. A significant development for the later Elizabethan drama was the mixing up of the solemn religious practices with the comic frivolities inherent in day to day life.

1.5 MORALITY PLAYS

The later advances of English religious drama was in the form of a morality play which was, in turn, followed by interludes, the non-allegorical religious plays about earthly characters with a predominant satirical tone. The morality tradition is significant for the abstract characterization of several qualities, both good and vicious. The dramatic story is an allegory of the interplay of the forces of good and evil. The dramatic conflict, essentially between good and evil, leads to the inevitable victory of the good over evil, the former characterized by the strength of religion and the latter smarting under a comic impotence. The morality plays have a long history in England beginning with the fifteenth century and lasting the whole of the sixteenth century. The plays had to reckon with the growth of English nationalism, its political and economic power. More importantly, they had to come to terms with the tides of classical revival and the new humanist learning from Italy. The representative morality plays of the early Tudor period, like *The Castle of Perseverance* (1425), *The Pride of Life* (1425) and *Everyman* (1500) (translated from Dutch, the authors anonymous) survey human life from birth to death through the conflicts occurring between one of the cardinal virtues and the seven deadly sins. Social reality of human life was beneath the concern of the early morality play. Plays of the late period like *Impatient Poverty* (anonymous, 1547-58), Lewis Wager's *Mary Magdalene* (1490), Nathaniel Woodes' *The Conflicts of Conscience* (1581), John

learning, though the awareness particularizes the Christian formulation of the essential fallibility of man. The plays are substantially dramatic unlike the early morality plays and display, forcefully, the tenor of the English language.

1.6 RISE OF ELIZABETHAN COMEDY AND TRAGEDY

The long years of the morality tradition, through the vicissitudes of church doctrine and the pressures of the new age, led to the evolution of the Elizabethan dramatic genres of comedy and tragedy. Though the biblical tradition presented dual perspectives on the predicament of man, either of the comical insignificance or of unmitigable suffering, paralleling the generic perspectives of the subsequent comedy and tragedy, the Elizabethan tragedy or comedy, in the making, came to increasingly bear the secular burden of the times. The concern with human condition per se is the chief characteristic of Elizabethan drama. The growth of the new classicism or learning is definitely a major contributory factor but, more importantly, the socio-economic and cultural growth of the nation made the focus on human material possible. If we look at the earliest English comedy, Nicholas Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister* (1553) or the earliest tragedy written by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton, *Gorboduc* (1561), the Tudor setting and ethos is particularly striking notwithstanding the classical dramaturgy through which the plays take shape. The new blank verse, having unburdened metrical rigor generates a new literary freedom hitherto unknown. The new verse presents a heroic spirit in language, emotion and action.

1.7 THE GROWTH OF THE ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

The early Elizabethan drama, before the regular playhouses were constructed, permeated a broad gamut of the social life of the times. Nicholas Udall's plays were school plays enacted by the boys as part of the liberalized school curriculum. In spite of their amateur playing, the boys used to be requisitioned to stage the plays before royal dignitaries or in the court itself. The early English tragedy had its advent at the Inns of the Court. *Gorboduc* was written and produced by two lawyers at the Inner Temple. Oxford and Cambridge became important centers for staging Latin drama, so much so that even Queen Elizabeth used to visit the universities to witness the performances. Later, the royal court, with the ostensible purpose of regulating theatre, assumed the function of theatrical organization, providing grants and costumes to several amateur boy groups. John Lyly staged several comedies for Queen Elizabeth and established the genre of Elizabethan comedy. Tragedy, however, could not find patronage either at the royal court or in London. It had to await the advent of adult acting companies and the erection of Public theatres on the outskirts of London. It is in these theatres like the Curtain, the Rose, and the Globe, that the Elizabethan stage came into being, a stage that introduced the plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare.

While the growth of Elizabethan drama as a native tradition was a steady one moving self-assuredly without meekly copying classical models, the same would not have been possible without Elizabethan Drama registering itself as significant European theatre since the Greek drama of the fifth century B.C. In its European phase, Elizabethan theatre not only integrated within itself various elements of classical drama but also the Greek formulations about comedy and tragedy. The task for the Elizabethans was not only to be forcefully English but also thoughtfully European and distinctively Elizabethan.

The Latin form, with its division into five acts, of the plays of Terence and Plautus structured English romantic comedy right from *Ralph Roister Doister*. The plays abounded in classical themes like love, intrigue and friendship and character types like the braggart lover, the parasite servant, and the scheming old man. The comedy developed into two distinct traditions of the romantic and the critical comedy.

Beginning with Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*, the romantic comedy grows through the court plays of Lyly like *Compaspe* (1581), *Mother Bomby* (1590) and *Endimion* (1583), George Peele's *The Arraignment of Paris* (1584) and Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1590) and culminates in Shakespeare's comedies like *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1595), *As You Like It* (1600) and *Twelfth Night* (1601). Primarily meant for aristocratic entertainment, romantic comedy pursues the theme of love—love as a blend of sentiment, foible, eccentricity, artifice, dedication and self-centeredness. Romantic love is more in the nature of the ludicrous rather than the ridiculous. Melodramatic to the core and farcical in treatment, this comedy, set in a pastoral or old world ambience, evokes a romantic mood and an atmosphere of exhilaration, celebration, chivalry and enchantment. With song and imaginative idealism, romantic comedy provides an escape route into a world of fancy and imagination from the grim realities of life.

The other tradition of comedy belongs to the redoubtable Ben Jonson who presented what are called the comedies of humour like *Every Man in His Humour* (1598), *Volpone* (1606) and *The Alchemist* (1610). Essentially city comedies, Jonson evolves his plays as social purgatives to the prevalent moral degradation. Funny yet serious, the laughter evoked is carefully controlled. Falling back on the tradition of rogue fiction, Jonson's protagonists are rogues who succeed until the end by their ability to gull others for their avaricious needs. Their eventual failure is a moral corrective driven home forcefully by the playwright.

1.9 ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY : THE SENECA INFLUENCE

The earliest inspiration for the English tragedy were the Latin plays of Seneca. It was the retributive revenge motive, belief in fortune or chance, stage declamation and soliloquy of the Senecan plays that made the plays of Thomas Kyd, Marlowe and Shakespeare extremely popular with the Elizabethan audiences. The appeal of the blood letting Seneca to the Elizabethans, bred on the Christian morality tradition, is apparently strange and curious. But the Elizabethans found a satisfying correlation between the contradictory traditions. F.P. Wilson sums up the Senecan appeal to the devout Elizabethans:

The extent of his influence on English tragedy, academic and popular, would have not been so great if the themes, the doctrine and the form have not proved congenial. The Elizabethans would enjoy the impression which his tragedies gave that crime meets its punishment in this life. They had the same appetite, or at least the same stomach, for sensational incident and violent passion ... Also they shared with him a taste for moral statement, for pity sentimental and love of rhetoric. His doctrine, it might be thought would have repelled a Christian audience but this was not so. The medieval *contemptus mundi* had held that we are born in sin linked to it before we are able to sin...²

1.10 GREEK ORIGINS OF TRAGEDY

However, Seneca did not exhaust the Elizabethan 'tragedy' which looks back to ancient Greece for the spirit and theory of western tragedy. The Greek tragic theory and vision helped Marlowe and Shakespeare enormously in achieving great complexity and depth in their plays. The dramatic form of tragedy owes to a lyric sung in honour of Dionysus, Greek God of vegetation and wine in the course of the fertility feasts, made to commemorate the harvest and vintage. The original Greek word, *tragedia*, comes from another word meaning a goatsinger, possibly the ritual song and dance known as *dithyram*, attended by the sacrifice of a goat. The *dithyram* evoked ideas of death and renewal of life, a process evoked by harvest and vintage. The point is that death is an inescapable positive fact of life preceding fresh lease or renewal of life. In the hands of the Greek Dramatists like Aeschylus (525-426 BC), Sophocles (996-406 BC) and Euripides (485-406 BC), tragedy focused on the aesthetic beauty though it varied in emphasis from dramatist to dramatist. Aeschylus to whom tragedy as a dramatic form owes its existence strove to elevate tragedy to the realm of fundamental truths, Sophocles gave the concept of dramatic unities and cherished tragedy as an art form unencumbered to achieve or present anything. Euripides (485-406 BC) used tragedy to reflect upon the darker aspects of life.

1.11 ARISTOTLE'S DEFINITION OF TRAGEDY

In the course of Greek drama, tragedy acquired a high seriousness both in its purpose and treatment of materials and reckoned with the concerns of the whole community and strove to raise fundamental questions about human existence and also to provide deep psychological insight into the metaphysical and epistemological processes of the world and human life. Aristotle, the Greek philosopher in the fourth century B.C. after examining Greek drama of his time very minutely, offers a definition of tragedy and its constituent elements in his treatise on drama called *Poetics*. For him, "tragedy is a representation of an action which is important, complete and limited in length. It uses language made beautiful in different ways and in different parts of the play. It is enacted not recited and by arousing pity and fear, it gives an outlet to emotions of this type."³

Aristotle uses the medical metaphor, namely, *catharsis* to describe the function of tragedy which is to purge the emotions of pity and fear in the audience. On seeing a tragedy the audience unburdens the constricting emotions that inhibit the understanding of their own life.

The elements of tragedy, according to Aristotle, are plot, character, diction, ideas music and spectacle. The plot must have a beginning, middle and end. The moving devices of plot are *peripeteia* and *anagnorisis*. *Peripeteia* entails an ironic frustration of purpose on the part of the protagonist who is not only a man of noble birth but obviously blessed with outstanding qualities, producing an opposite result from the one intended. The increasing failure of the protagonist is on account of the tragic error or *hamartia*. Essentially, the protagonist moves or is driven towards *anagnorisis*, the discovery of the true situation. The progression of the plot displays both verbal and dramatic irony. Verbal irony occurs when the actual intent of the speaker or the writer is expressed in words that carry the opposite meaning. Dramatic irony enables the spectator or reader of a play to know more than its character. The irony is tragic since the audience or the reader understand the predicament of the protagonist who indulges in self-delusory assertions.

While the significance of the Aristotelian formulation of tragedy is immense for the Elizabethans, the immediate fascination for the Elizabethans may have been the Roman models of tragedy like those of Ovid, Plutarch and Seneca who gave a Roman sense of virility, dignity and energy to the Greek tragic sense. The Elizabethan fascination for the tragic form as it comes to them through the Greeks and Romans is on account of their love for the regenerative force of life, coupled with a sense of wonder and mystery at the forces inherent in the world and human life. The tragic dilemma as dramatised in the Greek plays came to characterize the new ambivalence felt by the Elizabethans in the midst of individual and national prosperity and achievement, on the one hand, and the need for a new definition of individual and public morality, on the other hand, for which the orthodox Christianity offered no satisfying solutions. If we look at the dominant motifs of Elizabethan Drama, the revenge motive, modelled after the Senecan plays, running through Thomas Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* (1589) Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* (1589) and *The Massacre of Paris* (1592), Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (1601), Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1606-7) and John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (1613-14) what is accepted as a retributive justice in Seneca for an order of justice and individual morality becomes, unlike in Seneca, the essential question in Elizabethan Drama about the very stability of the societal moral system. The Elizabethans were increasingly burdened with a Renaissance inspired man-centered world where human possibilities assume the force of a moral axiom distorting the distinctions of good and evil or right and wrong. The human potentialities flower in an inextricable admixture of good and evil. In a mature play of Shakespeare like *King Lear* (1605) the radical questioning extends to the cosmic forces inherent in nature, morality and justice. The inevitable tragic assumption is a non-absolutist view of the world and an acceptance of the dialectical functioning where in the good and evil interact in a mutually supportive manner. T.S. Tomlinson sums up the moral vision of the Elizabethan tragedy:

...the central paradox of Elizabethan tragedy in particular seems to be that it sees the good and the valuable as — at least in part — actually nourished and supported by chaos and evil ... Nevertheless there is a sense in which the Elizabethans generally, to experience the tragic and the chaotic, at the same time experience energy and richness of life ... Shakespeare has seen in the chaos and destruction of tragedy — even possibly in evil itself — a source of energy and vitality greater than any found elsewhere. Less richly, and in greatly varying emphases, the writing of other Elizabethan dramatists bears out the truth of this central paradox. The deepest response to evil and good or to the valuable and chaotic, sees them, as in the same sense, dependent on each other for their form, substance and the very existence.⁴

The basic question Elizabethan tragedy raises is a relational one — between man and nature, nature in the larger sense of a cosmic force external to man, and nature embedded in the human condition. The Renaissance which brought a keen awareness of the infinite human potentialities makes this question a very poignant one for the Elizabethans. How does or should man relate himself to the forces within himself and to those external to him in the environment? The orthodox Christianity skirted the issue under the obligation imposed on man to obey the moral laws stipulated by it. Could the moral law be at variance with the natural law evolved by the same author of moral law—God? Moral law should synchronize with natural law in order to avoid a disjuncture between man and his situation. However, the condition of nature within man cannot be a law unto itself, as Marlowe was to dramatize in his powerful Renaissance play of infinite human ambitions and adventure, *Tamburlaine*. But moral law, independent of human nature, could not be the regulating factor. A correlation within nature, between nature within man and the one external to him in

environment regulates human condition. The correlation is of a very complex nature without being restrictively adversarial or benevolent to man. It provides a framework of mutual support and opposition, the only framework for human growth. Writing about Shakespeare's dramatic world, Tomlinson points out the essential dynamics in Shakespeare's dramatic world that explains considerably the whole of the Elizabethan dramatic perception:

The point, rather, is that in the fabric of Shakespeare's verse, the world of nature is given us as having an existence which, paradoxically, is at once independent of, and intimately related to man's status and worth. Any full realization of nature, Shakespeare is saying, must ultimately be in terms of man's consciousness; but the Shakespearean tragic paradox includes also a demonstration that nature, so far from being a mere background or illustration of a morality or goodness truly grounded in man alone, is in itself an indispensable source of nourishment, the given body of experience and substance sustaining and supporting human life. The tragic hero often fails to see this, and sees it only imperfectly. But the playwright sees it.⁵

The richness of Elizabethan tragedy is not simply ideational. The tragic form in the Elizabethan plays, more so in Shakespeare's plays which present the apotheosis of the growth of the complex and sophisticated Elizabethan world view, itself structures the Elizabethan thought and speaks more eloquently than what the characters articulate. The Greeks formulated the tragic form through their experiences of life. The discipline of the tragic form evolved by them is essentially an aesthetic value deeply cherished by them. The Elizabethans go a step further and make the dramatic art of tragedy a key to understanding the rich complexity of the Elizabethan mind and life. They endeavoured more in the direction of the evolution of the art of tragedy that mirrors their cultural and intellectual ambivalence than in the direction of the intellectual exercise of their minds. The strength of the Elizabethan mind lay in an intellectual understatement and in finding metaphors of dramatic action which speak out their minds eloquently.

The Elizabethans have immensely enriched the Greek tragic form both in their adherence to dramatic form and in the liberties they have taken from the rigorous discipline of the Greek dramatic art. The Elizabethan tragic protagonist is an Aristotelian hero, usually of a noble birth, blessed with outstanding qualities but suffers from a serious tragic flaw or hamartia in his character that sets the play in motion. The Chorus plays the introductory and summative function as in Greek Drama. Plot is a major element as in a Greek Drama using the devices of peripeteia and anagnorisis. The interest of the audience is sustained by the spectacular action and dramatic irony whereby the audience knows the predicament of the protagonist that the latter fails to understand. The plot leads the protagonist to a tragic recognition of his weakness while the audience gains a cathartic experience of the feelings evoked in the course of the play.

The Elizabethan drama abounds in the number of dramatic characters in a play while their number was limited in the Greek Drama. The dramatic unities are followed more in their breach by the Elizabethans who try to encompass a larger and larger framework of time and place, for their renaissance aspirations drive them to boundless action. Similarly, a zest for a diversity of experiences always haunted the Elizabethans making it impossible for them to stick to the Greek dramatic distinctions of tragedy and comedy. Consequently, Elizabethan drama intermixed tragic and comic experiences, a practice so abhorrent to the Greeks.

For the Elizabethans, more specifically for Marlowe and Shakespeare, tragedy is not a restrictive view of human excellence or weakness as the Greeks are often inclined to present but an affirmative view of human aspirations whose pursuit brings a glory to the definition of man. Struggle, conflict, suffering and failure may be the inescapable attendants but the human spirit is not stifled in its pursuits by what attends to them. The ability to withstand them is the tragic glory of man.

1.13 SUMMING UP : THE MODERNITY OF ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDY

What the Elizabethans have done in formulating a tragic method and vision is the definition of a modern scientific temper and attitude to life that began with the Renaissance and extends itself to contemporary times. Hieronimo, Tamburlaine, Dr. Faustus, Hamlet, King Lear, Othello and Macbeth, if we are to forget their Elizabethan lineage, are striking dramatic approximations of the states of mind modern man struggles to cope with, as restlessly as the Elizabethan protagonists attempted to do. In the age of nuclear technology, we are still beset with a Tamburlaine and the Faustian problem of reconciling infinite human potential with situational possibilities. In the realm of personal relations, we err as tragically as Lear, Hamlet or Othello. The story of man has remained unchanged for the last several centuries. Man succeeds eminently with his given potentialities but fails far more easily than he succeeds. The tragedy of the contemporary man is strikingly Elizabethan and, particularly, Marlovian. As Harry Levin would say we "cannot but discern" our "culture hero in the ancient myth of Icarus (and) in Marlowe's tragedy of the scientific libertine who gained control over nature while losing control of himself."⁶

1.14 REFERENCES

1. Harry Levin "Marlowe Today" *Drama Review* 8, 4, 1963-64, pp.22-23.
2. F.P. Wilson. *The English Drama 1485-1585*. Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1969. Pp.126-127.
3. Aristotle quoted in translation from poetics in Collier's Encyclopaedia.
4. T.B. Tomlinson. *A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. 1964. pp.3-4.
5. *Ibid.*, pp.11-12.
6. Harry Levin. *The Overreacher: The Study of Christopher Marlowe*. Boston: Beacon Press 1952, p.134.

1.15 KEY WORDS

Reformation

A religious movement in the sixteenth century Europe for the reformation of the doctrines and institutions of the Christian Church led by Martin Luther (1483-1546). The Reformation laid primacy on the individual faith to the exclusion of sacramental action. It held that the scripture, the word of God, speaks directly to the conscience of the Christian without the intermediary of the Church authority.

Renaissance

A complex of literary and artistic movements stimulated by the study of classical literature and art during the fourteenth and fifteenth century in Europe. Historical self-consciousness, reform of Christian society through classical education, liberation of the human mind from superstition and error were some of the important features of the Renaissance movement. The movement synchronizes with the growing prosperity of the European nations. More than anything else, Renaissance championed the worth of the human individual.

Seven Deadly Sins

Classification of sins found in the works of Christian theologians since St. Thomas Aquinas: The sins are pride, avarice, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth. These sins are essentially viewed as acts of rebellion against God.

Cardinal Virtues

The principal moral qualities that determine man's goodness. These are prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude. The fourfold classification goes back to the classical philosophy. St. Ambrose in the fifteenth century applied the term cardinal to these virtues of faith, hope and charity.

1.16 QUESTIONS

1. Trace the growth of English tragedy since the Mystery and Miracle plays.
2. Critically examine the role of the Renaissance in the growth of the Elizabethan Drama.
3. Point out the elements of Aristotelian tragedy in Elizabethan drama.
4. Discuss how Elizabethan tragedy departs from Aristotelian formulations of tragedy. In what ways do these deviations enrich the Elizabethan drama.
5. Discuss the salient features of the mature Elizabethan tragedy.
6. Critically examine Christopher Marlowe's dramatic endeavours that make him an outstanding predecessor to William Shakespeare.
7. In what ways is the Elizabethan tragedy close to us in the twentieth century?

1.17 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Fredrick S. Boas. *An Introduction to Tudor Drama*. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1993. A survey of the growth of the English stage through the schools, universities, inns of court and the royal court with a special focus on the biographical plays and the poetic tragedies of Christopher Marlowe.
2. Tucker Brooke & Mathais A. Shabber. *A Literary History of the Renaissance Volume II*. Albert C. Baugh ed. New York. Appleton Century Crofts. 1967. Discusses Renaissance literature in England, surveys the religious prose, the Elizabethan lyric, verse and prose narratives of the time: Elizabethan comedy and tragedy, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, William Shakespeare, Jacobean Drama, Caroline drama and the seventeenth century poetry.
3. Harry Levin. "Marlowe Today," *Drama Review*, 8, 4, 1963-64. An assessment and a tribute to Marlowe on his 400th anniversary.
4. T.B. Tomlinson. *A Study of Elizabethan and Jacobean Tragedy* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1964. A critical discussion on the dominant issues in Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy with focus on the revenge theme.
5. F.P. Wilson. *The English Drama. 1485-1585*. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1969. A Historical Survey of the English drama through the early and later Tudor period with a special focus on the generic growth of comedy and tragedy during the period.

UNIT 2 THE TRAGIC DRAMA OF *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 *Doctor Faustus* as a tragedy
- 2.3 *Doctor Faustus* and the Christian Morality Tradition
- 2.4 The heroic character of *Doctor Faustus*
- 2.5 The tragic premise in *Doctor Faustus*
- 2.6 The strength of tragedy
- 2.7 Act I : *Doctor Faustus*: The Unscholarly attitude
- 2.8 Act II : The Unfolding of Faustus' tragedy
- 2.9 Acts III & IV : The Comic diversion of tragedy
- 2.10 Act V : The tragic denouement of *Doctor Faustus*
- 2.11 Marlowe's achievement in *Doctor Faustus*
- 2.12 *Doctor Faustus* : appeal to 20th century
- 2.13 References
- 2.14 Key Words
- 2.15 Questions
- 2.16 Annotations
- 2.17 Suggested Readings

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit discusses how *Doctor Faustus* emerges as a great tragedy. The focus is on how it is modelled after a Christian morality play and how the play transcends the morality ethos within its structure to become a great human tragedy.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Doctor Faustus was written for the Admiral's Men and was staged in 1588. Its first Quarto edition was published in 1604. Several reprints of this Quarto appeared subsequently with some interpolations. However, in 1616, an enlarged edition of the

play was published containing many comic scenes absent in the 1604 edition. Contemporary editions of *Doctor Faustus* depend on both the 1604 and 1616 versions of the play.

2.2 DOCTOR FAUSTUS AS A TRAGEDY

One has to wade through several conflicting traditions to look at the dramatic core of *Doctor Faustus*. The influence of the traditions of orthodox Christianity, of the Reformation the Renaissance, of Paganism, of individualism and the incipient scientific modernity is exhaustive in the play. One is lost in the pervasive or conflicting claims of these traditions. However, the strength of the play lies in its disturbing impact on the audience, whether Elizabethan or modern a fact that vouchsafes that the play is not exhausted by the claims of a specific tradition but has an essential drama and a tragic rhythm.

Undoubtedly, *Doctor Faustus* explains a moment in history. Its tragedy is, irreducibly, a national or cultural predicament. As a dramatic genre, it has all the essentials that go with it. The play's power to disturb the audience is the power of its specific genre. Consequently, one has to see, in the first instance, how tragedy is a powerful discipline in a particular point of time and place and, secondly, how *Doctor Faustus* comes to realize the power of tragedy.

2.3 DOCTOR FAUSTUS AND THE MORALITY TRADITION

There is nothing new about the dramatic story of *Doctor Faustus*, – the story of human presumption, temptation, damnation and fall being the essential narrative of the mystery, miracle and morality plays. *Doctor Faustus* does not deviate either from the narrative or the thematic strain of the Christian drama preceding it. There is little drama in the divinely ordered destiny of man excepting the allegorical interplay between the forces of good and evil. The human situation is a pathetic comedy of evil, the evil that man, at best, could be tempted to, that all that man is capable of in his comic impotence is wrath and despair. The comic imbecility of man however, is a part of the divine totality of purpose as reflected in the world, the natural universe and history. As such, evil is not an antagonist but simply a lack or deficiency of being that is taken care of in the ultimate divine order where all being is ultimately good. Douglas Cole sums up the Christian dramatic tradition of Marlowe who chooses to transform the German Faust legend into a tragedy:

The English morality is staged as a homiletic allegory. Within its transparently didactic framework, the personifications of abstract vices and virtues contend for the allegiance of the central figure or figures that represent man. The characteristic plot is a contest, and its characteristic movement is from the seduction of mankind by vice to the salvation of mankind by virtue and repentance. The fundamental issue of the morality play is thus always the same, and it is by definition a serious one. The fundamental evil involved, sin in one or another of its particular forms, is always the same, and just as serious. But the dramaturgical expression of the issue and the evil, drawing from the heritage of the mystery plays, combined with moral gravity and comic effect; the comedy of evil persisted along with the allegory of evil; like the allegory, it found its support and basis in the doctrinal and homiletic formulation which was responsible for the morality

For his tragedy, Marlowe had to contend with a comedy and an allegory of evil, a didactic contest for dramatic conflict and homiletics for dramatic resolution. The dramatic thrust of the morality play was towards a slapstick in order to demonstrate human frivolity. The human protagonist suffers immensely but the suffering is retributive and axiomatic rather than real. The Faust legend Marlowe uses in the play eminently fits into the morality comedy form, for the necromancer, Faust, who sells his soul to the devil for swinish pleasures, effectively illustrates the human predicament in the morality plays.

2.4 THE HEROIC CHARACTER OF *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Obviously, Marlowe had not chosen to write another morality play to demonstrate the all pervasive divine providence though he sticks to its narrative and, to an extent, to its comedy. While being subordinate and adherent to doctrinal Christianity, Marlowe's Elizabethan protagonist, Faustus, a representative morality figure, has grown privy to the national and cultural self-assertiveness characteristic of the Elizabethans and to their Renaissance inspired humanistic aesthetics and intellectuality. The difference perhaps, lay more in Marlowe who, his theological training and scholarship notwithstanding, is a more aggressive representative of the aspiring and critical humanism. The comic imbecility of the representative human figure as presented in the Christian drama was definitely an anathema to Marlowe. In recasting the Faustus legend, Marlowe infused a heroic element in the Faustus narrative. The forces of evil are internalized in the human protagonist to the extent that man does not solely depend on the external temptation of evil. Similarly, the forces of good or of Christianity are made a part of the internal being of the protagonist. The earlier allegorical contest between the forces of good and evil in the human space becomes a fact of an irresolute coexistence within man and their competing claims always running short of a convincing victory of one over the other. Man is not a passive recipient of good and evil but can actively pursue them. Apparently, the human protagonist exercises choice and assumes responsibility but the choice does not negate the responsibility. The human consciousness which posits a diversity of feelings and aspirations generates suffering. Suffering is inevitable to a perceptive mind in a situation where cultural and intellectual aspirations are keenly felt. The condition of a perceptive individual in an aspiring culture resists, impulsively, any diactically formulated definition of his being. The resistance is unsuccessing in the given totality of the human situation but the struggle, and even the eventual failure, elevates man to a higher realm of heroic and critical activity. Such a human condition is tragic, for the greater the human abilities and endeavours, the greater is the self-lacerating human suffering and extent of failure.

2.5 THE TRAGIC PREMISE IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

What Marlowe attempts in *Doctor Faustus* is a tragic vision of heroic human possibilities. In the very tragic premise, Faustus is just the antithesis of the protagonists of the morality plays. Where his predecessors were passionless, Faustus, like Icarus, attempted, as the Chorus puts it, "to mount above his reach". If Morality heroes are self-effacing human beings, Faustus is superhuman in his ambitions. Though the condition is human, man could be as omniscient as God by virtue of his learning and, reasonably, should be as omnipotent as God. Where humanness does not limit Faustus' achievement, why should he be limited in power by the human condition? "Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man" whereas his power should reach out "as far as doth the mind of man"² (Act I, Scene i, 22 and 58). Faustus aims simply

All things that move between the quiet poles
 Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
 Are but obey'd their several provinces.
 Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds;...³
 (Act I, Scene i, 55-56)

The gap between the power Faustus can reach out to by virtue of his learning and the power of God could be filled by the "heavenly" necromancy, the black art opposed to God and forbidden to man. There is a specific way to human learning even in the much cherished new learning of the times. Necromancy is no tribute to human excellence and if there are limits to human learning or excellence, it is no reflection on the cherished humanist goals of the times. In his infinite ambition, Faustus degrades the human condition and his religious sacrilege is an accentuation of his human degradation.

2.6 THE STRENGTH OF TRAGEDY

Tragedy is essentially an interrogative process. The dramatic fusion of ideas, and action itself, presents a critical perspective of one on the other. Drama becomes tragic when it fights a limiting or unlimiting structure or formulation. Though as a dramatic narrative, *Doctor Faustus* is a Christian morality play, the evolution of *Doctor Faustus* as an intensely heroic protagonist begins the refashioning of the morality play. The play is a human tragedy for not only is Faustus tragically constituted in his boundless ambitions but, at the same time, the play questions the effectiveness of the cultural aspirations that shape his ambitions. Resultingly, the play provides a complex interaction between the human dimensions of the dramatic character and the ambiguities and ambivalences of the cultural situation the character is placed in.

2.7 ACT I : DOCTOR FAUSTUS : THE UNSCHOLARLY ATTITUDE

Much of the play is set in motion by the chorus itself – the dramatic premise and its ensuing implications in the narrative that Faustus in his attitude to religious and humanist learning, his twin accomplishments, lacks authenticity and has set on an Icareseque journey of self-destruction. As he proceeds to dismiss all disciplines of learning one after another in the beginning of the play, he betrays, professedly, ignorance rather than knowledge.

Bartlett Giamatti sums up Faustus' learning:

When he says Philosophy is limited, we see a man who confounds Aristotle with Peter Ramus, a man who treats the deep questions of being and not being and the technique of disputing well as if they were the same. When he says medicine is limited, we see a man who confuses gold and health, alchemy and physic, and who finds medicine wanting because it is not miracle, a lack he will remedy by turning to magic, miracle's parody. The soaring language does not offer us an ennobling spectacle; rather the opposite.⁴

Faustus' tragedy, Phoebe S. Spinard observes, is that of a "dilettante" who chooses not to choose. Faustus is merely a "dabbler in books who thinks himself an expert in all fields of knowledge", "a seeker after surface show who will not bestir himself to look for the roots of things". He is not "just a bad Christian; he is a bad humanist."⁵

Where knowledge should be strength it turns out to be a weakness in *Doctor Faustus*. Knowledge is power but the desire for knowledge for the sake of power demeans both knowledge and power. In fact, the sixteenth century witnessed a certain conflict between the contemplative and the utilitarian ends of knowledge. The orthodox Christian religion definitely erred in its absolutist approach to knowledge as contemplation, driving many a scholar into the ways of the world. Faustus, like many Renaissance inspired scholars, betrays a utilitarian weakness for knowledge. This has made the disintegration of humanism far more easy than that of orthodox Christianity. "Faustus' plenty makes him poor" – this is the tragedy of *Doctor Faustus* and of his age too.

The subversion of knowledge Faustus intends has serious personal overtones for him. The new aesthetic and intellectual game plan entails reformulation of his identity by the newly felt desires and ambitions, an identity culturally so well fixed by his learning and vocation and constituting his very being. His heterodoxy require a basic transformation in his being and reformulation of his thought processes and beliefs. But Faustus simply walks past himself, a self so entrenched in orthodoxy, and is driven back continually to the untransformed self. Heterodoxy is easy to desire but difficult to cultivate and far more difficult to assimilate.

It is clear from the beginning of the play that Faustus is tragically deficient or too distracted for the great act of transformation he sets up for himself and for which he is otherwise well-equipped with his qualities of mind, temperament and training. The profound scholar that he is, Faustus is scared that his scholarship, in its true implications, might thwart his desires. He substitutes "conceit" for resolution and fantasy for the hard facts of knowledge. Faustus has no response to what the Good Angel has to say but the words of the Evil Angel are always appetizing. While he requires to "Read, read the scriptures" as the Good Angel points out to his unscholarly inclinations, he is easily "glutted with Conceit" with the words of the Evil Angel. Desire and Conceit do not generate determination. As Valdes tells him and as Faustus repeatedly tells himself, he has to be "resolute" but Faustus cannot unlearn all his learning, though, at the same time, he is not able to realize his learning. A victim of the tragic division between the contemplative and functional needs of learning in his time, Marlowe's Faustus has to begin his education after his learning is over. Experience is a greater teacher than the book could ever be. Curiously enough, Mephistophilis, the great champion of Christian heterodoxy, begins to teach Faustus, not the virtues of religious revolt but those of the orthodox religion – that Lucifer preceded Faustus in his revolt of "pride and insolence" and that hell is no land of freedom and aspirations but simply the agonizing "loss of the eternal joys of heaven" and its "everlasting bliss".

Act I establishes Faustus' tragedy. The subplot of Wagner, the scholars and the clown dramatizes Faustus's predicament in very crude terms. The clown "would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of Mutton" and would raise the devils effortlessly. What Faustus aspires through his studious revolt is farcical.

2.8 ACT II : THE UNFOLDING OF FAUSTUS' TRAGEDY

Act II unfolds Faustus' tragedy in greater detail. The egocentric self-temptation of Act I gives way to an agonizing conflict between the religiously constituted self and the aberrations of its human impulses. In the opening soliloquy of Scene i, of Act II, Faustus defines his own tragedy

Now, Faustus, must
 Thou needs be damn'd and canst thou not be sav'd.

Despair in God, and trust in Belzebub:
Now go not backward: no, Faustus, be resolute:
Why waver'st thou? O, something soundeth in mine ears,
'Abjure this magic, turn to God again!'
Ay and Faustus will turn to God again.
To God? He loves thee not;
The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite...
Wherein is fix'd the love of Belzebub:
To him I'll build an altar and a church,
And offer lukewarm blood of new born babes⁶ (II, i, 1-15)

Faustus has damned himself through his egocentric indulgences and is beyond repair. The incorrigible state makes Faustus despair in God, a despair that makes him continue his self-indulgence for which the king of devils provides the fascination and the means. Obviously, despair is not totally the resulting state of his self-indulgences but has rather shaped his spiritual pursuits. Faustus' state of mind transcends his mental frame and is, possibly, rooted in his particular religious persuasion. The new protestant faith of the Elizabethans experiences a chasm between God and his worshippers, having repudiated the intermediary role of the Holy Roman Church and its order of the saints, rituals and other processes of salvation. In the sceptical mood about the Catholic Church's religious practices, a faith in God and His Justness came to be intertwined with a certain despair in God. Despair reflects a fear of God and the want of a satisfying or self-fulfilling experience of Him. Faustus's despair and his refusal to believe in his salvation, as the orthodox church would ordain him, leading to the kind of blasphemy he makes, is closely associated, as critics like C. Lily, B. Cambell and C.L. Barber view, with the protestant "casuistry". The protestants looked upon conscience as a more effective way, than the prescribed rituals, of reaching God. Marlowe does not champion the protestant's individual path to God, but uses blasphemy in the Faust legend for dramatising heroic possibilities of the Renaissance inspired aspirations. Significantly, Faustus does not express faithlessness in God; He wants to be like Him, and, as despair sets in, he only feels that God would not love him and wonders whether He could harm him after he has deserted Him for the company of Mephostophilis.

As despair leads to the self-indulgent belief that divine providence as well as the divine wrath cannot reach him, Faustus signs the pact with the devil giving away his soul in return for his services.

However, Faustus' pact with the devil is as self-indulgent as his rejection of divinity, both being subject to human vacillation. As Faustus fluctuates between despair and repentance, so does he flee from the devil, and surrender to the devil alternately renewing his contact with the devil after every bout of repentance. The pattern of self-willed despair and damnation becomes so intense and pervasive that in a given moment, he feels despairingly damned and also, self-assuredly, defiant of divinity. His "blood congeals" when he signs the pact and feels his arm inscribed with a divine warning - "Homofuge", Man flee, but there is the self-assurance that his senses have deceived him and, even if he were not deceived, he would not flee from the pact.

If divinity is unsatisfying and, thus frustrating, so is the devil unable to answer or give every thing he asks for. If he could retain his faith in God in spite of despairing and rejecting Him, he would stick to the devil for whatever it could give him for there is no alternative to God and the devil; he is born and bred in the realm of God but has chosen to live defiantly and voluptuously in the realm of the devil.

The morality structure of the play minus the morality kind of a submissive hero but one with an individualistic conceit builds up the tragedy of Faustus. It is not totally Faustus' sinful conceit that gives the particular kind of tragic agony to the play. In his conceit, Faustus looks askance at God and conventional Christianity as to why they seek the abject surrender of man and thus degrade him particularly when man is made in the image of God and craves to be like Him on the earth: "Be thou on earth as Jove

is in the sky." Marlowe lends justification to this human aspiration in the evolution of the Faustus character. Faustus' impulsiveness, conceding a certain measure of human fallibility, is the intensity of the human bitterness – Marlowe holds out for a dramatic statement. Marlowe's reported atheism has nowhere touched the point of faithlessness in God but faith in God to Marlowe, as to Faustus as well, could be born of the excellent human potentialities, that should, essentially, reflect divine omnipotence. Nicholas Brooke writes:

The dramatic tension of the Faustus story as Marlowe presents it lies primarily in the fact that Faustus is determined to satisfy the demands of his nature as God had made him to be himself a deity and that is forbidden: and it can only be achieved by a conscious rejection of the God who created him in his own image but denied him (as much as Lucifer) fulfillment of that image.⁷

Consequently,

...Faustus's self-damnation is wholly positive, achieved by an assertion not a failure of Will...Faustus's Hell is not a place of torture, it is Hell only in that it is an absence of heaven. It is an extreme of anti-God whose nature is deliberately opposed to the Angels' joyous submission to the service of omnipotent Heaven is the subjection of self, Hell in this sense is the assertion of self...Marlowe's philosophical position is that man has certain overriding desires whose realization is denied by any form of servitude, and the order of God is, as Milton's Satan observed, an order of servitude.⁸

The tragedy in *Doctor Faustus* gains strength in this rigidity of protest. The protest is made in the agonising awareness that it entails the deprivation of heavenly joys. Faustus cries out in desperation:

When I behold the heavens, then I repent,
And curse thee, wicked Mephistophilis,
Because thou hast depriv'd me of those joys.⁹ (II, ii, 1-3)

Faustus's rebellion is a desperate one for it loses more than it gains. But Faustus "is resolved" and shall "never repent". He sees no reason either to "die" or to "basely despair". For all its deprivation, his human condition has its own promise:

Have not I made blind Homer sing to me
Of Alexander's love, and Oenon's death?
And hath not he, that built the walls of Thebes,
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,
Made music with my Mephistophilis?¹⁰ (II, ii, 25-30)

Even Christ cannot save Faustus, as Lucifer says, as His "justness" precludes those like Faustus who are assertive of their worth. Faustus belongs to Lucifer who championed a similar protest against God earlier and experiences heavenly deprivation but pursues his freedom.

The dramatic causes provided through Faustus's ambitions and the temptations of the devil do not stand out as significantly as contributory causes as does Faustus's self-determination to protest against God.

2.9 ACTS III & IV : THE COMIC DIVERSION OF TRAGEDY

Act II unfolds the total tragedy of *Dr. Faustus*. Both Act I and II dramatize the rigour and tenacity of Faustus's rebellion against his own rootedness in orthodox religion

and against his deeply cherished heavenly joys and against his frustrating sense of their deprivation. However, while Faustus's rebellion is heroic in its assertion of the human spirit, the course of Faustus rebellion through the third and the fourth acts is totally unheroic. Faustus seeks and Mephistophilis plans, rather a series of comic indulgences mainly to distract the former's mind from the tormenting religious awareness. Faustus has no choice but to delude and delight himself in trivial and vicious pleasures. He tells Mephistophilis.

Sweet Mephistophilis, thou pleasest me;
 Whilst I am here on earth, let me be cloyed
 With all things that delight the heart of man,
 My four and twenty years of liberty
 I'll spend in pleasure and in dalliance¹¹ (III, I 58-62)

"Pleasure" and "dalliance" become the course of Faustian revolt – pomp and display in the courts of Europe, vengeful humiliation of the papal court in Rome. As a scholar set to question the divine omniscience, in the beginning of the play, Faustus sought indulgent knowledge and half-truths. Now, a confirmed rebel, Faustus remains a voluptuary. Marlowe did not draw the rebellious Faustus heroically but his point was that his act of rebellion, whatever may be the course of it, against God is immeasurably heroic, for few would dare such a rebellion. Greater rebels than Faustus, as in Marlowe's other plays like *Tamburlaine* was far more limiting in their ambitions and tasks.

2.10 ACT V : THE TRAGIC DENOUEMENT OF DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Further, as Faustus reaches his rebellious or tragic death in Act V, the nature of his death and the attendant torment bespeaks a magnificent tragedy if not that of a magnificent tragic hero:

But Faustus' offence can ne'er be pardoned: the serpent that tempted Eve
 may be saved, but not Faustus...Gush forth blood instead of tears!¹²
 (V, ii, 41-42)

The tragic conflict does not abate until the end. Faustus seeks an alternate heaven through the devilish Helen:

Her lips suck forth my soul: See where it flies!
 Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
 Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
 And all is dross that is not Helena.¹³ (V, i, 102-105)

Faustus knew that his revolt against God does not go beyond a futile gesture of defiance but the gesture is not only characteristic but worthy of Man given his magnificence. Faustus dies questioning the very validity of human existence:

Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul?
 Or why is this immortal that thou hast?

 This soul should fly from me, and I be chang'd
 Unto some brutish breast! all beasts are happy

 O soul, be chang'd into little water-drops,
 And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found!¹⁴ (V, iii, 175-190)

2.11 MARLOWE'S ACHIEVEMENT IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

The inevitable question that arises at the end of the play is: Faustus's achievements and failures notwithstanding, what does Marlowe achieve in the play with its morality structure and theme, the irrepressible and wayward hero and the farcical subplot. The play itself is very weak in form, more a cluster of scenes with no intelligible act division. The poetry and the elevated dramatic style belongs more to the individual passages than to the play. There is no progressive dramatic action with the prologue enunciating the tragic fate that awaits *Dr. Faustus* in the beginning itself and with Faustus himself presenting his tragic predicament from beginning to end.

Doctor Faustus is essentially a static play of tragic irresolution. In fact, the play stagnates so much in the middle sections of the third and fourth acts, which are meant to distract Faustus, that it distracts the audience as well.

Marlowe has a twofold aim in the play. He would write a morality play and hence the substantial stasis and comedy and the undramaticity of the play, associated with the morality tradition. In writing the morality play, he would rewrite the human story which has become very thoughtful, spectacular and poignant. To the comedy of evil, Marlowe adds a heroic tragedy. The twofold play, as J.P. Brockbank observes, serves a purpose for the audience:

In fear we acquiesce in the littleness and powerlessness of man, and in pity we share his sufferings and endorse his protest.¹⁵

2.12 *DOCTOR FAUSTUS* : APPEAL TO 20TH CENTURY

Though loose in form and disjointed in its dramatic power, *Doctor Faustus* has tremendous appeal to the audience. In fact, the play is nearer to the psychic experience of the modern man who experiences a split personality and copes with it through the stratagems of neurosis à la Faustus. For Kenneth L. Golden,

Like modern man, Faustus is the victim of a Splitting of the will. He rejects Christianity Because it would hamper his boundless desires, Yet he also cannot escape Christianity, or at Least certain aspects of it – especially guilt and The sense of sin that leads to despair. The Psychological law embodied in the common dictum “Genius to madness is near allied”, Jung found occurring again and again in the sense that the conscious and the unconscious elements of the psyche exist in a compensatory relationship.... Faustus' neurosis – the split, dissociated nature of his psyche – is a match for any of the “double Thinking of the modern mass mind.”¹⁶

In evolving the emerging duality of the Elizabethan mind, Marlowe anticipates the depth psychology of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung:

Both Freud and Jung see Unconscious as a timeless realm or, to put it another way, one containing the past, the present and the future. Further, even the so-called conscious mind is not separated from the unconscious in any absolute way and contains opposites existing side by side.¹⁷

2.13 REFERENCES

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6. Christopher Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus*, Act II Scene I 1-15.
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13. Ibid., p.47.
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15. J.P. Brockbank. "The Damnation of Faustus" *Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays. Twentieth Century Views*. ed. Clifford Leech New Jersey: Prentice Hall 1964. P.116.
16. Kenneth L. Golden "Myth, Psychology and Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*". *College Literature* 12,3,1985, pp.203-4.
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2.14 KEY WORDS

Casuistry: Derived from Latin casus meaning case, the word pertains to the application of moral principles, largely in theology, to singular cases of conscience. The protestant focus on individual conscience in deciding religious matters as against the authority of the church in such matters has brought the phrase, protestant casuistry into popular case. Since moral or religious law is always abstract, hence the need for casuistry. Even early

Christianity depended on casuistry for solving the individual religious problems of the people. St. Paul used casuistry at great length in his first epistle to the Corinthians to define the moral law on the eating of sacrificial meat, on work and virginity etc.

2. **Farce:** Latin *Farsa* from *farcire*, to stuff viands. Originally an interlude between the parts of a serious play, farce as a form of comedy presents a boisterous action. Rarely an independent play, even a good comedy like Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *Twelfth Night* are difficult to imagine without the element of farce that abounds in these plays.
3. **Icarus:** Son of Daedalus in Greek mythology. Daedalus, along with his son, Icarus, having incurred the wrath of King Minos, for their cunning activities flee by fastening wings to their bodies. Rather overambitious, Icarus flies very near the sun. His waxen wings melt under the heat of the Sun and Icarus falls into the sea. Since then, Icarus becomes a synonym for an overreacher.
4. **Necromancy:** Derived from the Greek *nekros*, a dead body, necromancy is the art of divining the future by consuming up the spirits of the dead and questioning them. Though the practice had been in vogue right from the times of ancient Greece, it was only in the middle ages, that it acquired an anti-religious character and came to be viewed very seriously by the Christian Church.
5. **Neurosis:** Dissociation of personality due to the existence of complexes. When complexes become incompatible with the conscious part of the personality, the dissociation of personality takes place creating a personality split with the incompatible complexes seeking an indirect expression. In the modern world, one does not suffer from a conflict of conscious compulsions but from neurosis, the human personality seeking an indirect or vicarious expression of multivalent feelings. The term was made popular by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, psychologists in the early part of the 20th century who are responsible for the science of mental health called psychoanalysis.
6. **Skepticism:** A critical attitude in philosophy that ranges from refusing to admit the possibility of knowledge to subjecting every claim of knowledge to strict proof. The third century Greek philosopher, Sextus Empiricus, Rene Descartes in the seventeenth century and Bertrand Russell in the 20th century championed skepticism. Over the centuries, skepticism or skeptical attitude is instrumental in checking all extravagant claims to knowledge.
7. **Slapstick:** Knock about comedy. Slapdash methods. Originally a slapstick was a wand made of two flat pieces of wood with a handle. It was used by the harlequin in a pantomime. When he struck one of his companions, the slapstick made a loud report.

2.15 · QUESTIONS

Questions

1. Discuss *Doctor Faustus* as a play in the English Morality Tradition.
2. Discuss *Doctor Faustus* as an Aristotelean tragedy
3. Discuss how *Doctor Faustus* illustrates English protestantism.

4. Critically examine how *Doctor Faustus* attempts to depart from a comedy of evil to become a tragedy of human heroism.
5. Examine Marlowe's intellectual and dramatic achievement in *Doctor Faustus*.
6. Examine *Doctor Faustus* as a tragedy of Neurosis and relate it to the predicament of contemporary man.

2.16 ANNOTATIONS

Annotate the following passages with reference to the context.

- a. Are not thy bills hung up as monuments,
Whereby whole cities have escap'd the Plague,
And thousand desperate maladies been eased?
- b. Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man.
- c. The Emperor shall not live but my leave,
Nor any potentate of Germany
- d. Away with such vain fancies, and despair:
Despair in God, and trust in Belzebub.
- e. The god thou serv'st is thine own appetite,
Wherein is fixed the love of Belzebub.
- f. Homo, fuge: whither should I fly?
- g. If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell.
My senses are deceive'd here's nothing writ:-
- h. Tush, these are trifles and mere old wives tales.
- i. Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just:
There's none but I have interest in the same.

2.17 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. C.L. Barber. "The form of Faustus' fortunes good and bad" *Drama Review*, 8,4, 1963-64. Pp.92-100. Discussion of Faustus' revolt in terms of Calvinist protestanism.
2. Golden L. Kenneth. "Myth, Psychology and *Doctor Faustus*" *College Literature* 12,3, 1985, pp.202-10. Discussion of Unconscious split personality and Neurosis.
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4. Judith, O'Neill. *Critics on Marlowe*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969. The book presents a survey of the significant criticism on Christopher Marlowe from the Elizabethan times to the contemporary times.

UNIT 3 IRONY AND THE TRAGIC DILEMMA IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction Nature and Definition of irony
- 3.2 Marlowe: An ironist
- 3.3 Irony of Faustus' aspirations
- 3.4 Faustus' tragic dilemma
- 3.5 Self-multiplicative irony in *Doctor Faustus*
- 3.6 Summing Up : Tragic irony and dilemma in *Doctor Faustus*
- 3.7 References
- 3.8 Keywords
- 3.9 Questions
- 3.10 Annotations
- 3.11 Suggested Readings

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit helps you to understand irony as the distinguishing feature of *Doctor Faustus*' tragedy and how the essence of irony and tragedy lies in a dilemma with which *Doctor Faustus* dies without being able to resolve it.

3.1 NATURE & DEFINITION OF IRONY

In the preceding unit, we discussed how *Doctor Faustus* holds a sort of balance of opposites between the morality and the heroic strains of tragedy. This oppositional balance is not simply thematic or intellectual but is the core of drama, and particularly that of tragedy, defined as irony. The subtlety of irony, in the form of a flux of opposite experiences distinguishes a good play from an inferior one and, to an extent, drama itself, which attempts to realize the human paradoxes in the dramatic action, and distinguishes itself from other genres of literature.

Dramatic irony is an intermediary between the subjectively felt ironies of experience on the part of the dramatist and the objectively found ironies of the world. Understood textually, dramatic irony refers to the possibilities of a multivocal or a privileged reading as against a popular reading of a play that is not available to the character and, at times, to the playwright himself. Renaissance drama favours irony

or an ironic reading by virtue of its transitional experience wherein the acceptance of medieval values has become uncomfortable and, at the same time, there is a hesitation to accept the aspirations of the new age. Consequently, the transitional experience of the times required a dramatic strategy or trope that would play an uncharacteristic role of remaining subtly evasive instead of standardizing the dramatic experience. The term irony was given literary sophistication by Friedrich Schlegel in the nineteenth century. He liberated the term from "simple verbal raillery" to explain the paradoxes in Shakespeare and the romantic poets. In Schlegel's understanding, Bert O. States writes:

Irony was the highest principle of art, and the poet stands ironically above his creation, as God does above his own; the creation is utterly objective in character, and yet it reveals the subjective wisdom, will and love of the creator. Thus the author pervades his characters and their actions but he is never subjectively identifiable with them. Like God, he always expresses less than he thinks.¹

Crediting irony with an infinitely variable strategy for encompassing nature's possibilities and an ability to summon "vital tension—producing mechanism of dramatic action". Bert O. States attempts to define irony:

By irony, in its widest context, I do not refer to that negativity of attitude we associate with common irony, but rather to the very principle of negation itself. The difference between irony as dry mock or perverse negativity, and irony as an unlimited capacity to negate, or oppose ideas, is not a difference in the kind of operation the mind performs but rather a difference in the mind's intentions towards the observed content. Hamlet is ironic in the first sense. Shakespeare creating Hamlet is ironic in the second... Irony is the dramatist's version of the negative proposition. It helps him to avoid error, and by this I mean that it widens his vision, allows him to see more circumspectively the possibilities in his "argument"; and in so doing it ensures his not falling into the incomplete attitudes of naivete, sentimentality, selfrighteousness, or unearned faith. In short, the complete dramatist-- if there is such a person -- is unironically ironic.

3.2 MARLOWE: AN IRONIST

More than any dramatist of his time, Marlowe faced the task of intellectual and artistic correction or reformulation. He had no more the world of established truths to live in but rather one of half-truths, the age-old truths which have become half-truths by his time and, further, the axioms of the new humanist learning which are limiting in themselves. The Christian faith in his time was at loggerheads with the new humanist values of material prosperity and pagan aesthetics. There was also the schism between the Catholics and the Protestants within the Christian faith. A scholar of vast learning, unlike many of his contemporaries, Marlowe could not help a critical and even a sceptical attitude towards both the dogmatic and the resurgent ideas current in his time. Scepticism, undoubtedly, represented the intellectual acumen and rigour of the Elizabethan mind. Marlowe's intellectual predecessors are the Latinist Erasmus and the great Thomas More. In *The Praises of Folly*, written in England at Thomas More's house, Erasmus, formulating the concept of *serio-ludere*--the serious or the great as inseparable from the weak or the frivolous-- sums up the ironic perspective necessary for the cultural experience of the times. More wrote a companion piece to *The Praises of Folly* in Latin called *Utopia* (1515) presenting the tragi-comicality of his times.

Irony as a self-defeating human presumption was the structure of medieval Miracle and Meralily plave Marlowe Followes the dramatic form of these plays but the point

of Marlowe's irony is a dilemma on the part of man whether there are infinite possibilities in him or all that he confidently feels about himself is simply a presumption. The essential irony implicit in the *Miracle and Morality* plays precludes human tragedy while the Marlovian irony makes the human dilemma poignantly tragic.

The nature of irony in *Doctor Faustus* is confounded by the fact that Marlowe nowhere articulated either his religious convictions or his humanist yearnings. It is equally difficult to say whether Marlowe suffered a schism within his mind with regard to the Catholic or the Protestant faith or with regard to the values of the Christian faith as against the emergent humanist values.

Except stating that Marlowe was deeply sensitive to the raging intellectual and religious controversies of his time, it is difficult to say what Marlowe's specific persuasions were. Critical perception often centers around Marlowe as a cynical Nietzsche bent on dismantling all orthodoxies. This view has its basis in Marlowe's "atheist lecture" which led to the charges of Richard Baines, an informer, and Thomas Kyd, against Marlowe for blasphemy before the Lord Keeper. But this perception is very tentative, especially in view of Faustus' last soliloquy containing the most passionate religious faith. Obviously, Marlowe's atheism was polemical against religious obscurantists; and the religious passions of the dying Faustus do betray Marlowe's deep religiosity.

With Marlowe's convictions eluding any definite critical point of view, Marlovian irony has to be credited to his dramatic genius that could evaluate all kinds of experience with an unfailing objectivity. What Marlowe presents in *Doctor Faustus* are two distinct structures of irony, one based on the theological concepts of sin and damnation and the other on the self-limiting structures of human possibilities. Marlowe's specific dramatic achievement lies not only in making one irony intelligible in terms of another but in fusing them in such a manner that one heightens the other.

3.3. THE IRONY OF FAUSTUS' ASPIRATIONS

The original Faust Book on which Marlowe bases his play did not have serious theological or human implications. Marlowe gives Faustus both a theological and human motivation. Faustus experiences spiritual pain and intense suffering caused by the nature of both his religious and human impulses. There is an irony implicit in the very combination of religious and human impulses.

A doctor of divinity and a master of several human sciences like Medicine and Law, Faustus is fully aware of the nature and indispensability of religious faith on the one hand, and the nature and possibilities of human excellence and achievement on the other. A religious faith is a positive and humble acceptance of human possibilities and the formulation of a concept of a power superior to man and omnipotent in itself. Similarly, non-religious human learning is based on the concept of human reason as the regulator of human affairs. Pride, both religious and secular, should adhere to the formulations that shape religious faith and human learning. There is no scope for any human achievement in religion and for godly power in human learning.

The basic irony of Faustus's aspirations is one of misplacement. He misplaces human learning in the realm of religion and the power of religion in the realm of human learning and achievement. He wishes to be "divine in show" and would "live and die" in Aristotle's works. Logic has "ravished" him. The divine show, Faustus wants, is not of god but of man. Similarly, logic which has ravished him by its analytics should produce "miracles". Medicine, which has saved several cities from plague and cured several maladies, should help him to "heap up" gold and should make Mee

"live eternally" and also "raise the dead" to life. Law does not suit human excellence and only divinity comes nearest to it but divinity does not recognize human excellence but presupposes human sin:

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.

Why, then, believe we must sin, and so consequently die.

Ay, we must die an everlasting death.

What doctrine call you this, Che sera, sera--

What will be, shall be. Divinity, adieu!³

(1,1,42-47)

The belief in religion is an admission of human sinfulness and religion must be dispensed with but Faustus does not consider whether there is any human failure outside the realm of religious formulations of sin and, further, as Douglas Cole points out, Faustus

arrives at his fatalistic conclusion by joining together two premises which themselves are glaring half-truths for each of the propositions he cites from the Bible is drawn from contexts and passages which unite the helplessness of the sinner with the redeeming grace of God... "For the wages of sinne is death but the gifte of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord"... "If we acknowledge our sinnes he is faithful and just to forgive our sinnes to cleanse Us from all Unrighteousness."⁴

Phoebe S. Spinard observes that Faustus' translation of Che sera, sera could just as easily have been, "What shall be will be". In the first, there is a rejection of will; in the second, an affirmation at least of the "possibilités of the will": Faustus is indeed refusing to consider his "being" in God, but by disposing of the question along with the answer, he is betraying the humanist goal of seeking the truth of "being" outside of religious systems.⁵

3.4 FAUSTUS' TRAGIC DILEMMA

Faustus' dilemma is essentially that while religion precludes human possibilities other than sin and repentance, the Humanist thought and learning gives him no solace being in itself self-limiting. Faustus is frustrated by the divine limitation of the human condition but the human condition, left to itself is as frustrating as the divine limitation. 'Yet, art Thou Faustus, and a man' and Faustus' dilemma is tragic for the human aspirations are whetted by divine power but the divine power is not within the human realm even if human capabilities are strained to the utmost. There is no escape from a sense of limitation, either religiously felt or humanly realized. Hence the need for religious faith, however constrictive it may be.

The human condition, at its best, is, thus, a delicately built irony of unrealizable ambitions. The irony compounds itself when man does not contend with this irony. Transgressing this irony is demeaning the human condition and subverting religious faith. Faustus' acts of necromancy and the sale of his soul to the devil are diabolic. The diabolic is the very antithesis of the human as well as the divine.

3.5 SELF-MULTIPLICATIVE IRONY IN DOCTOR FAUSTUS

The play presents a course of regenerative irony, for Faustus having strained the delicate irony of human condition has set it on a course sui generis. The theological

formulation of sin could never be farther than human truism. The greater the man tries to be, the less he becomes in fact. Douglas Cole writes:

Doctor Faustus is a man who of his own conscious wilfulness brings tragedy and torment crashing down upon his head, the pitiful and fearful victim of his own ambitions and desires. The irony with which Marlowe habitually invests the downfalls of his protagonists is here wrought to its finest and sharpest point; it is an irony based on theological concepts of sin and damnation, and dramatically expressed in two major patterns of action: the repetitive pattern of moral choice leading to the alternative of spiritual destruction and the pattern of contrast between Faustus' grand imaginative designs and the actual, vacuous accomplishments of his magical career.⁶

Faustus' achievements through his pact with the devil are in an inverse proportion to the magnitude of his ambitions. Ironically, Faustus's fatalistic interpretation of the scriptural assertion that what shall be will be becomes a matter of self-conscious choice. Further, the choice becomes a repetitive pattern of continual wilfulness in the face of an agonizing awareness that the God he rejects is the one he continues to cherish. Necromantic books are "heavenly". The magician he wishes to be is a "mighty God". He rebels against God but the divine consciousness characterizes even his rebellion. God, always, continues to be the measure of all things for Faustus.

The irony of Faustus' revolt does not end with its divine awareness. Lucifer and Mephostophilis whom Faustus courts, share the ironic predicament of Faustus-- Rejecting the God but cherishing Him. Mephostophilis describes Lucifer's revolt against God as not heroic but as one of "pride and insolence" and hell is the absence of "heavenly joy and everlasting bliss". Faustus himself looks upon his own revolt of "desperate thoughts" against God as securing "eternal death"

No dramatic character could be a creation of such an enduring irony as Faustus is. His is the paradoxical case of a revolt against something that constitutes his very being. Irony builds up the character of Faustus and the play so forcefully that the greater the revolt of Faustus is against God, greater still is his divine awareness. Irony builds up not merely the paradox of Faustus' revolt but, also through the paradox, intensifies Faustus' self-awareness and his sense of the human condition.

Now, Faustus, must thou needs be damn'd?
And canst thou not be sav'd. What boots it, then, to think of God or heaven?
Away with such fancies, and despair;
Despair in God, and trust in Beelzebub.....
Abjure this magic, turn to God again!

.....
To God? He loves thee not.
The God thou serv'st is thine own appetite,
Wherein is fix'd the love of Beelzebub.
To him, I'll build an altar and a church.⁷

(II, i 1 - 15)

The tragic dilemma in Faustus does not lie in his choice between God and the devil but in their inseparable coexistence within his human condition. Fear of God and damnation and the trust of the devil emanate from the human condition. God is the heavenly joy of human limitations and the devil is the appetite of human aspirations. The heavenly joy lies for man in a condition of human limitation and a tragic torment awaits in the human state of promise and excellence. Both God and the devil define man in a mutuality and confront him with an acute tragic dilemma as to whether he be content with the humanly limiting bliss or contend tragically with the magnificence of human promise and possibility

The tragic dilemma is all the more tormenting for there is no truly human resolution of this dilemma. God calls upon him to return to Him but the devil manipulates him to retain his contractual bond with him.

The parity of God and the devil in the centrality of man, however, is only a stage in the human predicament of Faustus and does not last long. Faustus has not, in fact, rejected one in favour of the other but has replaced God by the devil, with the divine awareness constituting his being, remaining more or less intact.

The divine awareness is a sense of humility and veneration towards a superior being. What Faustus gave as a devout soul to God, he would now give to the devil raising an altar and building a church. He would complete the bond with the devil using the same words, "Consummatum est", Christ used in completing the "work of redemption on Calvary". However, the devil does not redeem Faustus from his divine awareness but rather intensifies it and generates deep despair:

Home fuge: whither should I fly?
If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell.⁸

(II, i. 75-76)

The devil is no less despairing of Faustus' ambitions of divine power on earth. Neither could Faustus give wholehearted commitment to the devil nor could the devil keep up the obligations of the contract. Both despair of god, reject Him and lead a life of distraction as wounded rebels rather than as defiant fighters. The analogy between the man and the devil ends there for the loss is gruesome for Faustus who can only fall back on his despair whereas the devil could live on the thoughts of avenging their defeat as ineffectual angles.

The signing of the pact with the devil starts unfolding the fundamental irony of Faustus' aspirations. Faustus signed the pact only to undo himself totally. The pact signed to gain absolute power on earth only leads to Faustus' mental disintegration, for what he gets through the pact is only an increased despair in God as well as in the human condition. Mephistophilis would not answer Faustus' query about hell for it reminded him of his own tortured state of being. He wouldn't answer Faustus' question about the creation of the earth as well, for the creator is his bitter enemy nor could he give Faustus a wife, for marriage is a divine sacrament. Ironically, the show of the Seven Deadly Sins, he arranges is what he could give and what Faustus could relish vicariously. The period of contract of twenty four years turns out to be not only a denial of Faustus' aspirations but one of a progressive degradation of Faustus as a man. Douglas Cole writes:

In not choosing the God in his desire to be as God, Faustus has provided not only for his destruction, but also for his degradation. Instead of reaching the stature of demi-God or even commander of the world, Faustus becomes an imperial entertainer. The restless scholar hemmed in by the limits of mortality gains his satisfaction by playing the practical jokes on the papal court: the man who looked forward to controlling the lives and the power of all the earthly rulers now becomes the magician of the emperor, building castles in the air, and presenting spirits that resemble great men of the past.⁹

Further, the fascinating devil providing allurements turns out to be a tormentor threatening punishment as Faustus attempts to seek divine grace which amounts to disobedience to the devil.

The devil is temptation, distraction and sovereign power but doesn't stand by the contractual obligations. Faustus who aspired to rule the world cannot even insist on

the devil's obligations much less abrogate the contract for its breach but meekly assures obedience without insisting on the same from the devil.

Thou traitor, Faustus, I arrest thy soul,
For disobedience to my sovereign Lord.¹⁰

Sweet Mephostophilis, entreat thy lord
To pardon my unjust presumption,
And with my blood again I will confirm
My former vow I made to Lucifer.¹¹

(V, i, 74-81)

Faustus asks Mephostophilis to torment the old man who agonizes him with his advice. Mephostophilis' reply is significant.

His faith is great; I cannot touch his soul;
But what I may afflict his body with
I will attempt, which is but little worth.¹²

(V, i, 85-90)

Implicitly, Faustus could be tormented, for his faith in God is so shaky, but not the old man. Obedience to the devil and faithlessness to God bring the same fate. In fact, the devil heaps degradation whereas God could only pose a serious limitation on his human condition. Further, faith in God could be such a terrifying human strength that the devil would not dare to touch him. If the human condition is limiting, the limitation is a virtue, and a divine blessing too. Faustus should not have despaired in being Faustus and a man but should have felt supreme confidence in his human state. This realization couldn't be farther from Faustus but the human will would rather suffer its choice than retract meekly even if the choice is degrading and torturous.

At best, Faustus can distract himself from the gravity of wilful choice with whatever appeals to the baser human instincts. He asks for Helen but Mephostophilis can only give him a devilish shadow of Helen in whom we can read his predicament.

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

.....
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appeared to hapless Semele:
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa's azur'd arms.¹³

(V i, 95-100)

Imagery builds up the irony of Faustus' predicament. Douglas Cole sums up the ironical thrust in Faustus' passions:

Helen, whose beauty caused Troy to burn, will do the same for Faustus; the immortality offered by the kisses of a demon lover is an eternity in hell; the soul that is sucked forth cannot be given back again; hell not heaven is in these lips; the flames of Jupiter that destroyed admiring Semele are the flames of this Helene's abode which will destroy a hapless Faustus; wanton Faustus, like Arethusa, will hold the burning sun in his arms but not

The apostrophe to the devil in Helen's form is a desperate attempt to heighten his predicament and allow it to reach its logical end where the nature of his undoing comes in full force to his realization.

But Faustus' offence can ne'er be pardoned; the
serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus¹⁵
(V, ii, 13-15)

3.6. SUMMING UP : TRAGIC IRONY AND DILEMMA IN DOCTOR FAUSTUS

Faustus comes to full repentance at the end of the play. The last soliloquy is an admission of the possibility of divine grace and forgiveness. Ironically, the realization comes at a time when the devil around to torture him to death and if only his doom could be postponed, he would gain the divine forgiveness. Faustus willed his destruction so long, now he craves for time to be able to gain his salvation. But Faustus knew that the possibility of repentance and forgiveness waited on him until he reached his end. As he dies with all the opportunities of repentance and forgiveness thrown away wantonly, what remains is the burden of the human condition that contained the germs of his degradation and destruction.

Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul?
... This soul should fly from me, and I be chang'd
unto some brutish beast! All beasts are happy ...¹⁶
(V, iii. 100-110)

The pain of devilish torture is so intense, Faustus cries to God to save him from the tortures of the devil:

O God,
If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
Yet, for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransom'd me
Impose some end to my incessant pain.¹⁷
(V. iii. 100-104)

Faustus who sought the devil to oppose God; seeks God's mercy and his innate forgiveness to rescue him from the devil. Christian theology proves itself forcefully in Faustus' predicament. However, its point is religious didacticism whereas Marlowe brings out irony and a tragic dilemma. For Christian theology, Faustus' predicament falls short of a tragedy for he was motivated by nothing but presumption which could have been easily remedied by repentance and, consequently he could have been rescued by divine forgiveness. But for Marlowe, the immensity of the human condition forces desperate choices on man which could not justifiably be termed right or wrong but which have to be understood in terms of reality that constitutes human condition. What happened to Faustus may justify Christian theology but what it explains are the irredeemable paradoxes of man. Hence the irony of Faustus' career and his tragic dilemma. Douglas Cole sums up the Marlovian irony:

For Marlowe, the tragedy lies, not in the inevitable falling off of human achievement from the ideal, but in the travesty of the ideal that the deeds of man so often represent, and in the illusory aura of nobility with which man persistently invests his base desires. It is the tragic view of the ironist who sees in man the responsible cause of his own undoing, who presents man as a destructive agent who, by the abuse of freedom and will, persistently, betrays others and inevitably betrays himself.¹⁸

3.7 REFERENCES

1. Bert O. States. *Irony and Drama: A Poetics* Ithaca. Cornell University Press. 1971.p.3.
2. Ibid.,p.xviii.
3. Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus*, p.5.
4. Douglas Cole. *Suffering: Evil in the plays of Christopher Marlowe*. Princeton, Princeton UP.1962,p.198.
5. Phoebe S. Spinard. "The Dilettante's Lie in *Doctor Faustus*". *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 24,2, 1982. pp.245 to 247.
6. Douglas Cole. *Suffering and Evil in the plays of Christopher Marlowe*, p. 191
7. Christopher Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus*,pp. 16-17.
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9. Douglas Cole. *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Marlowe*, p. 216.
10. Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*,_ p. 46.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., p.17.
14. Douglas Cole. *Suffering and Evil in the plays of Marlowe* p. 220.
15. Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* p. 46.
16. Ibid.,p.57.
17. Ibid.
18. Douglas Cole. *Suffering Evil and Evil and in the plays of Marlowe*. p. 263.

3.8 KEY WORDS

Arethusa:

A nymph in Greek mythology who was persuaded by the river God, Alpheus. She flies to Sicily where she takes the form of a spring in Ortygia, an island near Syracuse. Alpheus, flowing under the sea, was there united with her.

Fredrick Schlegel (1772-1829): German critic, aesthetician and writer of romanticism, Schlegel formulates the aesthetic theory of romantic poetry and also the notion of romantic irony.

Helen:

The most beautiful woman in Greek legend; married to Menelaus, later the King of Sparta. She was abducted by Paris the Prince of Troy. Aided by many admirers of Helen's beauty, Menelaus wages a war against Troy. When Paris dies, Helen marries his brother Deiphobus whom she betrays to the Greeks. Helen returns to Sparta with Menelaus after the Fall of Troy.

Semele:

Princess of Thebes in Greek mythology with whom the Greek God Zeus falls in love. By Zeus, she conceives, Dionysus. While Dionysus was still unborn Semele gets consumed by the radiance of Zeus Olympian splendour which Semele herself entices him to wear, under the malicious prompting of Zeus' wife, Hera.

3.9 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss how irony constitutes the chief element in the characterisation of Faustus.
2. Illustrate the use of dramatic irony from the text of *Doctor Faustus*.
3. The essence of irony is dilemma: Discuss the statement with reference to *Doctor Faustus*.
4. Tragic irresolution is the dramatic strength of *Doctor Faustus*. Discuss.

3.10 ANNOTATIONS

Annotate the following passages with reference to the context.

- A. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and there is no truth in us.

Why, then belike we must sin, and consequently die?
- b. What doctrine call you this, che sera, sera - What will be, shall be? Divinity, adieu!
- c. Alas, poor slave! see how poverty jesteth in his nakedness! The villan is bare and out of service, and so hungry, that I know would give his soul to the devil for a shoulder of mutton, though it were blood-raw.
- d. To him I'll build an altar and church, And offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes.
- e. Hell hath no limits nor is circumscribed In one self place; for where we are is hell, and where hell is, there we ever be:
- f. O, no end is limited to damn'd souls! why were thou not a creature wanting soul?
- g. This soui should fly from me, and I be chang'd unto some brutish beast!

3.11 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Cole, Douglas. *Suffering and Evil in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe*. Princeton, Princeton University Press. 1962. The book presents an exhaustive background to the Marlovian tragedy and discusses the nature of evil and tragic suffering in *Tamburlaine*, *The Jew of Malta* and *Doctor Faustus*.
2. Hardin F. Richard. "Irony and Privilege in Marlowe" *Centennial Review* 33,3, 1983. pp. 207-227. The article discusses Marlowe as an ironist and looks into the possibility of two audiences for Marlowe's plays, one making an ordinary reading or viewing, and the other, the privileged, who could see the irony implicit in the play.
3. States, Bert O. *Irony and Drama; A Poetics*. Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1971. The book analyses the concept of irony, its relation to dialectics, besides discussing patterns of irony.

UNIT 4 THE RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction : Transcending medieval Christianity
- 4.2 Renaissance aspirations
- 4.3 Renaissance scepticism
- 4.4 The Historical character of *Doctor Faustus*
- 4.5 *Doctor Faustus*: Catholic and Protestant schism
- 4.6 *Doctor Faustus*: The Renaissance aspirations & rhetoric
- 4.7 *Doctor Faustus*: Renaissance Tragedy
- 4.8 *Doctor Faustus*: Catholic faith and Protestant despair
- 4.9 Summing Up : *Doctor Faustus*: A tragedy of the Renaissance and Reformation
- 4.10 References
- 4.11 Key words
- 4.12 Questions
- 4.13 Annotations
- 4.14 Suggested Readings

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit focuses on the content of the play. The interpretations of the play have been, at times, diametrically opposed to each other. *Doctor Faustus* is called essentially a Christian play by virtue of its medieval form. On the other hand; it is called inevitably a Renaissance play, for the aspirations of *Doctor Faustus* are those of the Renaissance. The Christianity the play presents is that of the division between the Catholics and the Protestants and the Renaissance the play illustrates is that of the English mind divided between religion and secular ambitions. The tragic complexity of *Doctor Faustus* has to be understood in terms of the interacting influences of these divisions.

4.1 INTRODUCTION: TRANSCENDING MEDIEVAL CHRISTIANITY

The medieval morality form *Doctor Faustus* assumes is simply exhaustive for it explains, minutely, the dramatic and thematic thrust of the play. As the morality

form exhausts the play, the question that inevitably arises is, where was the need for Marlowe to write about a dramatic tradition that was subject to so much of repetition for more than a century. Obviously, *Doctor Faustus* is not the facile hero of the morality play even if the play exhausts him as such. The justification to interpret the play in terms of medieval Christianity could be the dramatic existence of *Doctor Faustus* at that level. The play is the thing, Leo Kirschbaum asserts:

What does matter is that in terms of the play, Faustus is a wretched creature who for lower values gives up higher values. That the devil and Hell are omnipresent, potent, and terrifying realities - these are the values which govern the play. You must temporarily accept them while you watch the play. You need not ultimately accept them. But you should not interpret the play in the light of your philosophy, or religion or absence of religion. You cannot do so if you hear it properly as a play, as an entity, as a progressive action, as a quasi morality in which the characters in the play accept, which the playwright advances and accepts in his prologue and epilogue and which hence the audience must understand and accept.¹

While 'the play is the thing', it is not the total thing as well. Nicholas Brooke argues:

the play is not just
putting the Faust book on the stage. . . Faustus is,
and is not in control of the events that destroy him;
but Marlowe does not clarify his thought on the matter,
and if at one moment he seems to imply one attitude,
at another he equally clearly implies the opposite.²

4.2 RENAISSANCE ASPIRATIONS

At any rate, for Nicholas Brooke, a totally Christian conclusion of *Doctor Faustus* is not convincing since he dies seeking not the mercy of God but the extinction of the human state that has come to be invested with boundless aspirations and self-awareness. What the play puts into dramatic action and predicament is the Renaissance inspired idea of secular virtue which ultimately goes back to Aristotle.

The conception, for instance, of Tudor king or Italian prince was compared to Aristotle's description of the magnificent man, or even of the great souled Man, he who excels in all worldly 'goods' wealth, dignity, popularity and so on, who is a great patron of the arts, and who is superior to all the limitations of lesser men. . . he must be wholly resolute in his pursuit of greatness. . . he will tolerate no rival within his sphere of influence. . . an understanding of Aristotle greatly illuminates what it is that Faustus is trying to achieve; the subjective aim of self expansion is equated with the objective ideal of Aristotelian greatness, and not only are Mephistopheles and Lucifer treated as rival magnificos, but Faustus himself is aiming at that state.³

Marlowe brings in the Renaissance attitude into the Elizabethan world dominated by the medieval values of Christianity. Whether Marlowe ascribed to this attitude or not is a moot point, for he chose to be a dramatist keen on enlarging the dramatic cosmos by the tide of the new influences taking root in the Elizabethan world. Basically, it was a conflict of attitudes - the rigidly limited and defined world of medieval thinkers and the Renaissance world of natural law and human ideas, based on demonstrable

truths. The change could be seen from the shift from the old scholastic studies of logic, natural philosophy and medicine for jobs in Law, Medicine and Theology to the *Studia Humanitatis* consisting of Grammar, Rhetoric, History and Ethics focussing on human abilities required for several societal duties. The emphasis of the new studies is mainly on the linguistic and rhetorical human skills rather than on the unalterable divine truths. Many Renaissance thinkers, Erasmus being the foremost among them, sought the reawakening of human self-consciousness and his awareness of the universe around him. In the immediate context of the Elizabethan world, their concern is to stop the institutional decay of Christianity reeling under the burden of outworn traditions and the despotic church power. Along with the revision of the scholastic curriculum, they wanted to reform Christian society through a revival of classical learning. In fact, for Erasmus, the revival of classical learning was a prelude to the restoration of piety.

Based on an immense sense of human worth and possibility, the Renaissance mind explored the cosmic reality beyond the factual terms. For them, the aesthetic dimension is as central to man as the factual or the rational. In fact, the exclusion of the aesthetic undercuts the basic being of man, and as, the search for truth is invariably the search for beauty, the one cannot be divorced from the other. A sense of enquiry towards everything that concerns man and a spirit of revolt against anything that seeks to deny human reality characterizes the renaissance mind.

4.3 RENAISSANCE SCEPTICISM

Significantly, Renaissance presents also a countervailing sceptical attitude of mind towards its own inclinations of intellectual and aesthetic curiosity and passion. As described by Erasmus in his *The Praises of Folly*, the Renaissance cherished sceptical perspectives as well on the boundless enthusiasm about human possibilities. In its enthusiasm to strain its farthest limits, the human mind could undo itself instead of realizing its potentialities.

The failure is tragic given the strong sense of human self-confidence and possibilities. The Renaissance makes the human tragedy possible for the first time as the medieval Christian thought never admitted any human possibilities other than his total insignificance and impotence.

4.4 THE HISTORICAL CHARACTER OF *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Doctor Faustus reflects the division in the English mind during the Elizabethan period between the traditional religious ethos and the new ambience of critical and aesthetic values. The religious providentialism the church presented was ideologically acceptable to the Elizabethans but provided no practical guide in coping with the desires of the emerging secular culture. Marlowe makes Faustus a product of historically and culturally determined desires, and history, no matter what it might portend for the intensely self conscious Renaissance man, is a part of Marlowe's dramatic statement and tragedy of *Doctor Faustus*.

4.5 *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*: CATHOLIC AND PROTESTANT SCHISM

In fact, history for the Elizabethans did not simply entail a division of religious and secular concerns for there is a greater schism within the Christian religion in Elizabethan England that Marlowe's play does not totally escape, though under the

broader conflict of religious and secular values, the former does not gain serious dramatic cognizance. The ideological conflict between the Catholics and the Protestants was a part of Marlowe's learning at Cambridge. Critical perception of *Doctor Faustus* largely centered around the ideology of the medieval morality but the possibility that Faustus's religious revolt could ideologically have been shaped by English Protestantism, not merely by Renaissance aspirations, was not seriously considered. The movement of the Reformation synchronized with the Renaissance in opposing the dehumanization implicit in the ideological formulations of institutional Christianity. English Protestantism, deriving inspiration from John Calvin, besides opposing several religious practices of the orthodox church, propounded the rebellious doctrine of justification by Faith or conscience as against the institutional mediation or determination of the individual's faith. Further, Protestantism believed in absolute predestination and in the notion of the elect. Though the concept of human sin, as a flight from God in exercise of choice, is the same to the Protestants as it is to the orthodox Church, Calvinist Protestants and anti-Calvinist champions of the Roman church differed diametrically in the possibility of divine mercy for the sinner. The orthodox Church presented the idea of an ever benevolent God waiting to save the repentant at any time, Protestantism advocated the idea of a sinner as being a born reprobate through predestination whose predicament is one of endless despair from which there is no escape:

In his ruminations about the possibility of divine grace to him after he signs the pact with the devil, *Doctor Faustus* reflects the divergent positions of the Catholic and the Protestant positions. The religious controversy was so near Marlowe at Cambridge where he was a student when the defenders and opponents of the Calvinist faith like William Parkins and his follower, William Barret, on the one hand, and opponents like Peter Baro on the other, entered into endless polemics. Lily B. Campbell calls *Doctor Faustus*' despair a case of a torturous Protestant conscience while the possibility or impossibility of divine grace for Faustus holds the dramatic tension in the play:

It is the continuing struggle of conscience, the conflict between hope and despair, where hope would lead him to God again and despair would keep him from salvation, that makes the suspense of the play. The outcome remaining in doubt till the eleventh hour, the tension continues throughout the play and gives it its peculiar dramatic compulsion.⁴

In fact, Faustus' despair, either in itself or in juxtaposition with his religious hope or Renaissance aspirations presents the rich complexity of the Elizabethan mind fluctuating among several alternatives without being able to affirm or reject anything decisively.

4.6 FAUSTUS: THE RENAISSANCE ASPIRATIONS AND RHETORIC

From the beginning, *Doctor Faustus* explores religious and human dilemmas characterising the Elizabethan mind. Marlowe begins Faustus' story in a duality of Renaissance ambitions and religious values. There is Faustus' craving for classical learning, "Sweet Analytiks", "live and die in Aristotle's works" "who has ravished" him and a craving for a "world of profit and delight, of power, of honour, of omnipotence". The extent and depth of ambitions could only be expressed in liturgical images like "heavenly" for the delights of necromancy and the reach out of the worldly power could only be like "jove in the sky" and hence the dissatisfaction with the human state, "Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man" Though divine power is the ultimate test of human achievements, pursuit of divinity, according to

Faustus, is self-defeating, for human aspiration in a world of sin, and man cannot deceive himself by denying sin or ambition. "Why, then, belike we must sin and consequently die" He would ignore the eternal possibility of divine grace that the Catholic church promises and would rather go by the Calvinist argument that a sinner, a man of ambitions like him, is a born reprobate, his sin resulting from his predestined state.

Faustus gives necromancy the thrust and power of scientific method through which the Renaissance scholars attempted to understand nature's treasure as well as the aesthetics of human beauty.

Shall I make spirits fetch me what I please,
Resolve me of all ambiguities,
Perform what desperate enterprise I will?
I'll have them to fly to India for Gold,
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,
And search all corners of the new-found world
For pleasant fruits and princely delicates;
.....
....sometimes like women, or unwedded maids,
Shadowing more beauty in their airy brows
Than has the white breasts of the Queen of Love.
From Venice shall they drag huge argosies,
And from America the golden fleece
That yearly stuffs old Philip's treasury⁵ I, i 75-130.

"Nature's treasure" is an obsession with the Renaissance scholars since from nature proceeds human nature and the diversity of its desires, and taste for jewels, food, gossip, fashion, etc. Along with the gluttony of desires, there is a rhetoric of words. In fact, words play a greater role, for words have a thrust that impel desires rather than vice versa. Bartlett Giamatti writes:

Renaissance man felt he had the power to transform himself because he had the power of language. Words were units of energy. Through words man could assume forms and aspire to shapes and states otherwise beyond his reach.⁶

With a Renaissance focus on linguistic and rhetorical skills, Marlowe "wrestled with the multiform angel (or demon) of language"

. . . he expanded the limits of the stage by writing of human mind in its battle to surpass human limitation. He used soaring words as symbols of man's aspiring mind. And he used the lurking dangers in words to image the terrors of aspiring too far.⁷

In a characteristically Renaissance attitude, Faustus chooses to be impulsively rhetorical, driving himself into a state of aspiration beyond his abilities. Rhetoric drives Renaissance man towards knowledge, beauty and material power. There is an impatient blending of the intellectual, aesthetic and the material resulting in the overturning and undoing of the inherent strength of all three urges. Thus, the multivalent urges of the Renaissance display human magnificence as well as the tragic entrapment of man in his own self-exalted state of being. After rhetoricizing the possibility of manifold human grandeur, Faustus begins his tragic undoing with "waxen wings" of words "mounting above his reach."

Words fly past ideas as Faustus dismisses one discipline after another to convince himself that only necromancy fits his genius. What Faustus does not realize is that in the very name of human excellence he is flying away from human excellence into

areas that have not done any credit to man. He signs a pact with the devil who is the very antithesis of the moral being of man. Ironically, he is not frightened of damnation but would confound hell in Elysium and would allow his ghost to rest with the old Greek philosophers forgetting that heaven and hell are human inventions made to ennoble human life. The classical mythology is used not to elevate himself intellectually but used self-deceptively for self aggrandisement. The rhetoric of learning becomes a medium, not of self-elevation but of unlearning and degradation. The apostrophe to Helen in the final act is Faustus' finest rhetoric of learning and taste but all that Faustus gains is a self-deluding exercise to overcome the tormenting fears of damnation.

4.7 FAUSTUS' RENAISSANCE TRAGEDY

Phoebe S. Spinard sums up Faustus' tragic undoing as that of an accomplished scholar choosing the ways of a "dilettante" who uses learning superficially, and causes a yawning gap between what he says and what he is led to. Bartlett Giamatti sums up Faustus' Renaissance tragedy

Where at the outset Faustus was a creator, at the end
he is a creature; where before he dreamed of unlimited
power and glory now he is assured of limitless torment.
The words by which he reshaped himself into a demigod
at the beginning have now exploded into a horror all
about him. What we see on stage are the contents of
his head - the Hell he will possess forever, the heaven
he will shortly lose. He brought it on himself, this
deformed world, when he converted, when he turned to magic
from God, when he turned the power of words from God's
praise to his own.⁴

Faustus fails as he is simply carried away by the Renaissance aspirations instead of understanding the spirit of those aspirations that looked forward to human excellence and splendour. With all his accomplishments, Faustus fails tragically as a Renaissance hero, but the question arises as to whether Faustus deserved the tormenting suffering he had to experience. What is the nature of Faustus' sin that invites so much of divine wrath? The answer again lies in the humanist aspirations, though of a different kind. If the Renaissance posited man at the center of a secular world, the religious movement of the Reformation posited man in a direct relation with God bypassing the institutional authority of the church and its liturgical practices. Faustus' inability or refusal to repent may, in one sense, be his Renaissance pride but, in another sense, it is a protestant's admission of conscientious suffering and a despairing awareness that he is not the elect of God and, is thus, a reprobate.

4.8 DOCTOR FAUSTUS: CATHOLIC FAITH AND PROTESTANT DESPAIR

In the dramatic conflict between faith and despair in *Doctor Faustus*, the possibility of a strain of Protestant faith in Marlowe's making of Faustus, makes Faustus' despair all the more acute. The possibility of divine grace that Faustus is alternately hopeful of, in the immediate context of the schism, in the Church becomes a Catholic proposition but Faustus' despair triumphs in the play making his hope of salvation ineffectual and giving the protestant faith an edge over its Catholic rival.

Mariowe gives Faustus. for his rejection of divintiy, the initial motivation of Renaissance aspirations. However. very soon *Marlowe qualifies Faustus' motivation by the latter's awareness of eternal damnation having already taken place by his "desperate thoughts against Jove's deity" even before he sold his soul to the devil.* The Pact with the devil is yet to come, despair precedes it:

Now, Faustus, must thou need be damn'd?
And canst thou not be sav'd.
What boots it then to think on God or heaven?
Away with such vain fancies, and despair
Despair in God, and trust in Belzebub.

However, Faustus has not removed all traces of hope

...O, something sounds in my ears,
Abjure this magic, turn to God again
Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again

The hope is ineffectual

To God? He loves thee not;

There is also the self-loving Renaissance man in the despairing Protestant.

The God thou serv'st is thine own appetite.
Wherein is fixed the love of Belzebub
(II, i 1-15)⁹

Faustus' blood congeals as he signs the bond with the devil but his faith is not that strong, the blood flows on just being warmed by fire. What is strong is his despair

Homo fuge! Whither should I fly?
If unto God, he'll throw me down to hell. (II. i. 75-76)¹⁰

Repentance is an impossibility to Faustus the way he is made

My heart's so harden'd, I cannot repent;
Scarce can I name salvation, faith or heaven,
But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears
'Faustus thou art damn'd'
(II, ii, 18-20)¹¹

Faustus does cry for God's mercy although he knows that it is impossible to get it. Lucifer makes the nature of Protestant faith clear to Faustus: He chooses people for His Mercy, who would never sin in the first instance and only those outside his grace would sin and, these are outside his justice too.

Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just. (II, ii, 87)¹²

Until the end, Marlowe dramatizes the ineffectual possibility of divine grace for Faustus.

See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament!
One drop would save my soul, half a drop: Ah, my Christ.
(V, iii, 77-78)¹³

But there is no escape from Faustus' predicament:

If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul.
Yet for Christ's sake whose blood hath ransom'd me,

Impose some end to my incessant pain. . .
O no end is limited to damned souls!(V. iii 100-108)¹⁴

Lily B. Campbell likens Faustus' predicament to that of Francis Spira in Italy who out of conviction professes the Protestant doctrines of justification by faith. He is summoned to papal Legate at Venice for heresy and is forced to recant his utterances. Under the threat of severe punishment, he makes both a private and public recantation. After the first recantation, Spira felt God's presence who tells him not to abjure Him and at the same time, tells him not to recant. Having been convinced of his sin of deserting god, Spira experiences an intense despair in God and would not accept the advice of several learned people to seek divine mercy for he is convinced that his sin has resulted from his not being the elect of god and that despair is his lot. Finally, he dies unable to cope with his despair

For Campbell, *Doctor Faustus* is, basically, neither a tragedy of medieval Christianity nor of the Renaissance but specifically that of the Protestant faith uppermost in the sixteenth century English mind.

We see Faustus confirmed in sin more disastrously by yielding to the counsels of despair urged by Mephistophilis and the Bad Angels than by yielding to the enticements of pleasure. And we see him consequently rejecting the mercy of God promised in the words of the Good Angel and the old Man as he cast off faith and Hope. The Faust Book certainly left open the way for Marlowe's development of the story of *Doctor Faustus* as a case of Conscience. My contention is that the "medieval" elements of Marlowe's play are not medieval but of the Reformation and that they constitute the essential dramatic unity of the play culminating in the speech of Faustus as he faces his doom, so that theme and plot and poetry come together in the diapason of that final grandeur.

4.9 SUMMING UP : *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*: A TRAGEDY OF THE RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

The confluence of the influences of Renaissance and Reformation, the Reformation particularly sought by English Protestantism of the times, immensely enhances and sophisticates the dramatic cosmos of Doctor Faustus. Marlowe's use of Renaissance and Reformation aspirations is neither axiomatic nor ideological but one of perceptive intellectual sensitivity. In the possibilities of Faustus' multivalent conflict, Marlowe makes *Doctor Faustus* acquire a historical character without making the play an interplay of historical forces. Without the Renaissance, and the Reformation, *Doctor Faustus* would have remained a simple morality play. The Renaissance makes it a human tragedy of Christian morality, the tragedy that was missing from the morality dramatic tradition. The Reformation and English Protestantism make the human tragedy of *Doctor Faustus* emanate from a deep sense of religious conviction and conscience and from an individual's right to a particular kind of religious experience which is vehemently and tragically asserted.

4.10 REFERENCES

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2. Nicholas Brooke. "The Moral Tragedy of *Doctor Faustus*" "*Critics on Marlowe*" pp.93-94.
3. Ibid. p.105.
4. Lily B. Campbell. "*Doctor Faustus: A Case of Conscience*" *PMLA* 67.2 1952. pp. 223-24.
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6. Bartlett, Giamatti. "Marlowe: The Arts of Illusion." *Review* pp.532.
7. Ibid. pp. 534.
8. Ibid., pp. 543-44.
9. Christopher Marlowe. *Doctor Faustus*. pp.16-17.
10. Ibid. p. 19.
11. Ibid. p.23.
12. Ibid. p.25.
13. Ibid. p. 50.
14. Ibid. p.51.
15. Lily B. Campbell. "*Doctor Faustus: A case of Conscience.*" *PMLA* 67,2,1952. P.239.

4.11 KEY WORDS

Protestantism: Sixteenth century religious reformation movement consisting of distinct mainstream strains like Lutheran (Martin Luther) Calvinist (John Calvin) and the Anglican. Despite differences, the different strains of Protestantism believed in the concept of justification by grace through faith and reject the primacy of the Pope, emphasize the individual faith and accept the Bible as the prime authority. These mainstream Protestant movements stress the supreme authority of The Bible and the possibilities of salvation only to those who accept Christ and practice infant baptism. The radical groups like the Baptists, and the Quakers practice adult baptism limiting faith to those who practise it and believe in a critical understanding of religious faith.

4.12 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss *Doctor Faustus* as essentially a Renaissance tragedy.
2. Examine *Doctor Faustus* as a study in the duality of Christian faith.
3. Illustrate the ideas in *Doctor Faustus* that present a meeting point for the movements of Renaissance and Reformation.

4.13 ANNOTATIONS

Annotate the following passages with reference to the context.

- a) I'll have them fly them to India for gold Ranasack the ocean for orient pearl and search all corners of the new found world. For pleasant fruits and princely delicacies.
- b) Sometimes like women or unwedded maids, shadowing more beauty in their airy brows than have the white breasts of the Queen of Love.
- c) 'Twas made for man, therefore is man more excellent
- d) Christ cannot save thy soul, for he is just;
- e) I do repent: and yet I do despair

4.14. SUGGESTED READINGS

- 1) Campbell B. Lily. "Doctor Faustus: A case of conscience." PMLA 67,2, 1952. pp. 219-239. Campbell discusses, *Doctor Faustus* as a Protestant play illustrating Protestant doctrines of justification by faith, predestination and election.
- 2) Giannotti, Barlette. "Marlowe: The Arts of Illusion." Yale Review Giannotti, discusses the Renaissance inclination to rhetoric and how *Doctor Faustus* becomes a victim of rhetoric.
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UNIT 5 DRAMATIC POETRY IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction: Fusion of Drama and Poetry
- 5.2 Marlowe's indifference to dramatic art
- 5.3 *Doctor Faustus*: Dramatic rhetoric rather than art
- 5.4 Marlowe's 'Mighty Line'
- 5.5 Blank Verse: Renaissance rhetoric
- 5.6 Blank verse in England
- 5.7 The poetry of *Doctor Faustus*
- 5.8 Marlowe's poetry: an Estimate
- 5.9 Summing Up
- 5.10 References
- 5.11 Key words
- 5.12 Questions
- 5.13 Annotations
- 5.14 Suggested Readings

5.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses the play, *Doctor Faustus* as essentially poetic. The play gained greater recognition as poetry than drama, mainly on account of the use of blank verse in place of the rhymed verse. Marlowe makes blank verse give greater freedom of language and imagination and an ability to present diverse thoughts and feelings to drama.

5.1 INTRODUCTION: FUSION OF DRAMA AND POETRY

Drama and Poetry are two distinct forms but when they are fused in a literary endeavour, the power generated is greater than their individual strength. As we read Doctor Faustus, what we get primarily is a feel of poetry though the impact of the powerful tragic drama is never lost. In fact poetry heightens the effect of tragedy.

in *Doctor Faustus*. Great poetry and drama inescapably arrive at the same thing: a perspective on human condition. The impact on the reader or the viewer, either through the dramatic interplay of ideas or through the rhetoric of poetry, is far-reaching. *Doctor Faustus* touches us deeply. In doing so, the tormenting conflicts and the irrepressible rhetoric of words merge indistinguishably.

5.2 MARLOWE'S INDIFFERENCE TO DRAMATIC ART

In rewriting the Faust legend, Marlowe, possibly, experienced the want of a progressive plot and action that would generate their own drama. Marlowe has in *Faustus* an unprogressive state of mind or conflict to dramatize or to rhetorise. There is a justifiable criticism against *Doctor Faustus* as drama. The play lacks structure, it is poorly organized presenting itself as a jumble of scenes rather than coherent drama. There is reckless fluctuation, critics allege, from high thoughtfulness to sheer frivolity and from magnificent poetry to insipid dialogue. Several critics found nothing in the play other than a few magnificent lines.

5.3 DOCTOR FAUSTUS : DRAMATIC RHETORIC RATHER THAN ART

Nonetheless, *Doctor Faustus* emerges as powerful tragic drama notwithstanding Marlowe's indifference to dramatic craft. Marlowe simply centered dramatic thought and action in the conflictual core of human aspirations at a crucial transitional phase of western history when religion, aesthetics and philosophy were poised to take a new turn. This drama had no premise other than the advent of the self-consciousness of man and the inescapable dialectics which history imposes on the beginning of every new era.

The apparent lack of an achievement in dramatic art is due to Marlowe's preoccupation with the dramatic core of an emerging man-centered world. The kind of human experience *Doctor Faustus* presents does not require the ingenuity of dramatic art so much as a rhetoric that aggressively fashions out the new human character. The rhetoric relies, not so much on dramatic devices but on language, its words, and their melody and poetry.

5.4 MARLOWE'S 'MIGHTY LINE'

In the very choice of Marlovian preoccupation in *Doctor Faustus*, dramatic art takes a backseat, and the rhetoric of human concerns evokes poetry provoking critics to say that *Doctor Faustus* is more poetry than drama. In fact, since the time Marlowe wrote the play, he faced criticism on several counts from critics but no one grudged paying a tribute to Marlowe's poetic excellence in theater. Tributes to Marlowe began with Ben Jonson who was impressed with the poetry in Marlowe's drama and called it the "mighty line". Robert Greene finds a thunder in Marlowe's voice. For Leigh Hunt, "if ever there was a born poet, Marlowe was one" and "Marlowe and Spenser are the first of our poets who perceived the beauty of words."¹

5.5 BLANK VERSE: RENAISSANCE RHETORIC

The poet in Marlowe was obviously born in the Renaissance love of rhetoric. Language was the weapon Renaissance chiefly used to explore human assumptions and

elevate man to a centrality in the cosmos. Barlett Giamatti notes Marlowe's achievement in *Doctor Faustus*.

... Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* celebrates that God-like Power of Language and shows us how words can soar, and tempts us to dizzying heights within our heads. But all the time, Marlowe is in control. He knows too much about the shaping power of words to be a Faustus.²

It is not Faustus alone who wanted to be a magician; Marlowe aimed at nothing short of it. Faustus fails for he chose a black art for magic. Marlowe chooses poetry to achieve the power of magic through the glory and power of language and its words. However, the power to be achieved required a change in the structure of the verse that is to be used. The earliest dramatic form of the Miracle plays use the intricate stanza form but as the dramatic discipline started gaining maturity, the rigidity of the stanza form was gradually given up in favour of the diversification of verse forms and their total simplification to approximate, as nearly as possible, to the spoken speech.

5.6 BLANK VERSE IN ENGLAND

F.P. Wilson details the course of versification in English drama. Speaking of John Skelton's versification in *Magnificence* Wilson says:

Here then is a conscious attempt to introduce variety of verse and to fit the verse to the character. It has been said that Chaucer proceeds from complex metre to simple, and from simple metre to complex. The drama, too, as it moves from the simplicities of *Magnificence* to the complexities of *Hamlet*, proceeds from complex metre to simple. Skelton has abandoned the intricate stanza forms of the Miracle play but he is still experimenting with a great variety of verse. Later in the century, as we enter the great Age, even rhyme tends to disappear and we are left with blank verse and prose.³

The move towards blank verse is desirable for rhetoric. The historical importance of Skelton's *Magnificence*, Wilson says, is that "perhaps for the first time in English drama, a work of conscious art, a laureate devising a long work in conscious observance of rhetorical principle, the blank verse used by Marlowe and Shakespeare owes its freedom to a series of efforts to shed the metrical burden for gaining the rhetorical effect".⁴ The freedom of the form also synchronizes with the declining popularity of the miracle and morality plays. Tucker Brooke & Matthias A Shaaber trace the growth of Blank verse in English up to Marlowe.

Unriming decasyllables had been written before him by several sixteenth century Englishmen: by the Earl of Surrey and Nicholas Grimald, by Sackville and Norton in *Gorboduc*, by Gascoigne in *The Steel Glass* by Turberville, by Peele in *The Arraignement of Paris*, by the youthful Spenser, and probably by Kyd. Various, and yet similar, purposes seem to have prompted these innovators; the desire to approximate the Virgilian hexameter or the *senarius* of Seneca, the desire for a prose-like (Horatian) vehicle of contemporary satire in *Gascoigne*, the effort at Ciceronian eloquence in the play of Peele. They were all exotic ambitions and, except in Peele's few lines, they produced exotic effects. It was Marlowe who changed the sow's ear into the silken purse. When he employed it, blank verse became at once what Shakespeare, Milton and so many others have shown that it can hardly cease to be the most expressive and the grandest of English metres.⁵

Surrey used blank verse, perhaps for the first time to translate part of Virgil's Aeneid into English. Since then, blank verse became the medium of dramatic poetry. If one wanted to write serious kind of drama, it was felt, blank verse was the exalted

medium. Skelton, for example, used blank verse in *Magnificence* for describing virtues like Magnificence and used a light four stressed couplet or a two stressed line for describing vices. Similarly, Sackville and Norton in *Gorboduc* and Thomas Kyd in *The Spanish Tragedy* used blank verse for the purposes of subtle characterization.

Basically, the term blank verse is used for an unrimed iambic pentameter. An iamb is a metrical foot of two syllables, the first unaccented and the other accented, the first short and the other long as, for example, in to strive or to seek. A pentameter contains five metrical feet or measures. The pentameter is a ten syllable line with five stresses falling on the even syllables. A typical iambic pentameter reads like the following line:

In courts of kings, where the state is overturned. The foot or a measure in English prosody contains two or three syllables, with only one of them bearing stress. While in the iambic, the unaccented is followed by an accented syllable, in the other metrical unit, trochee, the accented syllable is followed by an unaccented syllable. Both the iambic and trochee differ from a spondee which is a double stressed foot. In addition, there is a pyrrhic foot which is totally unstressed. The variation of trochee, iambic and spondee within the decasyllabic line gives, especially in Marlowe, utmost melody. When it lacked this variation, as in Sackville and Norton or as in Thomas Kyd, blank verse produced monotony. Their attempt was to produce an English equivalent to the twelve syllable iambic trimeter used by the Athenian dramatists. The particular form suited Greek language in terms of its approximation to their every day speech. But the rather slow moving English language, as compared to Greek, required variation. Thus the five foot ten - syllable iambic pentameter with continual variations of the iambic with trochee, spondee and pyrrhic came to characterize the resurgent English dramatic verse.

5.7 THE POETRY OF DOCTOR FAUSTUS

This variation for achieving a variety of rhythms was characteristic of Marlowe's dramatic verse. *Doctor Faustus* begins with the Chorus saying:

Not marching in the fields of Thrasymene
Where Mars did mate the warlike Carthagens.

the first line begins with a trochee but has a pyrrhic ending with the last syllable being unstressed. For the straightforward narration of the lines, there is a regular beat trying to give the impression of dignified order where an effect is warranted.

Nor in the pomp of proud audacious deeds (chorus line 5)

Having commenced be a divine in show. (I, i, 3)

The iambic pentameter is falling on a trochee for a beginning and also for marking pauses.

Pause is an important element in blank verse providing a variety of rhythm. Surrey and others have made the pause occur at the end of a line making the sense rather coextensive with the line. Marlowe dispensed with the line as a unit of thought, and made the sense run on from one line to the next making in the process, the paragraph rather than single lines as units of ideas. This is a strategy of what is called run-on lines, a strategy typically Marlovian.

Learned Faustus,
To find the secrets of astronomy,

Graven in the book of Jove's high firmament,
Did mount him up to scale Olympus's top,
Where sitting in a chariot burning bright,
Drawn by the strength of yoked dragon's necks Chorus.⁶ (III, 1-6)

Or

As I was sometime solitary set
Within my closet, sundry thoughts arose
About the honour of mine ancestors,
How they had won by prowess such exploits,
Got such riches, subdu'd so many kingdoms,
As we that do succeed or they that shall
Hereafter possess our throne, shall
(I fear me) ne'er attain to that degree
Of high renown and great authority
Amongst which kings is Alexander the Great,
Chief spectacle of the world's pre-eminence,
The bright shining of whose glorious acts
Lightens the world with his reflecting beams,
As when I hear but motion made of him
It grieves my soul I never saw the man.⁷ (III, iii 18-35)

In the older rhymed verse, the tendency was for the couplet which stood by itself. The pause in the couplet was invariably at the end of the line after the fourth syllable and the iambic beat was never varied. Marlowe varies the whole pattern of the regulated metrical verse. For Marlowe, whatever was the metrical pattern, it had to follow the overflowing idea and there is hardly any splitting of the idea for metrical regularity.

Though the run-on lines give the impression of formlessness at times, there are single lines that make a very compact and forceful expression of ideas. In fact, Marlowe's ideational and metrical mastery within a single line is remarkably exceptional. *Doctor Faustus* abounds in several memorable lines.

Yet art thou still but Faustus, and a man⁸ (I, i. 23)
Homo. fuge, whither should I fly?⁹ (II, i, 75)
What art thou, Faustus but a man condemned to die?¹⁰ (IV, iv 37)
Damn'd art thou, Faustus, damn'd; despair and die?¹¹ (V, i, 48)
I do repent; and yet I do despair¹² (II, ii. 63)
Her lips suck forth my soul: see where it flies!¹³ (V, ii, 95)
See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament¹⁴ (V, iii, 78)

The sheer compressive force and summative brilliance of the ideas is strikingly clear in these lines. Faustus' tragic impatience with human limitations comes out in a few words of the first line. Similarly, the next three lines, individually present the Protestant doctrine of predestination and Faustus, not being the elect of God is condemned to despair. "I do repent and I do despair." Marlowe sums up the conflicting notions of Catholics and Protestants about the possibility of eternal grace and the impossibility of such grace to the sinner. Similarly the nature of the self-willed damnation of Faustus is presented in the line on Helen. The supreme Christian virtue comes out with utmost devotion in the line, See see.

Brevity, and consummate lyricism for heightening mental and emotional states mark several passages which continue to be memorable even after centuries.

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,
And burnt the topless towers of Hium?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss.¹⁵ (V, ii, 90-94)

In relatively few words, Marlowe has written, perhaps, the most magnificent apostrophe to Helen. Marlowe's greatness is that he could present with great ease the most exquisitely romantic and also versify brilliantly the most pathetic and the anguishing. Faustus' last soliloquy is deeply touching for its rhythmic expression of the most tormenting human agonies.

Stand Still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
 That time may cease, and midnight never come,
 Fair nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
 Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
 A year, a month, a week a natural day,
 That Faustus may repent and save his soul! (V, iii, 66-71)

Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
 A hundred thousand and at last be sav'd!
 O, no end is limited to damned souls!
 Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul?
 Or why is this immortal that thou hast?¹⁶ (V, iii, 102-107)

In barely fifty four lines in the last soliloquy, Marlowe presents Faustus' arrival as a visionary after having gone through, in the course of the play, ambition, pride, insolence, impulse, passion and sheer frivolity besides the nagging doubts about divine mercy and wrath. In the last few minutes of his life, as charted in the soliloquy, Faustus sets forth the remorseless logic of time, immense divine mercy which nonetheless, is capable of ruthless wrath, and the futility of knowledge, and ambition and of the human life itself. A vehement protest against the denial of human worth is ironically presented through despair in human condition. Simple words like "live," "see", "look", "ever", and "perpetually" are loaded with immense philosophical significance.

The primary focus on the idea rather than on the metrical line, as could be abundantly seen in the last soliloquy, is Marlowe's redefinition of the poetic by the dramatic. He is credited for having begun a sentence period as against a line period for poetry. The fusion of drama and poetry, or specifically of the dramatic conflict and poetic rhapsody, perhaps, could never be as harmonious as in *Doctor Faustus*.

Marlowe's dramatic poetry, however, is not faultless. He is criticized for not maintaining poetic rhapsody for sustained effect. He is also criticized for alternating magnificent lines with purely pedestrian ones and splendid monologues with laboured verses. There is also an allegation that free movement of the verse is impeded by coloured epithets and 'sonorous phrases'.

Though not exactly careless artistically, Marlowe, as Harry Levin says, "is always himself" whereas Shakespeare is everybody. Further, the focus in the play had to be on Faustus, that too on the Marlovain Faustus. Poetry came rather intermittently waiting both for ideas and their conflicts to intensify and for Marlowe's imagination to strike. Yet at times, there is a mismatch of content and poetry as could be seen in Faustus' apostrophe to Helen. Helen, after all, as Faustus knows, is no Helen but a devil in disguise. The distraction of Faustus from his despair, is too little cause for the magnificent poetry of the apostrophe.

5.8 MARLOWE'S POETRY: AN ESTIMATE

The nature of Marlowe's achievement lies primarily in the nature of dramatic or poetic endeavours in the play. Marlowe was basically searching for poetry and drama in what for him is to be an intensely human situation rather than attempting a work of art. Swinburne was nearer the truth in his praise of Marlowe:

He is the greatest discoverer, the most daring and inspired pioneer, in all poetic literature. The place and value of Christopher Marlowe as a leader among the poets would be almost impossible for historical criticism to overestimate.¹⁷

T.S. Eliot was far more thorough in his praise of Marlowe:

The less questionable judgement is that Marlowe exercised a strong influence over later drama, though not himself as great a dramatist as Kyd: that he introduced several new tones into blank verse and commenced the dissociative process which drew it further and farther away from the rhythms of rhymed verse; and that when Shakespeare borrowed from him, which was pretty often at the beginning, Shakespeare made something inferior or something different.

..... Marlowe's rhetoric is not, or not characteristically, Shakespeare's rhetoric; Shakespeare's is more exactly a vice of style, a tortured perverse ingenuity of images which dissipates instead of concentrating the imagination, and which may be due in part to influences by which Marlowe was untouched. Next, we find that Marlowe's vice is one which he was gradually attenuating, and even, what is more miraculous, turning into virtue. And we find that this poet of torrential imagination recognized many of his best bits (and those of one or two others), saved them, and reproduced them more than once, almost invariably improving them in the process. ... Contrary to usual opinion Marlowe was a deliberate and conscious workman.¹⁸

Harry Levin looks at Shakespeare's debt to Marlowe:

Shakespeare seems to have marked the passing of Marlowe through his own *Richard III* where he proved himself to be past master of the Marlovian attitudes and tonalities, even while he was ranging on toward richer complexities and subtler nuances of human relationships. To be sure, *Richard II* would be unthinkable without the example of *Edward II* or *The Merchant of Venice* without *The Jew of Malta*. Speaking more broadly *Hamlet* owes a certain amount to the precedent of *Doctor Faustus*, and *Coriolanus* to *Tamburlaine*.¹⁹

5.9 SUMMING UP

There stands Christopher Marlowe: a pioneering explorer of innovative poetry in drama. The poetry that is instantly dramatic and belongs essentially to the human mind and soul presenting their passionate ecstasies and tormenting conflicts and agonies. If Marlowe was not a great dramatic poet like Shakespeare, he nonetheless, is great in formulating the essentials of dramatic poetry in which Shakespeare and others who followed him, found a model for their dramatic endeavours. If the essentials of dramatic poetry Marlowe discovered and formulated were not shaped into an exquisite dramatic art of poetry, it was because, as Harry Levin says, Marlowe chose to be himself and left it to others to see what he could offer them.

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5.11 KEY WORDS

1. Soliloquy: Coined from Greek solus (alone) and loqui (to speak). Speaking one's thoughts aloud with none to hear, or regardless of the presence of hearers. It is a declamation in this manner by the characters. Soliloquies are popular in Marlowe's and Shakespeare's plays.

5.12 QUESTIONS

1. Examine Marlowe's use of blank verse in *Doctor Faustus*.
2. Give a critical appreciation of *Doctor Faustus* as dramatic poetry.
3. Discuss Marlowe's contribution to the growth of dramatic poetry in English.

5.13 ANNOTATIONS

Annotate the following passages with reference to the context.

- (a) Her lips suck forth my soul: see, where it flies!
- (b) The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.
- (c) Mountains and hills, come, and fall on me,
And hide from the heavy wrath of God!
- (d) Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd!

5.14 SUGGESTED READINGS

T.S. Eliot, *Christopher Marlowe: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Clifford Leech ed. Prentice Hall, New Jersey 1964. Eliot estimates the quality of Marlovian Verse, compares it with that of Shakespeare and also Marlowe's contribution towards the evolution of dramatic poetry in England.

UNIT 6 THE PERFORMANCE OF *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction: *Doctor Faustus* and the Elizabethan Stage
- 6.2 Textual diversity of *Doctor Faustus*
- 6.3 Twentieth century productions of *Doctor Faustus*
- 6.4 William Poel and Nugent Monk
- 6.5 Post Second World War Productions
- 6.6 Nevill Coghill
- 6.7 Michael Benthall
- 6.8 John Barton
- 6.9 Christopher Fettes
- 6.10 Production of Specific scenes in *Doctor Faustus*
- 6.11 Problems of producing *Doctor Faustus*
- 6.12 American productions of *Doctor Faustus*
- 6.13 *Doctor Faustus* and the Postmodern Theatre
- 6.14 Jerzy Grotowski
- 6.15 Summing Up
- 6.16 References
- 6.17 Keywords
- 6.18 Questions
- 6.19 Suggested Readings

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit looks at *Doctor Faustus* as theatre. Very few plays present such diverse elements that lend themselves to such diverse interpretations as *Doctor Faustus* does. We can see the sensitive spiritual drama and also the spectacular action with exhilarating audio-visual effects. There is a high tragedy and also a grotesque comedy. It is viewed as essentially a morality play, and also a preeminently

Renaissance and Reformation play. It is also viewed as a psychological play and magical extravaganza. *The character of Doctor Faustus itself is subject to varied focus—a thoughtful scholar, a devout Christian, magical trickster and a seeker after egoistic trifles or after simple sensuous pleasures.* The theater history of *Doctor Faustus* illustrates the diversity of focus in staging the play.

6.1 INTRODUCTION: *DOCTOR FAUSTUS* AND THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE

Doctor Faustus was primarily written as a playscript for the Elizabethan audiences. The standardization of the play as text entailed several attempts, following the initial production. The first recorded performance of the play was on September 30, 1594 at Rose Theater by the Admiral's men with Edward Alleyn playing the lead role of Faustus. There are possibilities, William Tyndeman notes, that the piece was sold to the Earl of Pembroke's Men, one of the many professional acting companies of London. It might have also been acted by them at the Court. However, the script passed into the hands of Lord Admiral's Men, possibly through purchase by Lord Howard of Eppingham. It was also staged at the Theatre in Shoreditch any time between 1588 and 1593, either by Pembroke's Men or by Lord Admiral's Men. The morality framework and the intensely Christian theme notwithstanding, in writing *Doctor Faustus*, Marlowe had in mind the predominant purpose of entertaining the Elizabethan audiences who would care more for a spectacle than for a moral story. William Tyndeman records an early impression of the play as noted in Sir John Melton's *Astrologaster of the Figure Caster* of 1620.

shagge-hayr'd Devils runne roaring over the stage with Squibs in their mouthes, while drummers make thunder in the tyring-house, and the twelve-penny Hirelings (i.e. stage-hands) make artificial Lighrening in their Heavens.¹

The state of the popular Elizabethan mind was such, Tyndeman notes that there was even a rumour among the credulous that the actual demons participated in the stage action. Edward Allyn, who also played Tamburlaine and the Jew of Malta, evoked instant identification from the audience with his "barnstorming" acting. Obviously, Faustus was lost in Allyn and it was Allyn who mattered to everyone. His popularity was such that he had to be recalled from his retirement on account of Queen Elizabeth's admiration for him. Thomas Heywood found him to be "peerless" and Thomas Nashe found him making good any shortcoming in the text. However, in the succeeding years, his acting was condemned as unreal though he was recognized for his essential theatrical hold on the audience. The essential intellectuality of the play might not have been totally lost on the Elizabethan audience, though they were largely attuned to the popular taste for spectacle and high rhetoric. The Elizabethan stage conventions and practices, largely developed in terms of the audience's proclivities. Even before the Elizabethan stage conventions could render the play strikingly physical, Marlowe himself initiates a visual thrust in the making of Faustus' character. Phoebe S. Spinard observes:

..... Faustus is not a visionary but a visualizer. Most of his accomplishments are described in terms of seeing, whether in reading books or in viewing the geography of the earth and sky from Mephostophilis' dragon drawn chariot. His plans, too, are focused visually on concrete objects: the projects he will accomplish with his magical powers, the gifts he will obtain from the spirits even his possible refuges from the devils in his final soliloquy.²

Further, Spinard observes, Faustus calls for a visual response from the audience as when the devil in Helen's disguise is presented to him and when he finds Christ's blood streaming in the firmament. On both the occasions, Marlowe seeks to put the

audience on a visual track through Faustus' words. Faustus "cannot grasp what he cannot see" and uses "outward shows as a substitute for thought." *Marlowe's Elizabethan Faustus is definitely a correlative effort for the Elizabethan audience's proclivities. Marlowe was writing theatre as much as drama in Doctor Faustus.*

However the tendency to be theatrical, is partly correlated with the dramatic and rhetorical strain in *Doctor Faustus*, and, at times, it is simply let loose as in the middle sections of the play. The fact is that the dramatic word and its rhetorical force and the visual spectacle stand on the same footing in Marlowe's play. The same is true of the Elizabethan theatre in general. The visual dominates the verbal but the rhetorical dramatic word is the organizing principle. This is the Renaissance element characterizing the Elizabethan drama. Writing of themes and conventions of Elizabethan tragedy, M. C. Bradbrook asserts that the "essential structure of Elizabethan drama lies not in the narrative or the characters but in words". Through "word play" and "word patterns", the Elizabethans build their drama on words. Faustus with all his human learning, wanted to be divine in show and asks Mephistophilis "what means this show" for all that he presents. For Russell, Marlowe's play is "visual as well as intellectual, physical and metaphysical, responsible and popular". Russell writes:

For Marlowe both words and actions are important. He was sometimes content with action and no words as crucial moments of his drama. Helen who ravishes Faustus and "sucks forth" his soul only passes over the stage in silence Marlowe was not fond of the rhetorical elaboration of Seneca, Kyd or early Shakespeare Marlowe did not pursue comparisons so nimbly, and seldom developed an intricate argument, he preferred to build to progress, retaining each element within the final large impression.³

He further writes:

Reliance on visual effect is perhaps most impressive in relation to individual characterisation, for besides maintaining a typically Renaissance complication of meaning and situation, a show implied a kind of density in character portrayal. It was not accidentally that Alleyn was framed for majestic parts The actor of Tamburlaine, Faustus and Barbaras had to be able to hold the center of large stage pictures and make a clear physical statement; nervous subtleties or minute physical realism were required for neither words nor gestures.⁴

Visual explicitness underwritten by a clear thematic perspective was required of *Doctor Faustus* or of a typical Marlovian play on the stage. Perhaps, the resources of Elizabethan theatrical organization or abilities were inadequate for Marlowe's theatre. The Victorians who revived interest in Marlowe who was almost forgotten for nearly 200 years after the closure of theatres in London in the middle of the seventeenth century, cared more for Marlowe's poetry than for his drama or theatre.

6.2 TEXTUAL DIVERSITY OF *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

In staging *Doctor Faustus*, the initial problem is the kind of Faustus to be chosen. The textual diversity and even Marlowe's authorship of certain scenes has never been convincingly settled. The play exists in two texts belonging to 1604 and 1616 which have come to be known as A and B texts. Tydeman presents the problem as to which of the texts is to be considered more authentic:

..... it is now clear that the A text omits or corrupts much of what was originally presented on stage, while the B although more faithful to the

The A Text was a shorter one meant mainly for the touring companies with a greater focus on the tragic scenes than the comic ones. The B Text includes, in detail, the comic scenes of the middle section of the play that were briefly sketched in the first one. Many critics and producers have made a rather eclectic use of both the texts using what suited their point of view for the purpose of textual edition and production.

6.3 TWENTIETH CENTURY PRODUCTIONS OF *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

The upsurge of interest in Marlowe in the twentieth century both for the dramatic insights and for the theatrical possibilities of his plays raises the question whether Marlowe does not justifiably belong more to the twentieth century for his critical temper and theatrical exploration.

The twentieth century revival of interest in *Doctor Faustus* mainly centers on the play as a neglected classic. The neglect of the play was on account of the constrictive morality framework and also because of too many comic scenes considered unMarlovian. Further, Marlowe was overshadowed by Shakespeare whose dominance led to a view that other than Shakespeare, his contemporaries are not stage worthy. Theatre everywhere has come to be so attuned to Shakespeare that for staging Marlowe, one may have to unlearn or forget Shakespeare. John Russell Brown writes:

Marlowe wrote his plays before Shakespeare's masterpiece had been conceived; but we read him afterwards and in his successor's light ... We stage Marlowe in a theatre accustomed to Shakespeare, with actors, directors and designers who have all had experience of his plays: talents have been developed and techniques evolved for Shakespeare's dialogues in all revolutionary subtlety, for Shakespeare's kind of dramatic action and characterisation.... Marlowe has no Lear or Hamlet or Prospero whose passage through a play involves a deepening or chastening of the character's thought and feeling. His plays are more centered on their heroes than most of Shakespeare's as far as plot and theatrical focus are concerned; but the audience, even of Faustus, is not fully involved with the progress of the hero's consciousness.⁶

6.4 WILLIAM POEL & NUGENT MONK

The pioneering spirit behind the revival of *Doctor Faustus* in the 20th century was William Poel who passionately advocated a return to Elizabethan style auditoria and production methods for staging Marlowe. Poel presented the play at St. George's Hall in London first in July 1896 and then in 1904. Poel's attempt was to create a stage which would approximate, in as many details as possible, the Fortune Playhouse of 1600. Poel mainly relied on the A text of 1604 focusing on Faustus as a restless scholar after knowledge. For Poel, the play is essentially a tragedy and he cut down many comic scenes that would have reduced the tragic grandeur of the play. Faustus was played by a seventeen year old D.L. Mannering, rather a little unassertively and adolescently. The stage divided by the front curtain and a principal curtain-presented the comic scenes near the front curtain and the serious scenes near the main curtain. Though there is considerable focus on the visual element in costuming and stage

effects, Poel's was a simpler production compared to the highly scenic Shakespeare revivals. Bernard Shaw praised Poel's production for his attempts to achieve almost an impossible stage verisimilitude and found Mannering's acting sober and conscientious. However, what began as a modern revival of *Doctor Faustus* did not go beyond Poel. Marlowe did not appeal to commercial playhouses. The next significant production of *Faustus* was for the first Canterbury festival in August 1929 by Nugent Monk as a part of the double bill with *Everyman*. The coupling indicated the approach to *Faustus*. Where Poel tried to recreate an Elizabethan ambience for *Faustus*, Monk's production made it a medieval piece along with *Everyman*, obliterating the essential irony of the play to render it a Christian discourse on the wages of sin.

6.5 POST SECOND WORLD WAR PRODUCTIONS

Doctor Faustus did not receive any significant attention after the Canterbury Festival until the end of the Second World War. Three productions of *Doctor Faustus* in the decade following the war are significant: the first, the Old Vic Company's production at the Liverpool Playhouse in May 1944, Walter Hud's production of *Doctor Faustus* using the 'B' text for the first time with minimum cuts, at the Shakespeare Memorial theatre, Stratford-Upon-Avon, with Robert Harris as Faustus and Hugh Griffith as Mephostophilis and the revival of Old Vic production at New Theatre in October 1948 by John Burrell, with Sir Cedric Hardwick as Faustus and Robert Eddison as Mephostophilis. Significant in these productions was the fact that Mephostophilis played by a student Andreas Tenber dominated Faustus.

6.6 NEVILL COGHILL

One of the very important productions of *Doctor Faustus* during the century was Nevill Coghill's for the Oxford University Dramatic Society in 1957. Coghill revived the play in 1966 with Richard Burton as Faustus and Elizabeth Taylor as Helen. These two repeated the same roles in the later film version of the play. Coghill's focus was on the paradoxes in Faustus' character. Burton's performance was found to be unromantic and disappointing, as in the productions of the forties by a student, Andreas Teuber. Burton's performance came in for a lot of adverse comment. William Tydeman writes:

... Richard Burton in Nevill Coghill's 1966 production was guilty of overemphasising a neurotic vulnerability. Deliberately eschewing the anticipated romantic interpretation, Burton portrayed the Doctor as an unprepossessing, rather pathetic pedant employing diabolic powers to obtain satisfactions, his physical inadequacies and chosen vocation denied him: ... this presentation of a sedentary bespectacled, provincial dominie, celebrating a windfall of premium bonds with a jaunt round the tourist traps of Elizabethan Europe (Sunday Telegraph, 20 February, 1966) though an enterprising reading, not only reduced Faustus' stature and ruled out any laudable aspect to his ambitions, but also introduced a false incongruity into the play, with exalted sentiments and thrilling language emanating from a totally unheroic figure. The encounter with Helen of Troy became ridiculous and the final shattering soliloquy lacked the full sense of human waste.⁷

6.7 MICHAEL BENTHALL

The Old Vic Company restaged the play in August 1961 at the Assembly Hall, Edinburgh under the direction of Michael Benthall. Paul Dineman played Faustus,

Micheal Goodliffe played Mephostophilis and Robert Eddisson played Lucifer. Benthall made an eclectic use of the A & B texts cutting down much what he thought was the superfluous comedy and also some of the dialogues that show Faustus too assertive in defying damnation. Dineman was "attractive and convivial" but was found unable to bring to focus the ambition which was the undoing of Faustus so much so that his damnation appeared theatrically unconvincing. Benthall's production received encomiums for the visual spectacle of the middle scenes. William Tydeman sums up his own and other responses to the theatrical spectacle:

In 1961 at the Assembly Hall, Edinburgh, Michael Benthall was able to achieve more or less this effect, assisting audiences to participate in the spectacle rather than merely to lose themselves in an illusion. By appearing on a bright lit platform with spectators to three sides of them and by using the gangways of the hall for exits and entries, the players made immediate contact with their patrons, while the director allowed his telling visual effects to impinge on the auditorium itself, notably with the eruption of the emperor's court and Pope's guests on to the dark platform stage which "suddenly (sprang) into blazing colour" (Philip Hope Wallace, *Guardian* 23, August). Benthall's accent on 'multiple comings and goings (Punch) was able to invest the play with the trappings of a 'brilliant pageant' (Tatler) whose excitements the *Sunday Telegraph* for 17 September vividly conveyed: 'smoke sulphur and incense about one;....'⁸

6.8 JOHN BARTON

The performance that evoked a lot of critical comment during the seventies was the one directed by John Barton at Edinburgh's Lyceum Theatre in August 1974. Relying mainly on the A text and further subjecting it to several cuts, Barton interpolated extracts from the original Faust legend translated into English. He avoided ambiguity as far as Faustus's tragic predicament and comic proclivities are concerned. The interpolations from the Faustus legend provided a framework of comment with the devils delivering much of the narrative including the choruses. Barton's aim was to give a sort of Brechtian detachment to the audience to enable them to comment on the play. He used puppets for the angles to show the illusory nature of Faustus' world. Ian McKellen who played Faustus evokes two types of responses. On the one hand, there is the picture of Faustus displaying a compulsive neurosis. Milton Shulman writes for the *Evening Standard*, 6 September 1974:

..... the good doctor isn't leaping about for a precious book, nudging the servants of Lucifer for some reaction to his activities, gleefully hugging himself at his own cleverness or thrashing about in fearful agony as he prepares to meet his doom. A little more repose might make a more convincing philosophical Faustus.⁹

Michael Billington writes for *The Guardian*:

The strength of Ian McKellen's performance is that it supplies an internal dialectic..... he is a bushy haired peasant scholar whose arching catlike body is full of yearning lusts; on the other hand, he is a tormented overreacher suddenly prey to fits of rational sadness.¹⁰

Barton's aim is to avoid textual ambiguity and to build up a flux of psychological states in Faustus and bring him nearer to the quality of modern life.

6.9 CHRISTOPHER FETTES

The focus in the eighties production of Faustus, especially in the one at Lyric Studio Hammersmith in February 1980 and later at Fortune Theatre in March 1980, was on

the sensuous rather than the intellectual Faustus. Under the direction of Christopher Fettes, the youthful John Aubrey played Faustus in the all male cast. The sensuous reverberations of Aubrey's acting did not escape homosexual overtones.

6.10 PRODUCTION OF SPECIFIC SCENES IN *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

In all productions of *Faustus* beginning with Poel's at the turn of the century, producing the play is one attempt and the treatment of specific scenes for the purpose of visual spectacle is altogether another thing. The presentation of the devils posed a problem in that they had to resemble the devils of the popular imagination. Poel's devils resembled the devils of the popular paintings of the fifteenth century and Mephistophilis resembled a demon "from the roof of Notre Dame". Benthall presents the devils in colour and style so as to make them unrepulsive as they were supposed to be to Faustus. Barton clothed them as blackrobed monks operating the puppets. For him the devils had no reality other than as figments of Faustus' imagination.

The presentation of the Seven Deadly Sins posed another problem. Bernard Shaw found them in Poel's presentation so uncharacteristically attractive that it was not only Faustus who was delighted but the audience also applauded the Sins on their appearance. Nevill Coghill created a "beautiful mosque" which, however carried an unmistakable sense of menace and violence behind their surface elegance. Barton presents them as puppets making clear that whatever attraction they possess is purely superficial. Both Coghill and Barton tried to correlate the visual aspect of the show with the tragic dilemma of Faustus.

The presentation of Helen was another subtle theatrical problem for the productions of *Faustus*. Many productions tended to present Helen purely in aesthetic terms keeping in view Faustus' apostrophe to her. The play required an awareness of the demonic nature of Helen on the part of the audience. However, the audiences at several productions, Tydeman notes, were persuaded to sit through the middle sections simply to witness Helen and her mythical beauty. Clifford Williams presents Helen in the nude in a production at Shakespeare's Memorial Theatre in 1968. The point of nudity was her desirability for Faustus but it is extremely doubtful whether it strengthened the cause of her hellenic beauty and the attendant desirability either for Faustus or to the audience. It was John Barton, William Tydeman notes, who presented Helen aptly: "with a blonde wig, a mask and a wisp of chiffon carried about by Faustus, lovingly caressed, and finally taken to bed with him. The loss of living, breathing sexuality was great, yet the possible disappointment attendant on discovering Helen to be less perfect than one's image was dispelled, while Faustus's own degradation in the search for physical satisfaction could hardly have been more tellingly conveyed."¹¹

Helen was nothing more than a blonde wig, a mask and a wisp of chiffon carried about by Faustus, lovingly caressed, and finally taken to bed with him. The loss of living, breathing sexuality was great, yet the possible disappointment attendant on discovering Helen to be less perfect than one's image was dispelled, while Faustus's own degradation in the search for physical satisfaction could hardly have been more tellingly conveyed.¹¹

Faustus' apostrophe to Helen marks the zenith of an aesthetic and sensuous transcendence while the same words have to carry the burden of the religious degradation of courting the devil in the disguise of Helen. Obviously, the presentation of Helen is bound to be a very difficult theatrical feat that should present simultaneously an apotheosis and mockery.

6.11 PROBLEMS OF PRODUCING *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

In a way, the problem of presenting Helen is characteristic of the difficulties inherent in producing *Doctor Faustus*. Mutually antagonistic elements have to be delicately poised without allowing one strain to undercut the other – the Christian versus the

Renaissance or the medieval versus the modern. It was a challenge to modern theatre, specifically for the Modern British theatre to stage the ambivalence constituting Faustus' tragedy – the ambivalence extending to the dilemma as to whether Faustus is to be only tragic or comic as well. William Tydeman sums up the endeavour of Modern British theatre to stage *Doctor Faustus*:

Productions of the play have come far since *The Times* said of Poel's 1896 version, that *Doctor Faustus* seems scarcely fitted for representation on the modern stage. Few would take so gloomy a view today. Even if they have rarely been content to take the text on trust, directors can scarcely be blamed for their vigorous wielding of the scissors or the felt pen. Nor must the problems of creating a coherent Faustus, of making the notions of Hell and damnation meaningful to a modern audience, of spanning the presumed gulf between the peaks be minimised. A conflation of the best features of all productions reviewed here – Benthall spectacle, Williams consistent concept of complex Faustus, Barton's puppetry, Fette's economy (and his Mephistophilis) might prove rewarding, but they illustrate the obvious truth that no single production of *Doctor Faustus* in recent times can be truly satisfactory. Yet the play has inspired some exciting theatrical moments, and much of its power is still untapped, particularly its contemporary relevance.¹²

6.12 AMERICAN PRODUCTIONS OF *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Outside England, the productions of *Doctor Faustus* are far fewer and less convincing too. Two notable productions were in America. One was by Oscar Welles, a Broadway production for the Federal theatre project at Maxine Eloit theater in 1937. This was a popular production for the American stage in the thirties with more than a hundred performances, but the staging had little to recommend other than what the *New York Herald Tribune* for January 9, 1937 had to report.

The action takes place against a black background and the players are brilliantly spotlighted against it. Isolated from their surroundings and appearing for most of the time on the stage apron that extends far beyond the proscenium, the effectively costumed actors of Smoke screens..... many shrewd eclectic contraptions and all the devices of modern stage art but the final effect is of a true and simple translation of the Elizabethan stage into contemporary theatrical terms.¹³

Another notable American production was by The Phoenix theatre under the directions by Word Baker in 1964 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Marlowe. It was a poor tribute to Marlowe on the anniversary. *Time* for October 16, 1964 reports:

Mounting a lavish display of props, costumes, and lighting effects, the phoenix production camouflages the metaphysical tragedy and smothers the tensions in Marlowe's imagination..... Marlowe's mighty line is reduced to a polysyllabic mouthwash.¹⁴

6.13 *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*: THE POSTMODERN THEATRE

Modern theatre, both in England and America, attached to theatrical naturalism and audience reception could not have done justice to the intellectually elusive Christopher Marlowe. It is interesting to see how *Doctor Faustus* lends itself to the critically explorative postmodern experimental theatre that began in America and on the continent in the nineteen sixties. The postmodern experimental theatre mainly opposed the logocentric drama that has come to characterize the western theatre since

Aristotle. The logos or the text is not simply the dramatic text but the cultural logos as well, promoting the dominant values of the time through mimesis and representation. Theatre, over the centuries in the experimentalists' view, has not only made theatrical element like plot, character and *mise en scene*, subserve the dominant cultural logos but also came to thwart the free flow of human ideas and feelings that the theatre originally aimed at presenting. The playwright as the author of the dramatic and cultural logos appropriated the whole domain of theatrical art thereby denying theatre its legitimate function of generating or regenerating human reality on the stage. The experimentalists attempted to restore to theatre a certain autonomy of creative art independent of the playwright or at least, concomitant to his act of dramatic creation. In the early part of the twentieth century, Antonin Artaud called for a triumph of pure *Mise en Scene* as against the tyranny of the text. The *Mise-en-scene* is capable of organising the theatrical text, after the play text is introduced, through actors, stage, objective, décor, lighting, costumes, movement, sound etc. Artaud's was truly a revolution in theatre which received support from the new formulations in critical theory like Poststructuralism and Deconstruction. The poststructuralists disbelieved in the role of the subject author as the repository of artistic impulses and believed that if the subject or the author were to claim an existence in a work of art, it is in a state of continual dispersal. Similarly, the erstwhile stable relationship between the representer and the represented or the signifier and the signified is a continually fluctuating one. The theory of Deconstruction as formulated by Jacques Derrida believed in the systematic play of differences in language causing a never-ending activity and productivity. Artaud's endeavour to disrupt the logocentric mediation of theatre through the primacy of *mise en scene* appealed to Derrida immensely. The experimentalists in theatre, persuaded by the formulations of the poststructuralists and Derridean Deconstructionists were looking forward to multiple readings of the dramatic texts, through *mise en scene*.

6.14 GROTOWSKI'S *DOCTOR FAUSTUS*

Marlowe's intellectual ambiguity and the textual diversity of Doctor Faustus provided an ideal ground for theatre experimentalists to indulge their critical imagination. Jerzy Grotowski's production of Doctor Faustus at his theatre laboratory in Opole, Poland in 1963 is an attempt to make the play intelligible to the contemporary postmodern temper and sensibility.

Drawing from several quartos of *Doctor Faustus*, Grotowski begins his production with scene Three of Act Five where Faustus is arguing with his scholars. Rearranged in twenty two scenes, Grotowski turns Marlowe's ambivalent defiance of the established religion into a postmodern cognitive mapping of a dispersed religion. He writes:

This is a play based on a religious theme. God and the Devil intrigue with the protagonists – that is why the play is set in a monastery. There is a dialectic between mockery and apotheosis. Faustus is a saint and his saintliness shows itself as an absolute desire for pure truth. If the saint is to become one with his sainthood, he must rebel against God - Creator of the world, because the laws of the world are traps contradicting morality and truth ... Whatever we do good or bad – we are damned. The saint is not able to accept as his model this God who ambushes man ... But what must the saint care for? His soul, of course his own self-consciousness..... In fact, Faustus is not only a saint but a martyr – even more so than the Christian saints and martyrs because he expects no reward. On the contrary, he knows that his due will be eternal damnation.....The dialectic of mockery and apotheosis consists then of a conflict between lay sainthood and religious sainthood.....¹⁵

The dialectic between apotheosis and mockery divests the soliloquies of their rhetoric and, in its place the trained Grotowskian actor vocalises and gesturalizes the postmodern resolution of an irresolute Elizabethan dilemma. Grotowski describes how theatre can present Faustus independent of Marlowe, his dramatic text and its constrictive dilemmas and conflicts.

The sky then resonates with the word and in all the corners of the room the hidden actors, reciting like monks, chant prayers like Ave Maria and the Pater Noster. Midnight sounds, Faustus' ecstasy is transformed into his passion. The moment has come when the saint...is ready for his martyrdom: eternal damnation. He is in rapture, his body is shaken by spasms. The ecstatic failure of his voice becomes at the moment of his passion a series of inarticulate cries – the piercing, pitiable shrieks of an animal caught in a trap. His body shudders and all is silence.¹⁶

6.15 SUMMING UP

Grotowski's rather deconstructive approach is one attitude of contemporary critical theory towards theatre performance. The postmodern rendering of the play by Grotowski reflects the new historicist approach dialectically opposed to artistic deconstruction. The new historicist approach renders a work of art equally independent of the artist but makes it predominantly a product of the historical moment of its production. Art, in new historicist endeavours locates itself in contemporary history rather than emerge through any process of imagination. The earlier historicist approach as against the new historicist one, made art a product of its historical moment, regardless of its ability to reconstruct another period. Perhaps, Poel's production comes nearer to the historicist approach.

Since the 16th century, the performance of *Doctor Faustus* surveys a long theatrical history medieval morality play drama of emerging Renaissance aspirations and the self-generative postmodern theatre. Play, drama, and theater-Marlowe visualized the complex growth of dramatic and theatrical art.

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4. Ibid., pp. 166-67.
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14. *Time*, October 16, 1964, p.77.
15. Jerzy Grotowski, "Doctor Faustus in Poland" *Drama Review* 8, 4 1964, trans. Richard Schechner, p.121.
16. Ibid., pp.132-33

6.17 KEY WORDS

1. **Deconstruction:** A mode of reading first defined by Jacques Derrida based on the principle that linguistic signs cannot be linked to extra-linguistic reality but are, instead components of the self-contradictory structure of language. A deconstructive reading of a text is, then, a search for concealed contradictions within a text that undercut its apparent unity.
2. **Mise-en-scene** (French) Scenery and properties of an acted play; stage setting, and the surroundings of an event.
3. **Modern theatre:** Essentially a theatre of protest that began with the plays of the Norwegian playwright, Henrik Ibsen in the latter part of the nineteenth century, like *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Ghosts* (1881). The other champions of modern theatre during the 19th and 20th centuries are the Swedish dramatist, August Strindberg, Russian playwright, Anton Chekov, Italian playwright, Luigi Pirandello, the English playwright Bernard Shaw and the American playwright, Eugene O'Neill, and the German playwright, Bertolt Brecht. Two concepts characterize modern theatre: one is the notion of modernism based on the self-consciousness of the artist and objectively verifiable reality of the world. Secondly in terms of theatrical production, it depends on realism and naturalism whose main function is to foster an illusion of reality on the stage and to transmit the theatrical illusion to the audience.
4. **New Historicism:** It is a critical approach to literature with the belief that the meaning and value of a piece of literature resides in history and that the history can be reconstructed. The new Historicism, as championed by Stephen Greenblatt and Michel Foucault emphasises the diversity of social currents in any given period and the inescapable colouring of the understanding of the past by the modes of thought of the present. Further, for the new historicists society is essentially a political structure of power that always seeks to contain challenges to its power.

There are no verified set of beliefs and attitudes in any given period of time but rather tensions and struggles for power within a culture. Originally New Historicism arose in the field of Renaissance studies and extended itself to the study of other literary periods.

5. **Postmodernism:** a broad term to explain the intellectual temper in the West since the Second World War. On the one hand, postmodernism reflects

disillusionment with modernist self-consciousness and its realist/naturalist perspectives and, on the other hand, it runs through several contemporary ideas like post-structuralism, Deconstruction, reader-response studies and new Historicism etc.

6. **Poststructuralism:** Rejecting the supremacy of the authorial voice and interpretative human experience, structuralists like Ferdinand Saussure and Levi-Strauss and post-structuralists like Ronald Barthes and Jaques Derrida, make literature a linguistic model in which signs are related to one another not through logical connection but through a process, a differentiation. While structuralists explore a structure of functional relationships within linguistic structures, Post-structuralists, focusing on the possibilities of reader response, are engaged in decentering even the functional relationships between the signified and the signifying structures to discern the points of rupture or fission in them. From the traditional liberal humanist approach to the post-structuralist approach, which is essentially, deconstructionist, the shift that has taken place is from the predominance of the author, through that of the underlying linguistic structures to the possibilities of the response of the reader.
7. **Theatrical naturalism:** Theatrical naturalism was propounded by Emile Zola who believed that art and literature are on the same scale of gradation like chemistry and physiology etc. Central to naturalism is the idea of stage environment which has to be illusionistically realised for the actor treating the stage geographically and psychologically distinct from the area occupied by the audience through what is called the fourth wall convention i.e., the actor imagines that the stage is circled not only by three walls but by a fourth wall, one in front of the audience too. He has to be totally unaware of the audience in front of him for his awareness of their presence would destroy the theatrical illusion of reality on the stage. This sort of naturalism on the stage is evolved by theatre Libre in Paris, Otto Brahm in Berlin, David Balasco in New York and Constantin Stanislavsky in Moscow.

6.18 QUESTIONS

1. Marlowe wrote as much theatre as drama in *Doctor Faustus*. Discuss.
2. Discuss the textual diversity of *Doctor Faustus* with reference to its productions during the Elizabethan period.
3. Examine the merits and demerits of modern productions of *Doctor Faustus*.
3. Examine Grotowski's production of *Doctor Faustus* and comment on the suitability of the play for a postmodern performance.

6.19 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Willian Tydeman. *Doctor Faustus: Text & Performance*. 1984. McMillan London. Tydeman discusses the productions of *Doctor Faustus* since the Elizabethan times to the 1980.s and focuses on the problems of acting involved in specific roles and scenes and of staging the play.
2. John Russell Brown. "Marlowe and the Actors *Drama Review* 8. 4. 1964 Russell discusses the challenges Marlowe imposes on the actors for his plays.
- 3 Jerzy Grotowski, " *Doctor Faustus* in Poland" *Drama Review* 8.4, 194 pp.121-133. Richard Scehecher, Grotowski presents his theatre script of *Doctor Faustus* and dicusses the critical perspectives of his production



Block

2

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Block Introduction

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Background : Performance

UNIT 2 **14**

Romantic Comedy and the Language of the Play

UNIT 3 **22**

A Midsummer Night's Dream : I

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A Midsummer Night's Dream : II

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The Mechanicals

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the thought of marrying her enemy? How does their loving or angry relationship affect our understanding of the rest of the play? Since *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is chiefly about the love affairs of Helena, Demetrius, Lysander, and Hermia, why does Shakespeare have Theseus and Hippolyta in the play at all? Why is there so much confusion between the lovers? Why in the Forest? How is it resolved? This, too, will be discussed in Unit 3.

Gender criticism is a broader version of what used to be called feminist criticism. Hermia and Helena never change their minds about whom they love but the men, sometimes under the influence of magic and sometimes because they are foolish, fall in and out of love with the two women and make them deeply unhappy. The women in this play will be discussed in a separate section of Unit 4 firstly, because they are more rebellious and less unstable than the men are, and secondly, because gender issues interest us today.

Finally, we have used historical criticism for our analysis of the Mechanicals in Unit 5. The Mechanicals are skilled workers (weaver, joiner and so on), but uneducated, i.e., they do not have a classical education in Greek and Roman literature. Yet they seem vaguely familiar with it, especially with Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and are keen to present a "classical" play as part of the nuptial or wedding celebrations.

Why do the Mechanicals rehearse in the Forest? Why are they so earnest about letting the audience know that the lion in their play is only an imaginary lion, and that they mean no harm to anyone? Why is Bottom called Bottom, and why is he, a weaver by profession, given such an important role? Why did Shakespeare include them? Did he caricature his own group of actors, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, in the Mechanicals?

Critics have asked these questions. Answers to them are important firstly, because they are interesting in themselves, and secondly, because they will introduce you to historical criticism, a very significant branch of critical analysis. From studies of the period of the play, historical critics have discovered Shakespeare's possible reasons for including a weaver, the Mechanicals' fear that their play will be mistaken for reality, and the love of the weaver and Queen Titania.

BLOCK INTRODUCTION: *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*

A Midsummer Night's Dream is a Romantic Comedy with a difference. It has a lot of love, fun and laughter but it also has fairies in it, and is quite grim, frightening, unpleasant, and chaotic at moments. And dreams recur in it in all sorts of ways, as do moonlight, plays, and so on. Critics have interpreted it in different ways, psychoanalytically, historically, and according to its poetry.

We have divided up this study material into 5 units to familiarise you with the play as well as with some important critical methods. A list of books will help you go deeper in to any area that may interest you, while the questions at the end of each unit will help you revise the study material. But to follow all of this, we suggest that you read the Introduction (the next section) carefully.

Just remember that Shakespeare thought of his drama as play something to enjoy, so have fun!

The best way to study any literary text is to know it well. We suggest that you read *A Midsummer Night's Dream* using a good edition of the play. The one we have used and which most Shakespeare scholars consider reliable is the Arden edition by Harold F. Brooks. After reading the play, study these five units, and then reread the play at least once.

The information in these units is of two kinds: material not directly about the play, and material directly about it.

Material that is not directly about the play but deepens our understanding of it includes information about Shakespeare and his period. Shakespeare, an Englishman, lived in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In Unit 1, you will learn about why it is important to know when he lived and wrote. He wrote over thirty plays, which are classified as comedies, tragedies, and histories. Many of his best known plays were written in the 1590s. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was probably written and performed in the 1590s but its exact date of composition is uncertain. In Unit 1, you will also learn about the problems of dating this play, "the conditions of performance" (such as censorship and all-male acting companies), the kind of theatre Shakespeare wrote for, and the difference in meaning when the play is acted and when it is merely read.

From the study material specific to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, you will learn about the language of the play and how to use different critical methods to analyse it.

Like all of Shakespeare's plays, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is chiefly in verse. In Unit 2, you will learn about the different styles of language in the play and about how its language helps us to date the play.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is set in Athens which is more like England than Greece. "Duke" is an English title, not an Athenian one, and the plants and trees in the forest are all to be found in an English forest in summer. Here is one such passage that supposedly describes the forest outside Athens but could be a description of any English landscape in summer:

I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,
Where oxslips and the nodding violet grows,

closer scrutiny to be a very complicated business. One such word is the word 'word' itself. If you look up 'word' (noun) in a good dictionary (let us choose the **Oxford English Dictionary**), you will first be disconcerted to see its meaning and usage taking up two large columns, very closely printed in very fine print. Next, you will note that the meanings and usage are classified into two major categories : in the first category are those uses of this word in which it stands for verbal expression in general and is, by extension, used for such meanings as 'command', 'a saying or proverb', 'text of a song', 'a promise', 'a declaration' 'a contention', etc. In the second category are included its uses as 'an element of speech', 'a combination of sounds, or one such sound, used to express an idea', 'a written character or set of characters' representing this, etc. In this sense, 'word' can refer to a name, title, idea, printed marks, a telegraphic message, and so on. You will find these and many more senses of the word 'word' listed and exemplified in detail : altogether eleven sense-groups in the first category and seven in the second.

In this course, our aim is to study words in the sense in which they represent 'elements of speech', i.e. in the second, and the technical, sense of the word. In fact, more recent dictionaries, which are not written on historical principles (as the **Oxford** is), place this definition first. Let us look at a few of these definitions, beginning with the **Oxford** definition in full :

1. **Oxford English Dictionary**: 'A combination of vocal sounds, or one such sound, used in a language to express an idea (e.g., to denote a thing, attribute, or relation), and constituting an ultimate minimal element of speech having a meaning as such.' (1927, 1989)
2. **Collins English Dictionary**: 'One of the units of speech or writing that native speakers of a language usually regard as the smallest isolable meaningful element of the language, although linguists would analyse these further into morphemes.' (1986)
3. **American Heritage Dictionary**: 'A sound or a combination of sounds, or its representation in writing or printing, that symbolizes or communicates a meaning and may consist of a single morpheme or of a combination of morphemes' (1985)
4. **Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary**: 'A speech sound or series of speech sounds that symbolizes and communicates a meaning without being divisible into smaller units capable of independent use.' (1984)

Let us try to set up a profile of 'word' extracting various features from these definitions. It would appear from these definitions that we can apply the word 'word' to an entity that possesses the following characteristics :

1. A word is made of a sound, or a series of sounds; we may also apply it to describe representations of these in writing.
2. A word is a unit of speech (presumably when it is a sound or a series of sounds) or writing (presumably when it is a representation of the sound/series of sounds in writing).
3. The definitions do not seem to agree on whether or not the word is the smallest unit of speech/writing. Def. 4 implies that it is, since it says that it is not 'divisible into smaller units capable of independent use'. Def. 3 states that a word may consist of a single morpheme or a combination of morphemes, thereby implying that the smallest unit is the morpheme and not the word. Def. 2 makes a further refinement by saying that native speakers of a language regard it as the smallest

UNIT 1 BACKGROUND : PERFORMANCE

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Dating the First Performance
- 1.3 Conditions of Performance
- 1.4 Reading and Performance Texts
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

We have called Unit 2 “Background” because it is the word used for information that does not seem to have direct relevance to the text being studied. From the Block Introduction, you will know that such information helps us to appreciate the text better, so it is less background than the stuff of the play.

We have concentrated on three points:

- The time when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written because a writer knowingly or unknowingly includes contemporary ideas and events in his writing.
- The constraints under which the plays were written and performed, or “conditions of performance.”
- The difference between performance and reading texts. Shakespeare's plays were meant to be acted but for a long time they have been treated as plays to be read. This has affected the interpretation of the plays.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare lived 400 years ago in England. Elizabeth I was then the queen of England. The conditions he lived in, what interested him and his audience, and even the language were different to what they are now. So different, in fact, that even the ordinary English man or woman finds him “strange.” Shakespeare's audience, however, would not have found him strange. It shared his interest in current affairs such as the food riots of 1595-96, the power of Queen Elizabeth I over the kinds of plays that were to be performed, and that boys took women's roles (see 1.4). The difference between reading and performance texts will be discussed in 1.5.

After reading this unit, you will know

- The bases of the arguments among Shakespeare scholars about when the play was written and performed
- The difference in meaning when a play is performed and when it is read
- The playhouse culture of Shakespeare's time

1.2 DATING THE FIRST PERFORMANCE

Why should the date of the first performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* concern us? Largely because the time and occasion tell us what Shakespeare's audience would have found interesting in the play. We will discover the real emphases or important ideas in it rather than inventing our own.

Most Shakespeare scholars agree that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed in the second half of the 1590s, but the exact year is debated. The four questions we will try and answer about the first performance are:

- What time of year was it performed?
- What was the occasion for which it was performed?
- Was Elizabeth I present at this performance?
- Which year was it first performed?

What time of year was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* performed?

The only certainty about the date of this play is that it was entered in the Stationer's Register in September 1598 as having been performed, but it may have been performed earlier than 1598. Scholars have used different data to determine the date of its first performance. For example, because of "midsummer" in its title, it is possible that the play was performed in summer, perhaps on a special occasion such as the eve of Mayday (Walpurgisnacht) or Midsummer Eve when young men and women would find their life partners and which is therefore associated with eroticism.

What was the occasion for the performance?

For a long time it was accepted that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was an "occasional" play, that is, it was written for a special occasion. Harold Brooks is among those who are convinced that it was performed for an important aristocratic wedding. This explains why the play begins and ends with the wedding of Duke Theseus and Queen Hippolyta while the main action is about the rest of the characters. It would seem, then, that Theseus and Hippolyta are not really important to the action of play.

The importance of a character, however, does not depend on the length of the role. Sometimes a writer emphasises characters' importance by placing them in significant scenes, such as the first and last scenes. Theseus and Hippolyta appear in the first and last scenes, both of which focus on their wedding. Shakespeare shows us other similarities between these two and the audience that was supposedly gathered for the aristocratic wedding. Like the audience at the first performance, Theseus and Hippolyta are powerful aristocrats. Theseus is Duke of Athens and Hippolyta has been queen of the Amazons. In a further parallel with whatever wedding *A*

Midsummer Night's Dream is supposed to have been performed for, a play is to be performed to celebrate Theseus' and Hippolyta's wedding.

Many modern critics do not agree that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed for an aristocratic wedding because there is no record of such a wedding in the second half of the 1590s.

Was Queen Elizabeth I present at the first performance?

If *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was indeed performed for an aristocratic wedding, it is likely that Elizabeth I was present. This is generally the explanation for the compliments to Titania, queen of the fairies, and Diana, the virgin goddess of the moon. Elizabeth I was called the Virgin Queen and compared with Diana and Titania.

The argument against this view is that these compliments are not proof that Elizabeth I was present at the first performance. They are routine compliments to the very powerful queen who liked to be admired in this way.

In 1.4 you will see why Shakespeare would compliment Elizabeth I in a play that had nothing to do with her and who was probably not even present at its first performance.

When was the play first performed?

Critics have suggested two seasons: 1594-95 and 1595-96. A current view is that it was most definitely performed in 1596 (see Patterson, *New Casebooks* p.176).

Before going on to the topicality of the play, a brief mention about who comprised the audience for Shakespeare's plays.

It used to be believed that the largest group in the audience was made up of aristocrats and courtiers. Recent research suggests that although special performances were held for the Court, the biggest audiences were of people like the Mechanicals from the poorer strata of society. Shakespeare tried to please both kinds of audience. [See 2.5 for further reading on play going in Shakespeare's time.]

Why should the year of its first performance concern us in the late twentieth century? The information influences our understanding of the play and helps us to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as Shakespeare's audience might have seen it.

In Act II of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Oberon and Titania have had a serious quarrel, which, Titania says, has upset the normal workings of nature. There has been unusually heavy rain and the crops have been ruined:

...with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge have suck'd up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which, falling in the land,
Hath every pelting river made proud
That they have overborne their continents.
The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;
The nine-men's-morris is fill'd up with mud,

And the quaint mazes in the wanton green
For lack of tread are undistinguishable,
The human mortals want their winter cheer;
No night is now with hymn or carol blest.
Therefore the moon, the governess of the floods,
Pale in her anger, washes the air
That rheumatic diseases do abound.
And thorough this distemperature we see
The season alter: hoary-headed frosts
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose;
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown,
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, in mockery, set; the spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries; and the mazed world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which.
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension;
We are the parents and original. (II i 87-117).

Titania's speech is derived from Seneca, Ovid, and Spenser, but it also had topical interest. England had bad weather from March 1594, which was followed by wet summers in 1595 and 1596 (see Brooks xxxvii, and Patterson *New Casebooks* 176). Grain was scarce, prices rose sharply, and there were food riots. Titania's mention of wet weather and rotting grain would have interested the poorer majority of the audience which was directly affected by rising prices and hunger.

Shakespeare achieved two contradictory goals through the dialogue about bad harvests. First, Titania says that Oberon's rage is responsible for the bad weather, an accusation that seems ridiculous until we realise that Oberon is a fairy king with supernatural powers. Shakespeare's audience would have seen a parallel with their own situation. Unlike Oberon, the mortal Elizabeth I could not be responsible for the bad weather, but she was partially responsible for good government. An uprising in 1596 against bad governance showed that there was indeed dissatisfaction against those in power. The topicality in Titania's speech probably enhanced the play's popularity.

Elizabeth I, however, did not like criticism and had her critics imprisoned or killed. Could Shakespeare, a mere playwright, have dared to criticise her? If he did dare, he was careful to make a fairy king rather than a mortal queen responsible for the bad harvests. There was thus only a hint that he might have had Elizabeth in mind when he wrote this passage. He did not take any chances, however, and had Puck apologise profusely in the Epilogue for any offence the play may have given.

Keeping the majority of the audience and the queen happy may not seem important to us, but in 1.4, you will see how important it was for Shakespeare.

1.3 CONDITIONS OF PERFORMANCE

Historical critics' discoveries about the theatre culture in Shakespeare's time have enriched the plays for us. Here is some information relevant to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Plays were written and performed by groups of actors known by the names of their patrons, e.g., the chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare's company) and

the Admiral's Men (Christopher Marlowe's company). The names usually changed when the patron changed. Patrons did not fund the companies nor protect them in any way. Players and owners were therefore careful not to upset powerful officials and courtiers.

The government strictly controlled theatres (playhouses) because they were said to cause riots, traffic jams, and plague. Municipal authorities licensed playhouses within the city limits, while the scripts of all plays had to be passed by the Master of Revels, an officer of the royal Court. (Philostrate is Master of Revels in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.) Strict censorship is partly why a number of Shakespeare's plays are set in Athens, Venice, Rome, or other places far from England in place and time.

If a company displeased the authorities, its licence could be revoked and the actors would be without a livelihood. Players therefore tried to keep the authorities happy. We notice this in the Mechanicals' conversation about their play which they are to perform for powerful Athenian aristocrats who are very like Elizabethan courtiers. The Mechanicals are at pains to explain to this audience that their play should not be mistaken for reality:

Bottom: There are things in this comedy of Pyramus and Thisbe that will never please. First, Pyramus must draw a sword to kill himself; which the ladies cannot abide. How answer you that?

Snout: Byrlakin, a parlous fear.

Starveling: I believe we must leave the killing out, when all is done.

Bot: Not a whit; I have a device to make all well. Write me a prologue, and let the prologue seem to say we will do no harm with our swords, and that Pyramus is not killed indeed; and that I, Pyramus, am not Pyramus, but Bottom the weaver. This will put them out of fear.

Quince: Well, we will have such a prologue; and it shall be written in eight and six. [*i.e., as a Petrarchan sonnet.*]

Bot: No, make it two more; let it be written in eight and eight.

Snout: Will not the ladies be afeard of the lion?

Bot: Masters, you ought to consider with yourself; to bring in (God shield us!) a lion among ladies is a most dreadful thing; for there is not a more fearful wild-fowl than your lion living; and we ought to look to't.

Snout: *Therefore another prologue must tell he is not a lion.*

Nay, you must name his name, and half his face must be seen through the lion's neck; and he himself must speak through, saying thus, or to the same defect: 'Ladies,' or 'Fair Ladies, I would wish you,' or 'I would request you,' or 'I would entreat you, not to fear, nor to tremble: my life for yours! If you think I come hither as a lion, it were pity of my life. No, I am no such thing; I am a man, as other men are': and there, indeed, let him name his name, and tell them plainly he is Snug the joiner. (III i 8-44).

There is a strong parallel with Elizabethan players' worry that the least offence would mean a cancelled licence.

- The Chamberlain's Men were well off and owned an octagonal, wooden playhouse called the Globe. Its central portion was without a roof so that natural light could be used for daytime and summer performances. Artificial lighting was used for winter evening performances. The detailed description of moonlight in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* were meant to help the audience imagine moonlight while sitting in the bright light of long English summer evenings that last beyond nine o'clock.

[The Globe burnt down early in the early 1600s when its thatched roof caught fire during a performance of *Henry VIII*. A reconstructed Globe with a fireproof thatched roof has been built recently at almost the same place and on the same design.]

- Acting companies had male actors only. Boys acted women's roles. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Francis Flute is an amateur actor and therefore upset that he is to act as a woman:

Quince: Flute, you must take Thisbe on you.

Flute: What is Thisbe? A wandering knight?

Quince: It is a lady that Pyramus must love.

Flute: Nay, faith, let me not play a woman: I have a beard coming.

(I ii 40-46).

- Wealthier members of the audience paid extra to sit on the stage and converse with the actors. The script would be ignored as actors ad libbed in response to the audience, as happens during the Mechanicals' play.

1.4 READING AND PERFORMANCE TEXTS

A major change in interpreting Shakespeare's plays has been from treating them as meant for the stage to seeing them as solely to be read to treating both performance and reading as significant.

Shakespeare was an actor as well as part owner of a drama company. Play writing and acting was how he earned his living. The plays had to be good enough to attract large audiences otherwise Shakespeare and his fellow actors would have starved. From extant (surviving) texts of his plays, we learn that an actor or prompter or manager, to suit a change in actor or audience often changed the plays. In other words, there was no "fixed" or absolutely authentic text.

About 200 years ago, Coleridge suggested that Shakespeare was a poet rather than a dramatist. This was an influential idea. Shakespeare's plays continued to be acted, but a huge number of people simply read them. The plays were taught in schools and universities as poetry and details of the language were analysed. Discussions about how appropriate a word was for a character or situation did not take into consideration that Shakespeare may have changed that word if, for example, the actor could not pronounce it.

In the middle of the twentieth century, departments of Theatre Studies were established in western universities. Here Shakespeare's drama was taught as plays to be performed. Students learned how a director could change the meaning by simply making two actors frown at each other across the stage during a dialogue instead of standing next to each other and smiling while saying exactly the same thing, Phyllis

C.McGuire has demonstrated this effectively in his essay, "Hippolyta's Silence and the Poet's Pen." You will find it in the New Casebooks on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. [See 2.5 for details].

1.5 LET US SUM UP

From relevant "background" information in this unit, you have learnt

- Why it is useful to know when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed
- Whether Elizabeth I was present at the first performance, and
- How uncertain the relationships between characters and the emphases of the play can be when it is performed on the stage, and therefore how different performance and reading texts are.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. What four questions should we try and answer about the first performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
2. What was Shakespeare's playhouse called?
3. What are the three significant points about Theseus and Hippolyta in the opening scene of the play?
4. What does Titania's speech in Act II, scene i, 87-117 have to do with England in the 1590s?
5. Which two non-human characters mentioned in the play was Elizabeth I compared to?
6. What part of the play tells you about the censorship of drama in Shakespeare's time?
7. Why are the descriptions of moonlight so detailed in this play?
8. What are the occasions that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might have been performed at?
9. What are performance and reading texts?
10. Who said that Shakespeare was a poet rather than a dramatist?
11. What was the function of a Master of the Revels in the time of Elizabeth I?
12. Which two authorities controlled plays and theatres in Elizabethan England?

UNIT 2 ROMANTIC COMEDY AND THE LANGUAGE OF THE PLAY

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Romantic Comedy And Shakespeare's Innovations
- 2.3 Language Varieties
- 2.4 Bibliography
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

The issues elaborated in this unit are

- The Romantic Comedy formula and how Shakespeare's altered it
- The language of the play varieties, and how to use it for dating the play

We have also given you a list of books and journals you may wish to read on this play and on Shakespeare's work. Most importantly, we have given details of the text of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that you should try and use.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Generic criticism looks at the form or genre in which a piece of literature is written. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a Romantic Comedy, and in 2.2 we will tell you about the rules of such comedy and how much Shakespeare followed them.

In 2.3, you will first learn of the poetry in the play and how Shakespeare varied it. Then, from the myriad interesting studies of language in Shakespeare's drama, we have chosen the business of dating *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by analysing its language.

The second part may seem like an obscure and irrelevant exercise to you but some of you may wish to go on to research or teaching and it will help you to know how meticulously scholars have worked to make the texts of Shakespeare's plays as authentic as possible. Remember, the plays were initially written as performance texts. Prompters, actors, copiers all added and subtracted from them. This is why scholars have tried to discover what they were originally like.

2.2 ROMANTIC COMEDY

Romantic Comedy is one of the many kinds of comedy performed on the 16th century stage in England, and it has an identifiable formula which is similar to popular Hindi films. In the second half of 2.2 we will consider some of Shakespeare's alterations of the formula.

The Romantic Comedy Formula:

Romantic Comedy has a main plot and a subplot. In the main plot an eligible aristocratic man and woman fall in love with each other but cannot marry for some reason. They may be socially incompatible or their families may have a long-standing quarrel or it could be that the man or the woman do not even realise they are in love, as is the case with Benedick and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Then some external agency like the disclosure of a secret or a trick by others brings the lovers together. Their marriage or intention to marry is celebrated with a dance and/or a feast in which all disharmonious elements are eliminated or made to fit in with the general joy. The presiding deity is Hymen, the God of marriage. In short, although the action focuses on courtship, the play ends in marriage.

The characters of the subplot are from the lower strata of society (servants, constable, Mechanicals) or behave as if they were (Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*). The two major functions of the subplot are to parody the main plot and wittingly or unwittingly sort out the problems of the characters in the main plot. In short, there are points where the main plot and the subplot interact, and at the end, everyone, whether they are aristocrats or not, joins in the celebrations.

The setting for Shakespeare's Romantic Comedy is some place remote and distant from England, such as Messina, Padua, or Athens. This remoteness adds to the fairy-tale quality of the comedy. The action begins in the court but since it is in the court that the lovers' marriage is obstructed, they leave for some place that is close to nature, such as a forest or village or some ideal pastoral setting that encourages love and fertility. Having found fulfilment, they return to the court or city, which is transformed by their joy into a healthier place that no longer stands in the way of love.

The purpose of Romantic Comedy is to emphasise accepted social values. Thus love, which ends in marriage, is allowed, but adulterous or obsessive love is not. Anything that threatens the harmonious functioning of society is gently but firmly eliminated or corrected. But the chief function of Romantic Comedy is to entertain, not correct.

In Shakespeare's use of the Romantic Comedy formula in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, we will consider three of his adaptations of the formula.

First, the forest obviously represents the pastoral world which the aristocratic Athenians, Lysander and Hermia, run away to when their love is prevented by Hermia's father and Duke Theseus. But even though Oberon would like to see the right men and women paired together, so much unhappiness occurs in the forest that the Athenians long for Athens. As soon as they return to the court and city, their marriages are fixed as they desire and not as the father or Duke desire. The play ends with a celebration.

Secondly, Shakespeare has not one but two subplots instead of two sets of characters, one aristocratic and the other plebeian, he has three sets of characters. The Fairies are

1.3.3 Word vs. Morpheme

It is mainly to account for such forms that linguists set up the category of **morpheme**. Morphemes are defined as the smallest elements that have meaning, or that perform a grammatical function. It is immediately clear that this definition will include a large number of forms so far defined as words, e.g., *old, young, sweet, a, the, was, can, may*, etc., though the category 'morpheme' was obviously not necessitated by forms like *-al, -s, -ed, -ing*, etc. which are the smallest elements (ie they cannot be broken down further) that have meaning (*-al*) or perform a grammatical function (the rest).

You must have noted that the definition of morpheme is free from the condition that the forms be able to occur independently. It was this condition that had disqualified elements like *-al, -s, -ed, -ing*, etc. from being called words. So these forms are automatically included in the category of morphemes. But so also are all independently occurring forms which are not made up of smaller independently occurring forms. This is because the definition of morpheme includes all 'smallest' elements, irrespective of whether they can occur independently or not.

With a morpheme defined in this way, words and morphemes necessarily enter into a particular kind of relationship. Let us tentatively define this relationship as that of 'composition': ie a word is 'composed' of one or more than one morpheme. Words like *nation, old, young, nice, play, run*, etc. are monomorphemic, whereas words like *national, older, younger, nicest, played, running*, etc. are composed of two morphemes each. Of the two morphemes that make up each of the words in the second list, one is a free morpheme, capable of occurring independently, and the other a bound morpheme, which is not thus capable. You can easily guess what the free morphemes are, since they also occur as monomorphemic words (viz. *nation, old, young, nice, play, run*); the suffixes (*-al, -er, -est, -ed, -ing*) are all bound morphemes.

However, it is also possible for a word to be composed of two free morphemes, e.g., *postman, blackboard, and goalkeeper*. In other words, by setting up the category of 'morpheme' we are able to solve the problem the Bloomfield's definition of word as 'minimum free form' faced with compounds. You will recall that they were excluded from the category of words by the Bloomfieldian definition as they were not minimum free forms: they were free but not minimum, as they consisted of smaller forms (like *post, man, black, board*, etc.). With the setting up of the morpheme category, this problem no longer exists, as the smaller forms are now labelled morphemes. They can either occur as monomorphemic words, or can combine as free morphemes to form a compound.

1.3.4 Relationship Between Levels: Composition or Realization?

We thus have two levels of structure where we formerly had only one. The lowest level is that of the morpheme, which consists of the smallest meaningful elements. The elements of this level (ie morphemes) make up the forms at the next higher level, the level of word. This relation of 'making up', or 'composition' is obvious only in those cases where two or more morphemes are combined together to form a word. It is not so obvious in the case of monomorphemic words, where one morpheme makes up one word. In such cases, it appears that it would be more appropriate to speak of 'realization' rather than 'composition'. We could thus say that the form '*young*' at the level of morpheme is 'realized' as the form '*young*' at the level of word, though at first this appears to be a vacuous thing to say (ie the relationship of 'realization' appears to be empty of substance). But a little consideration shows that it is essential to postulate this relationship between the two levels, even for those cases where words are 'made up

Changing the length of lines: Shakespeare increased or reduced the number of syllables in a line. Sometimes he used short sentences for speakers at some points, as in the famous quarrel between Hermia and Helena in III ii:

Hermia. You juggler! You canker-blossom!

You thief of love! What, have you come by night
And stol'n my love's heart from him?

Helena. Fine, i' faith!

Have you no modesty, no maiden shame,
No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear
Impatient answers from my gentle tongue?

Fie, fie, you counterfeit! You puppet you! (III ii 282-288; see also I i 194-201).

At other times, Shakespeare shifted from direct information to long, romantic, lyrical passages, as in Act I, sc.i, lines 157-179. Lysander provides information, Hermia is lyrical:

Lysander. I have a widow aunt, a dowager
Of great revenue, and she hath no child____
From Athens is her house remote seven leagues____
And she respects me as her only son.
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee,
And to that place the sharp Athenian law
Cannot pursue us. If thou lov'st me then,
Steal forth thy father's house tomorrow night;
And in the wood, a league without town

...
There will I stay for thee.

Hermia. My good Lysander,
I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow,
By his arrow with the golden head,
By the simplicity of Venus' doves,
By that which knitteth souls and prospers loves,
And by that fire which burn'd the Carthage queen
When the false Trojan under sail was seen;
By all the vows that men have broke
(In number more than ever women spoke),
In that same place thou hast appointed me,
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

Using rhetorical sets: Rhetoric is the theory and practice of spoken or written eloquence, and the art of literary expression. Different kinds of rhetoric are called "sets." Antithesis, for example, is a familiar rhetorical set much used in courtly love sonnets in which lovers repeatedly "burn and freeze." The young lovers' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* seem to have read so much of this love poetry that their speeches have been described as being "pestered with antithesis" (Brooks xlii; see also xlv-l for more on rhetorical sets in the play).

Using internal pauses or caesurae: That is, the pause does not come at the end of the line only but also in the middle of a line.

By using prose: It used to be said that Shakespeare used prose for his "low" characters and poetry for the rest. This is noticeable in Titania's conversation with Bottom in III i, but it is not always the case. During the Mechanicals' play,

the aristocrats' comments are in prose. This is partly because of rhetorical courtesy (see the section on sestets below). We find a similar exchange in *Much Ado About Nothing* when Leonato answers Dogberry using the same confused numbering of points as Dogberry has used.

- Using rhymed lines: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has over four hundred rhymed lines, the most of any of Shakespeare's plays. These include couplets, variations on the sonnet, doggerel, and songs.

Couplets are used chiefly, but not solely, by the fairies, so much so that it has even been called "fairy language" in some essays on the play. The two variations on the sonnet are the quatrain or four lines rhyming alternately, and the sestet or six lines rhyming ababcc. In III ii 122-133, Lysander addresses Helena in such a sestet, and in the manner of learned courtesy, she replies in the same form:

Lysander. Why should you think that I woo in scorn?
Scorn and derision never came in tears.
Look when I vow, I weep; and vows so born,
In their nativity all truth appears.
How can these things in me seem scorn to you,
Bearing the badge of faith to prove them true?

Helena. You do advance your cunning more and more.
When truth kills truth, O devilish-holy fray!
These vows are Hermia's: will you give her o'er?
Weigh oath with oath, and you will nothing weigh:
Your vows to her and me, put in two scales,
Will even weigh; and both as light as tales.

Notice that both speeches rhyme ababcc. Rhetorical courtesy requires a speaker to reply in the speech style used by the person he or she is responding to.

The Mechanicals' play has a crudely jogging sort of verse called doggerel. Low characters unwittingly parody the use of verse in drama because they do not have the same educational resources as those above them in society. Finally, there are songs in varied verse forms and dance rhythms. In fact, this plays' lyricism is probably why it was set to music by the composer Mendelsohn, and some its most famous productions have emphasised the ballet element at the expense of the dramatic, as, for instance, in the black and white film mentioned in Unit 5.

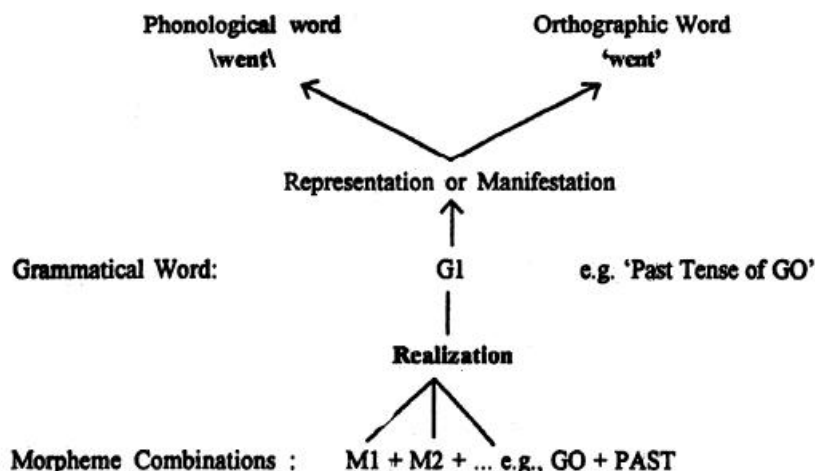
Dating the play:

Here is a very brief overview of some of Brooks' arguments on how we can date the play through its language.

The great variety of styles in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* led the critic John Dover Wilson to argue that it was written at three different times, the earliest being 1592, Brooks, however, says that it was written between 1594 and 1598.

Brooks says that the language serves a dramatic function and is varied to suit the occasion. After Lysander and Hermia have been ordered to separate, one would expect them to be emotionally direct in their speeches, but they speak as if they only know love through what they have read. They are especially funny in Act I, part of which we have already quoted to show how they speak in partial sonnets. Consider this:

Lysander. How now my love? Why is your check so pale?



The smallest meaningful units are morphemes. Morphemes combine to make higher meaningful units. Some of these combinations may be realized as grammatical words. These grammatical words are then represented or manifested by phonological and orthographic words.

This diagram shows only the formal aspect of the study of words, which is what we shall be concerned with in the following units. The aspect of meaning does not concern us in these units. That is the reason why the lexeme does not find a place in the above diagram.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

1. Every speaker of a language has an intuitive apprehension of 'word'. If asked, he is able to identify the stretch of sound which constitutes one word. This ability is strengthened by literacy since in writing words have to be separated by spaces.
2. Though languages differ in the way they codify meanings into words, every language does have the unit 'word'.
3. The notion of word can be analysed into four types depending on the way it is apprehended on different occasions: phonological, orthographic, lexical and grammatical.
4. When we use 'word' to refer to a stretch of spoken speech, the reference is to the phonological word.
5. When we use 'word' to refer to a stretch of written or printed symbols, we refer to the orthographic word.
6. The relationship between the phonological and the orthographic word may be one-one, one-many or many-one. When the relationship is one-many (/mi:t/ → meet/meat) we have a case of **homophony**: when it is many-one (/li:d/, /led/ → 'lead'), we have **homography**.)
7. The abstract word which is realised in different grammatical forms is called the **lexical word** or the **lexeme**. In this sense, the word focuses on meaning. The headwords in a dictionary represent lexemes. Though most lexemes are realized by single words, some lexemes can be realized by a sequence of words (e.g., **idioms**).

2. Criticism:

The list is not in alphabetic order but in descending order of usefulness.

- Dutton, Richard. Ed. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in New Casebooks. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996

[These essays bring you up-to-date with criticism on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. They cover historicist, psychoanalytical, feminist, and Marxist criticism. Dutton's lucid introductory remarks on the essays are further clarified by his explanations of the place of the critics in current schools of criticism at the end of each essay. His annotated list of books for further reading is very good but it does not carry information on older basic critical reading.]

- Barber, C.L. *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1959

[A seminal work. It is now fashionable to use Bakhtin's ideas to analyse the "carnavalesque" in comedy, but Barber was the earliest critic to see the comedies in terms of festivals. Most modern Shakespeare scholars begin their study of Shakespeare's comedies with Barber's book.]

- *Shakespearean and Jacobean Comedy*. Stratford-Upon-Avon series.

[This has essays on Kempe and Armin, comic players in Shakespeare's company who succeeded each other. Shakespeare wrote his comedies with their talents in mind. Critics say this explains why the early comedies differ from the later ones.]

- Andrew Gurr's two books (1970s, 1990s) on the theatre in Shakespeare's time are outstanding.

3. Journals:

Academic journals carry the results of the newest research and are therefore necessary to read. The ones in our list are reliable and relatively easy to get because good libraries have them.

- *Shakespeare Survey*

[This is published once every year. Sometimes an issue is on a single play or an aspect of drama. It also carries reports on performances of Shakespeare's plays during the year.]

- *Shakespeare Quarterly*

- *ELH*

[*ELH* is not exclusively a Shakespearean journal but often has excellent articles on Shakespeare's plays.]

2.6 LET US SUM UP

You have learn about Romantic Comedy and how Shakespeare altered it in this play by making the forest less than ideal, and by continuing the disharmony at the end You have aslo seen how he used the same plot in *Romeo and Juliet* and 4

Midsummer Night's Dream, turning it into a tragedy and a comedy, so that it seems that he deliberately kept in the darker elements of the latter.

You now know about the variety of language styles used and how we can date the play using the evidence of the language. You have seen how Shakespeare varied the blank verse by changing the lengths of lines and by using the caesura and rhyme. You have learnt about other rhymes in the play as well as who uses prose and why. You have also learnt how the language delineates character. For example, although Theseus uses poetry as well as prose, he maintains his status of Duke by using a dignified style and never descends to doggerel. In another instance, Shakespeare emphasises the fairies' non-human status by making them speak mostly in couplets or dance rhythms which are furthest from ordinary human speech.

You have also seen that this play has more passionately lyrical passages than Shakespeare is other plays of 1594-98. This is because of stylistic decorum which permits lyricism in a romantic drama with fairies in it.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. What is blank verse and why has Shakespeare used it for his drama?
2. How has he varied the blank verse?
3. What rhyme forms did Shakespeare use in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* other than blank verse?
4. Which set of characters speaks mostly in couplets?
5. What is rhetoric and what are rhetorical sets?
6. Pick out six rhetorical sets in the play. Try and identify them.
7. Shakespeare used two aspects of sonnets in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Name them. Give examples.
8. Based on the variety of language styles in the play, what did Dover Wilson infer about the dating of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
9. What three arguments does Harold Brooks give to counter Dover Wilson?
10. What is stylistic decorum? What does it have to do with the extensive lyricism of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
11. How is the lovers' speech different in the grand quarrel scene to what it was earlier in the play?
12. What is the basic plot of Romantic Comedy? Why does it end in feasting or dancing?
13. How did Shakespeare alter the Romantic Comedy formula in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
14. Which of Shakespeare's plays is a tragic version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

UNIT 3 *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* : I

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 The Athenian Aristocrats
- 3.3 The Lovers Or Court and Country
- 3.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.5 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we will concentrate on three readings of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:
How stage representations of the opening scene can influence our reading of the rest of the play

The criticism of power and authority in the play

Patterns of contrast and repetition

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The division headings of this unit are misleading. No sensible person today reads drama by breaking it up in to "plot," "theme," or "character." On the other hand, effective learning travels from the known to the unknown, and since many of you have probably been taught to divide characters up for study, we thought we would start with that. Our intention, however, is to see the place of characters in the whole drama.

Any reading of a literary text simply interprets it in a particular way. In other units you have seen historical, linguistic, and generic interpretations, and one introducing you to the festive or celebratory nature of this comedy.

3.2 THE ATHENIAN ARISTOCRATS

We concentrate here on stage representations of the opening scene and their influence on our attitude to the rest of the play.

A Midsummer Night's Dream starts and virtually ends with the aristocrats. To be exact, it starts with Theseus. How we interpret his relationship with Hippolyta in this scene decides how we will view the relationships of the other lovers. For example, most readers feel that Theseus represents authority, especially patriarchal authority.

We come to this conclusion largely because of what happens in the opening scene which has two episodes: Theseus' announcement of his coming marriage to Hippolyta, and Egeus' demand that his daughter marry Demetrius.

Theseus' announcement of his marriage:

Theseus has just defeated Hippolyta in battle. She was queen of the Amazons, an all-female community. Theseus' conquest of the Amazon queen has been seen by many as an assertion of male authority. He is now to marry her "with pomp, with triumph" (I i 19). He is cheerfully excited, she remains silent. He calls her "my Hippolyta." She does not call him "my Theseus" until Act V when the play is nearly over and harmony has been firmly established.

From Philip C. McGuire's account of five different stage versions of this episode, we summarise two opposing stage versions of the opening scene ("Hippolyta's Silence and the Poet's Pen" in *New Casebooks* 139-160).

If Hippolyta remains next to Theseus and smiles through his speeches, then she appears to share his enthusiasm for their impending marriage. Since the play is about love ending in harmonious marriage, the relationship of Theseus and Hippolyta in the opening episode becomes the ideal to be learned by the other couples. The audience would have appreciated this. The strongest message in Elizabethan Romantic Comedy was that social hierarchies should be maintained. It was considered natural and proper that a woman should be subordinate to her husband, just as it was natural and proper for a state to be ruled by a male. So, Theseus' subduing Hippolyta first in battle and then in marriage would have seemed proper to Shakespeare's audience.

The opposite interpretation depends on Hippolyta staying grimly apart from Theseus on the stage. If she does, then she obviously does not share his enthusiasm for their marriage. Her lack of enthusiasm is reinforced in III i 102 ff., when they are on a hunt. Theseus wants to show off his hounds. Hippolyta says that she has seen Hercules' hounds, implying that Theseus' hunt cannot match Hercules'. Since the ruler and his bride-to-be have a disharmonious relationship, it follows that their subjects, the young lovers, will imitate them. Only supernatural power like the magic of Oberon is able to bring harmony to Athens, as it does to his own marriage.

In the second interpretation, Oberon is the arbiter of marital happiness. This has exasperated feminists who say that it is unimportant whether Theseus or Oberon is ultimately in charge because both enforce patriarchal order. After all, even though Oberon is not mortal, he is a male and an aristocrat.

The more relevant point is that Oberon wants the Athenian couples to be happy and instructs Puck to ensure this by pouring magic juice into Demetrius' eyes. Puck mistakes Lysander for Demetrius, pours the juice into his eyes, and he, seeing Helena instead of Hermia when he awakens, falls in love with her. Meanwhile, Puck has also poured the juice into Demetrius' eyes who also sees Helena when he awakens, and, if we may use the expression, all hell breaks loose. Eventually the magic is reversed in all but Demetrius who remains in love with Helena which was Oberon's intention all along.

In short, disharmony stems from Theseus, spills over into the forest and, in spite of Oberon's excellent intentions, continues for quite some time.

Let us now turn to the second episode of the opening scene. Immediately after Theseus announces his marriage, Egeus bursts in demanding that Theseus enforce Athenian law according to which a daughter is her father's property and she must

obey him. Hermia must marry Demetrius, failing which Theseus must ensure that she dies. Theseus says he cannot change the law, so Hermia must school herself to obey her father. (In the second stage version, Hippolyta has been reading the law book that Egeus brings with him and when Theseus says that he cannot change the law she snaps it shut in anger, making it clear that she respects neither Theseus nor the law of his land.)

Theseus' response is curious on two counts.

First, he offers Hermia two alternatives and not just one as Egeus does. If she disobeys her father, he says, she must *either die or join a nunnery*. Why does he suggest a nunnery? It may be that Egeus has not revealed the whole law because after his demand that Hermia must obey him or die as per Athenian law, she asks Theseus what is "The worst that may befall me in this case, / If I refuse to wed Demetrius" (I i 63-64). Theseus replies that it is death or a nunnery for her. But there is a strong suggestion that Theseus has invented the nunnery option on the spot, and that the repeated rebellion against the harshest aspects of the law in this play starts with Theseus. Of course, some may say that being in a nunnery would be a living death, but Hermia herself says that if she cannot marry Lysander, she will not marry anyone. So Theseus' ruling fits in with part of her wishes. Egeus and the law demand death, Theseus encourages life.

After this, Theseus walks out of the room accompanied by everyone except Lysander and Hermia who are free to plan their elopement to a place where Athenian law does not operate. Theseus is either a very absent minded ruler or he is more on the lovers' side than Egeus'. Had he sided with Egeus, he would have seen to it that these two lovers are not left alone. Once more, we get the feeling that the Duke himself has rebelled against the law, this time to allow love to flourish.

Remember, Romantic Comedy celebrates life, love, and fruitfulness. Theseus' response to Egeus foreshadows the end of the play when the lovers will return to weddings and laughter in a rejuvenated Athens which blesses their love.

Having shown us the law as well Athens' potential for rejuvenation, Shakespeare shifts the action to the forest outside the city where Athenian law does not apply. The focus is now on the lovers rather than on Theseus.

3.3 THE LOVERS, OR TOWN AND COUNTRY

Later editors of Shakespeare's drama made the five Act division in modern editions of the play. Shakespeare did not divide his play into Acts, nor did he mark the beginning and end of a scene. A scene ended when there were no more actors on the stage, then a new set of players entered and the next scene began.

We can analyse *A Midsummer Night's Dream* sequentially, that is, as one scene follows another. The sequence of action in Romantic Comedy is from the court or city to a pastoral setting (forest, country) and back to the court or city. The court obstructs true love which flowers in a pastoral ambience. The impediments to love are meanwhile removed and the lovers return to a kinder, more humane court where weddings, feasts, and dances, symbolising harmony, conclude the action. You have learnt about this in Unit 2.

A Midsummer Night's Dream follows this sequence but in the next part of this unit we will analyse a pattern of the play, not its sequential action. Unlike a **sequence**, a pattern is static; it extends over the entire play. For instance, in this play, dramatic

elements seem to come in sets of two. There are two sets of lovers, two rulers, and two men who fall in love with the wrong woman. Patterns impose order on chaos, they order disorder. The rigid patterns of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* control the wildly changing relationships between the characters. The result is like a dance. In a dance, too, the movements are energetic and constant but they are controlled by the discipline of the dance.

We have to decide which pattern we wish to analyse. For this, we will follow the method of structuralism. Structural critics emphasise the binaries in a text. For a structural analysis, we must isolate two opposite ideas or images and group dramatic elements under these. Among the many noticeable binaries in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are light and dark, daylight and moonlight, humans and fairies, aristocrats and artisans.

In order to link together the different kinds of critical readings of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we have shown you, we have selected the binary of Athens and the forest which is so strong a pattern that it can be represented in two columns, as we have shown. This binary fits in with generic criticism: some characters appear in the court but not in the forest (pastoral area), others in the forest and not in the court, while some bridge the court and pasture. You will see how details of gender and power relations also emerge, and you can imagine that any stage production could use a structural analysis to emphasise relationships between settings and characters.

After reading this section, you should be able to list dramatic elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* according to some other binary classification. For example, you could divide the play according to poetry and prose, or quarrels and dances. Each such exercise will tell you more about the play as well as about Shakespeare's skill in organising his dramatic material.

Athens

1. Dramatic action in Athens takes place in the Court.
2. Theseus, a mortal, rules.
3. Athenian law is harsh and used to maintain order in society.
4. Lovers are unhappy here. Lysander and Hermia are separated because of a law that Theseus says he cannot alter; Helena is rejected by Demetrius who once made love to her as Lysander reports and Theseus endorses. Theseus says he has wanted to speak to Demetrius about this but it slipped his mind.
5. Athens has a hierarchical, patriarchal social order. The Duke is head of the state, the father of the family, and women are expected to obey them.
6. In Athens, women are not allowed to choose their husbands and they must submit to the men.
7. The Duke endorses couplings at the end of the play. Earlier, though he seems to encourage the Hermia-Lysander relationship, he is not very open about his support, if it is indeed support. Helena's unhappiness is completely ignored by the Athenian court.
8. When Theseus is appealed to as ruler of Athens, he responds as a dignified if slightly absent-minded ruler should. His ducal activities are conducted in public and except for the vagueness of his support for Hermia, nothing is hidden or secret.
9. There seem to be no "natural" families. There are no mothers. The practical reason for this may have been that with only male players, it was easier to have men in the cast. But in the play,

according to Athenian law, fathers are more important than mothers. Hermia has a father and no mother; Helena has a parent but we do not know whether this is her mother or father; the men have no parents apparently.

10. Friendships are important and remembered in a crisis. Hermia and Helena are childhood friends. Lysander and Demetrius are friends.
11. The action takes place in the day.

The Forest

1. The forest represents the pastoral or natural world.
2. Oberon, the fairy king rules.
3. Practical jokes, songs, and quarrels occur but there is no evident law.
4. Oberon wants the human lovers to be happy.
5. The forest seems to be a place of disorder. The king and queen of fairies are married but have quarrelled; while Athenian women must obey their men, queen Titania defies her husband and asserts her right to keep the

Indian boy; lovers literally lose each other in the forest; lovers fall out of love; the Athenian men fall in love with the same woman; the Mechanicals lose their star actor.

6. In the forest, Helena and Hermia fight to keep the men they have chosen to love even when these men do not reciprocate their love.
7. Unhappy lovers do not appeal to King Oberon but he notices Helena's unhappiness straight away and sets about arranging the right pairings.
8. Oberon does not even make a pretence of asserting his authority. He achieves his desire – especially of getting the Indian boy from Titania – by deceit and magic. i.e., in both Athens and the forest, the ruler eventually controls his consort.
9. There are no families at all but Titania is foster mother to the Indian boy. Athens has no mothers.
10. There are no friendships between the forest dwellers.
11. The action takes place in the moonlight or in darkness.

The bridges between Athens and the forest are

- The Mechanicals who go from Athens to the forest to rehearse their play; lose Bottom who has a dalliance with a queen, thus bridging a vast social gap; and then return to perform their play in Athens
- Lysander and Hermia who escape from Athens where they are deeply unhappy but the forest makes them unhappy as well. As the horrible night proceeds, they long for daylight and Athens to which they return with relief.
- Theseus and Oberon both eventually control their consorts and events in general.

You will notice, however, that the difference between the binaries is not as absolute as it seems at first glance but that there are more common points than the ones we have listed. For example, the unhappiness of the lovers increases in the forest where Lysander falls out of love with Hermia and although Demetrius falls in love with Helena, she suspects that he is insincere and out to hurt her by declaring he loves her.

3.4 LET US SUM UP

If you know the play as well as you should, these analyses of the play will have been fun to read.

You should now be familiar with some important contemporary ways of reading literature. We have discussed the power structures, gender relations, two stage interpretations, and a binary structure of the play. We hope we have convinced you that no analysis of the play will make much sense if you separate a character or group of characters from the rest of the play.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. What two interpretations are possible of the opening episode in Act I, sc.i?
2. What is a structural reading of a play?
3. What is the relationship of a father and daughter under Athenian law? Do you think Egeus gives us all the legal information in this matter? What are the two pieces of evidence we have that there may be more to the law?
4. Think about the gender issues in the play. List the many instances of Shakespeare's sympathy for women in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
5. Look up the passages that describe the forest. Is there anything in them to suggest that the forest is not entirely beautiful?
6. What, according to Hermia, is the insult Helena repeats again and again during the grand quarrel scene?
7. What is generic criticism?

UNIT 4 *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM*: II

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives and Introduction
- 4.1 The Fairies
- 4.2 Dreams
- 4.3 The Women
- 4.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.5 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES AND INTRODUCTION

The chief difficulty in reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or even watching it performed is that it seems in the end to be not one play but several separate strands very tentatively looped together. So in this unit we will take up and study three chief areas of interest:

- The Fairies who live in the forest and interact with the mortals
- The Dreams or visions which take up so much of the enactment time of the play
- The Female Characters, both human and non-human, who give the play much of its ultimately serious tone

In 4.4 we will consider whether these separate strands mesh into a satisfying whole or not.

4.1 THE FAIRIES

The fairies are the unusual characters in the play, forming one of the two subplots. In this section we will look at

- their role in the play
- Puck's characterisation and function

The role of the Fairies:

You might think that a grown and serious writer like Shakespeare must have been slightly mad to write a play with fairies in it for an adult audience. But then in his time nearly everyone believed in the existence of supernatural creatures like fairies, witches, goblins. The three witches of *Macbeth* have been interpreted as symbols,

but Shakespeare's audience must have accepted them as real creatures who predict the future and intensify Macbeth's latent ambition.

Like the witches in *Macbeth*, the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are linked with the world of men. For example, when Oberon accuses Titania of having an affair with the mortal Theseus, we realise that mortals and fairies do not remain strictly separate from each other.

In some respects, the fairies are very much like the Athenians. They have a similar social hierarchy. A King and Queen rule them, while some fairies simply fetch and carry for the others and could be seen as the counterparts of the Athenian Mechanicals. In general, however, the fairies fit in with the celebratory air of this play and of the midsummer festival which was supposed to bring visions to young people.

Puck:

Puck is the odd creature. He has abilities that the rest do not have. His special gifts are that he can fly around the earth at great speed and he can execute mischief. And it is for these that he is summoned by Oberon to help him steal the Indian boy from Titania and in the process make a mockery of her for withdrawing her attention and favour from him.

Puck's name is of special interest. For one thing, it sets him apart from Oberon and Titania who have classical names, as well as from the other fairies who are called by the names from nature such as Mustardseed, Peasblossom, and quite delightfully, Cobweb.

He is sometimes called by other names, particularly Robin Goodfellow. Robin Goodfellow is an English folk character who is a genuinely good fellow. He helps hard worked housewives complete their tasks, he helps butter set and so on.

But he is also, without warning and for no reason that human beings can understand, maliciously mischievous. For example, when an old woman prepares to settle down on a stool, he pushes the stool away so that she falls down and hurts her rear end. He can also make milk turn sour and prevent the butter from setting. And he does so for no very sinister reason. He is not instructed by the devil or some evil spirit but does these nasty things for his own amusement. Here is what we learn from a conversation between Puck and a Fairy:

Fairy. Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Call'd Robin Goodfellow. Are you not he
That frights the maids out of their villagery,
Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern,
And bootless make the housewife churn,
And sometimes make the drink to bear no barm,
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they have good luck.
Are you not he?

Puck. Thou speak'st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon, and make him smile
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal;
And sometimes lurk I in a gossip's bowl

In very likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob,
And on her wither'd dewlap pour the ale.
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
Sometimes for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
And 'tailor' cries, and falls into a cough;
And then the whole quire hold their hips and loffe
And waxen in their mirth, and neeze, and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted there. (II i 32-57).

Shakespeare used both the good and the bad aspects of the Robin Goodfellow folk tales in his dramatisation of Puck. We can see this in the havoc Puck creates among the young Athenian aristocrats with the love potion.

When Oberon tells Puck to put the love juice in the eyes of Demetrius so that he may fall in love with the unhappy Helena, Puck makes a genuine mistake and pours the juice into Lysander's eyes. Having done so and seen the resultant confusion, Puck simply laughs. The unhappiness of the two Athenian women does not move him to correct his mistake. Yet when Oberon scolds him, he does make the correction, ensuring at the same time that corrective juice is poured into Lysander's eyes but not into Demetrius' so that the right couples are married in the end. And he explains to Oberon that he did not plan the mischief but mistook Lysander for Demetrius because they were dressed alike. The entire sequence shows his malicious as well as good side.

But the important and revealing aspect of the fairies' attitude towards the Athenians is that Puck cannot distinguish one Athenian from the other. They all appear to him much alike. One of the "truths" Shakespeare seems to be hinting at is that lovers think their individuality is important while the reader / audience can see that there is in fact very little to distinguish them, to show the difference between them.

But before we look at Puck's view of the other characters, we need to understand Puck's own place in the hierarchy of the forest. Puck's relationship with Oberon provides the tension between the fun-filled, mischievous side of the fairy world and its darker, more threatening aspect.

In the lighter vein, of course, Puck is Oberon's court jester who changes shape and mimics sounds to make Oberon laugh. But Puck's ability to change shape, and to make others (notably Nick Bottom) change shape has a potential for unpleasant, darker mischief. He confesses that his purpose is to frighten people by creating illusions in the forest, and to drive Lysander and Demetrius "astray."

Oberon represents the happier side of the fairy world, and does his best to hold Puck in check. For instance, he seriously rebukes Puck when he finds that the latter has mistakenly (though we suspect it is not really a mistake) applied the love juice to the wrong persons.

4.2 THE DREAMS

There is much play on "dream" in this drama. To begin with, we have "dream" in the title. It is not just any dream that is mentioned here but a midsummer night's dream. Midsummer was a festive time with many associated pre-Christian ceremonies. One of these was a belief that if a young virgin spent the night in the forest, she would have a vision or dream of the man she would marry. Of course, it was also a time

when sexual games between young men and women occurred in the forests without any social censure being attached. The title of the play would have led the audience to anticipate some its action. Shakespeare in fact draws attention to the connection between dreams and his play:

...as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to aery nothing
A local habitation and name. (V i 14-17).

Dreams occur at significant moments of the play. We will consider two of its dreams.

First, there is Hermia's dream that a serpent is eating her heart, and she calls to Lysander for help. When she wakes up, Lysander is not there at all, and she convinces herself that she was dreaming that she dreamt any such dream. None of this multiple illusion hides the fact that Lysander has abandoned her for Helena. The dream is like the forest which intensifies horrid things that otherwise hover in the air.

For instance, Helena and Hermia have been friends since they were children and there is no hint of a rupture in their friendship. Of course, Hermia's father wants Demetrius to marry Hermia whereas Helena is in love with Demetrius, but even this does not strain their friendship. It is only in the forest that they quarrel and come close to blows, the only time in any Shakespeare play that women come so close to physical violence against each other. In something similar, Hermia's dream presages the separation between her and Lysander. She is as frightened by the serpent as she is by Lysander's betrayal.

The other dream is Bottom's dream, one he claims to have had when Puck's spell is lifted from him. In fact, of course, he remembers actual events as a dream, and it in this supposed dream that he sees the possibility of cutting across social barriers and having a relationship with a queen, but he decides not to tell it to anyone. After all, Romantic Comedy never rocks the social boat but maintains social hierarchies.

Both dreams have been much commented on by critics, as you will see when you read the New Casebook essays on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These dreams have been especially tempting for psychoanalytical critics. For example, some of them claim that the serpent in Hermia's dream represents the male genital organ and Hermia expresses fear of sexuality when she is frightened by it. (See Holland *New Casebooks* 61-83)

Psychoanalysis is a form of mental therapy that investigates the interplay between the conscious and the unconscious mind. Psychoanalytical criticism uses the methods of psychoanalysis and applies them to literature. Its aim is to uncover the unconscious motivations of the author as well as of the characters. Its assumption is that the covert meaning is what the work is really "about" and should be distinguished from the overt content. Lastly, psychoanalytical critics believe that the area of drama or interplay or action is at the individual psychological level, and that the social aspects such as class conflicts are of comparatively less importance. They "privilege" or highlight individual subjectivity.

We will now consider a small part of a Freudian interpretation. Freud is considered to be the man who began psychoanalysis. He argued that sometimes a wish that is frustrated in real life can be satisfied by an imaginary wish-fulfilment. According to him, all dreams, even frightening nightmares are the fulfilment of such wishes, but in disguise. The reason for the need for disguise is that desires sometimes come face to

face with social prohibitions, with things that society does not permit, and in dreams there is a veil over their real meaning. They defy logic.

The dreams we witness in the play operate cathartically upon the characters, providing a form of therapy whereby each one can discard his or her obsession. If this interpretation seems to follow the work of the psychoanalyst Freud it is because the moonlit forest seems an obvious and fitting symbol for the creative unconscious. And keeping with the Freudian view of dreams, once the dream vision is over, it leaves each character with a greater perception of others and a greater insight into themselves.

For the Athenian lovers, the journey into the forest takes them into a world that is part dream and part reality. Reality itself is continually questioned in that a character such as Oberon can be seen by the audience but not by the Athenian lovers, whereas Bottom as an ass appears very clearly to the audience as something quite different to Titania's vision of him.

4.3 THE WOMEN

A Midsummer Night's Dream is full of confusion as it hovers between sleep and dreaming, and characters change their minds for no known reason. The women in the play are the still centre of the storm; they provide stability. This is evident in all the sets of lovers: the young Athenians, Titania and Oberon, and Theseus and Hippolyta.

Hermia and Helena never waver in their commitments to the men they love even as they try and cope with the devastating changes of heart in these men. In contrast, Lysander and Demetrius respond to Puck's mistaken application of the love juice by switching from rivalry over one girl to rivalry over the other girl. Nothing essential changes in their attitude of confrontation towards each other, making the objects of their love almost irrelevant. Meanwhile, Oberon and Titania too are locked in rivalry over yet another love-object, in this case, the young Indian changeling child in Titania's charge. Finally, we have Hippolyta and Theseus, once rivals and warrior enemies but who have now put their quarrel behind them. This gives Hippolyta, the more introspective and far-sighted partner, the ability to find "music" even in "discord" (IV i 114-18).

The relationship between Helena and Hermia is characterised by sisterhood, to the extent that they see themselves as a "double-cherry." A similar relationship existed between Titania and the mother of the Indian boy, vividly described in II i 123-37:

His mother was a votress of my order;
And in the spiced Indian air, by night,
Full often hath she gossip'd by my side;
And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
Marking th'embarked traders on the flood:
When we have laugh'd to see the sails conceive
And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind;
Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait
Following (her womb then rich with my young squire),
Would imitate, and sail upon the land
To fetch me trifle, and return again
As from a voyage rich with merchandise.
But she, being mortal, of that boy;
And for her sake do I rear up her boy;
And for her sake I will no part with him. (II i 123-137).

This is the reason she has taken him over as her own child, and is emphatic that “the fairy land buys not the child of me.” Oberon, however, feeling that in this new-found love she has deserted him, decides he too will now desert her.

4.4 LET US SUM UP

We see that wisdom emerges out of the folly and mockery that prevails at every level of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Lysander and Demetrius learn to distinguish between infatuation and true love, and Titania learns to relinquish what she loves (the Indian boy) to elicit once again tenderness and love from her husband. This wisdom expresses itself as the rejoicing at the end of the play. The “rules” of Romantic comedy demand such ideals be celebrated at the end of the play.

4.5 QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of “dream” in the title of the play?
2. What is the common factor between Hermia’s dream and the forest?
3. In what ways can the women in the play be seen as a group with common qualities? Why do you think did Shakespeare make them like this?
4. What do dreams and the play have in common?
5. What lesson, if any, is communicated in Titania’s giving up the Indian boy to her husband?

UNIT 5 THE MECHANICALS

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Identities Of The Mechanicals
- 5.2 The Mechanicals And The Forest
- 5.3 The Play-Within-The-Play
- 5.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.5 Questions

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The question “Who are the Mechanicals?” raises two questions:

- Why did Shakespeare include the Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
- Does the Mechanicals play increase our understanding of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or Shakespeare's England?

We will break up answers to these questions into the Mechanicals' many identities, why they are in the forest, and their play about Pyramus and Thisbe.

5.1 IDENTITIES OF THE MECHANICALS

The Mechanicals appear in Act I, sc.ii when they discuss the play they will perform at Theseus' wedding. The first Act of a play introduces important characters and their relationships. By introducing the Mechanicals after the Aristocrats, Shakespeare dramatises the social hierarchy in Athens. The Mechanicals are inferior so they appear last. They rehearse their play in Act III, sc.i. during which Bottom vanishes and Titania falls in love with him. This is the first interaction between two social strata. Bottom returns to his friends in Act IV, sc.ii. They are relieved that their play can take place now. This is one of the many moments when harmony returns to the play. The Mechanicals finally enact their play in Act V after the triple wedding of the aristocrats.

A Romantic Comedy usually ends with weddings of the lords and ladies. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the lords and ladies are married in Act IV. Shakespeare's play and the Mechanicals' play end almost simultaneously in Act V, as if Shakespeare were respecting them for being fellow theatre people. After The Teesens discourteous comments on their play, Shakespeare is very courteous towards the Mechanicals. In short, though they are often comic, Shakespeare sympathises with them.

The Mechanicals comprise the fourth group of characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Their difference from the rest of the mortals in the play is marked in the following ways:

- The Mechanicals are at the bottom of the social ladder.
- Some of their names suggest their poor economic condition, e.g., "Starveling." According to Brooks' footnote to the *Dramatis Personae*, tailors were proverbially weak and thin. Another critic adds that Starveling's name is an almost literal description of someone suffering from acute hunger. In 1596, the time this play is said to have been first performed, this hunger was compounded by shortage of food and high prices.
- The Mechanicals are the only characters who have dual roles. They are defined by their professions as well as by their roles in the *Pyramus-Thisbe* play. (Brooks points out that their names are suited to their professions.)
- The Mechanicals are the only characters with distinctly English names. One could say that this is their national identity. We have seen that Shakespeare's audience was largely from the same class as the Mechanicals and would have identified more readily with English names and professions than with Athenian ones. It is possible that Shakespeare included the Mechanicals to appeal to this largest section of his audience.
- The Mechanicals as amateur actors are also more English than Athenian. In Elizabethan England, actors often travelled from village to village performing on makeshift stages. We notice a reference to this in Puck's description of the players in as "rude mechanicals, / That work for bread upon Athenian stalls" (II ii 9-10). Athenian drama, in contrast, was enacted in amphitheatres that still exist because they were so well made.
- Bottom the weaver is the most outstanding Mechanical. He is chosen to be *Pyramus*; an ass's head is magically placed on his head; queen Titania falls in love with him; he is the most talkative of the Mechanicals who advises Quince the director on the script and performance; he wants to act every part in their play (see Act I sc.i); he is loved by all the Mechanicals who feel they cannot enact their play if he is absent; his speech is richest in absurd language; he is never embarrassed even when he is with Dukes and queens; and he is the only Mechanical to soliloquise, that is, to talk when he is alone on the stage (IV i 199-217). The most valid reason given by scholars for why Bottom is made more important than the other Mechanicals is that the part was written specially for William Kempe an outstanding comic actor. Many in the audience came especially to see Kempe. There is no equivalent role for a particular actor among the other characters.
- Another interesting possibility is that apart from the food riots in 1596, there was an uprising of artisans against misgovernance. Weavers were prominent among them. Though the uprising was harshly suppressed, it did challenge government authority. In a mild parallel, when queen Titania falls in love with a weaver (Bottom) she ignores her husband the fairy king. Thus the weaver, however unwittingly, challenges the authority of the king, whereas the aristocrats uphold the law.

5.2 THE MECHANICALS AND THE FOREST

Why are the Mechanicals in the forest? Here are three reasons in ascending order of importance.

- Disorder as well as magical things are possible in the forest. Most of these magical happenings create comic confusion. For instance, mixing of socially unequal groups is not possible in Athens but does take place in the forest. One result is that Titania falls in love with a Mechanical. The ass's head on Bottom is simply Puck's mad addition to Oberon's basic plot which is to make Titania in love with a socially unsuitable person. This is meant to be comic.
- The forest trees, bushes and undergrowth contribute to the confusion, especially at night. People get lost in them and separated from their friends and loved ones. Bottom's separation from the other Mechanicals is a major confusion of the play. It also makes possible the comedy of a queen falling in love with a weaver.
- Chiefly, the Mechanicals are in the forest so that they can rehearse their play without fear of anyone stealing their ideas, or so says Quince. The play is so absurd that no one is likely to want to steal it. Nevertheless, Quince's comment reminds us that there was a lot of competition among playwrights for ideas for new plays. Playwrights, Shakespeare among them, cheerfully stole ideas from all sorts of places – ancient literature, folk tales, and each other.

5.3 THE PLAY-WITHIN-THE-PLAY

The two issues here are

- What is the Mechanicals' play about?
- Why did Shakespeare use the play-within-the-play?

What is the Mechanicals' play about?

The Mechanicals want to perform a play at Theseus' wedding but they are uncertain what it should be about. Bottom suggests that it should be about a tyrant, about "Ercles," (his mispronunciation of "Hercules"). Quince is determined that it should be "The most lamentable comedy, and most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe" (I ii 11-12). A romantic story is appropriate for a wedding but the Pyramus-Thisbe story ends in disaster. Mistakenly thinking that a lion has eaten Thisbe, Pyramus kills himself; Thisbe finds him dead and kills herself.

A Romantic comedy ends with weddings, dances, and feasts, all of which represent harmony and fruitfulness. The tragic ending of the Pyramus-Thisbe play contrasts with that of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. If there is any comparison between Quince and Shakespeare, it is that Shakespeare is aware of the Romantic Comedy formula, Quince is not.

Though the Pyramus-Thisbe story ends tragically, the Mechanicals' stage representation of it is ludicrous. The Mechanicals act so badly and their verse is so ridiculous that the audience can only laugh. In short, any tragic effect is dispersed in laughter.

In the next section we will see why Shakespeare had his Mechanicals enact a tragic love story.

Why did Shakespeare include a play-within-the-play?

The play-within-the-play was quite common in Elizabethan drama. Shakespeare used it in *Hamlet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ben Jonson used it in *Bartholomew Fair* and John Webster in *The Duchess of Malfi*. Playwrights used it to comment on the main action and theatre culture.

A play-within-the-play underlined the most important ideas of the main play. For most of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the couples are not happily in love. They either actually quarrel or are on the verge of quarrelling. By making his fairies use magic, Shakespeare has all the right couples suddenly and contentedly in love.

The Mechanicals' play is both similar and different to this. Pyramus and Thisbe are in love and want to marry but their families have quarrelled and will not permit it. At the end, they are separated forever by death. The story reminds one of *Romeo and Juliet* which some critics think Shakespeare parodied in the Mechanicals' play. The more likely explanation is that the Mechanicals' "lamentable comedy" dramatises the tragic outcome of a parental injunction against love, which is how the Lysander-Hermia story may have ended, while comedy, lamentable or not, fits in with the marriage celebration.

Elizabethan dramatists often used the play-within-the-play to satirise aspects of theatre culture. Among Shakespeare's satiric targets in the Pyramus-Thisbe play are:

- **Bad plays and playwrights:** The script of the Pyramus-Thisbe play is ridiculously brief; it is ad hoc, as if being made up on the spot; tragedy and comedy are jumbled together; it has a lot of action but no character development; its verse is poor (doggerel is evident in, e.g., V i 214-221). The playwright wants to show off his classical knowledge but his script shows his ignorance of classical literature (see, e.g., the classical names in V i 194-197). His knowledge of English is equally amusing ("Sweet moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams" in V i 261). He thinks the audience will not understand the dramatic devices, so detailed comic explanations are included: the lantern is the horned moon, Snout is the wall, the lion introduces himself in a long speech and says the ladies must not be scared of him.
- **Bad actors:** The Mechanicals mispronounce words; they repeat lines if they think the audience has not heard them the first time (see V i 231-236); they deliver lines incomprehensibly out of nervousness (this is especially true of the Prologue); they converse with the audience.
- **Undisciplined audiences:** Loud comments from the audience disturb the actors. Audience and actors begin a dialogue (V i 246-249; 335-341). In Unit 1, we saw that this actually used to happen in Elizabethan theatres. Theseus sits through most of the play but begins to walk out before it ends. The players are desperate to keep their audience and suggest that they could perform a dance (Bergomask) instead of the Epilogue. All this was based on what actually happened in theatres.

[The rudeness of the Athenian aristocrats was emphasised in an old black and white film of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Mechanicals leave the stage to prepare for the Bergomask. While they are changing, the aristocrats walk out of the room. The Mechanicals emerge excitedly from the Green Room (actors' changing room) only to see the backs of their audience. Their faces fall. They exit from the opposite side of the stage.]

5.4 LET US SUM UP

Of the three groups of characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the aristocrats and fairies have more in common with each other than with the Mechanicals. They are mortals and the fairies are not, but their social leaders are rulers (Duke Theseus, King Oberon). Oberon, in fact, tells us how Titania is almost in love with love with Theseus, making it clear that there is social interaction between the aristocrats and the fairies.

But the Mechanicals are a separate group. Shakespeare used them for practical reasons (most of the audience would have identified with them; Bottom was a good part for Kempe); for professional reasons (he satirises the worst of Theatre culture through them); and for comic reasons (their language, ignorance of the new learning, and innocence creates much of the comic confusion).

Shakespeare presents them as comic but loveable.

5.5 QUESTIONS

1. How do we know that the Mechanicals are more English than any other set of characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?
2. What social strata do they belong to?
3. What does the name "Starveling" have to do with the harvests of 1595-96?
4. For whom did Shakespeare create the role of Bottom?
5. In what ways is Bottom the most outstanding Mechanical?
6. What use did Elizabethan playwrights make of the play-within-the-play?
7. In which of his other plays did Shakespeare use the play-within-the-play?
8. What are the common points between the main play and the Mechanicals' play?
9. What aspects of Elizabethan theatre culture are satirised in the Mechanicals' play?
10. Why do the Mechanicals rehearse in the forest?

Notes

Notes



Block

3

HAMLET

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This Block in your hands is the second block of MEG-2 i.e. Masters in English Programme on British Drama. This Block 2 is on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and contains six units.

We begin Unit 1 with an appreciation of the problems of identifying the text of *Hamlet*. We have tried to determine the date of the first performance of *Hamlet*, the sources that Shakespeare drew upon to construct the *Hamlet* story, and the various versions of the text of the play that have come down to us.

Unit 2 examines the meaning of *Hamlet* in the light of the Elizabethan revenge tradition and also looks briefly into various other interpretations of *Hamlet* that have found favour with scholars, readers and theatre goers.

Unit 3 is devoted to learning how to read *Hamlet* between the lines: the language of Shakespeare, his interest in rhetorical devices and imagery.

In Unit 4 we have focussed on *Hamlet's* soliloquies, the question of subjectivity in the play as well as its general philosophical implications in the context of the early modern literature.

Unit 5 looks at *Hamlet* from a wider perspective in the context of Shakespeare's work. We have tried to assess its canonical status down the centuries as well as the present time.

Last but not the least in Unit 6 we examine various critical approaches of the twentieth century and examine *Hamlet* in the light of various new literary theories.

The questions at the end of each unit are only meant for your practise and you do not have to give them in for evaluation.

We hope you enjoy going through this Block.

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UNIT 1 BACKGROUND

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 The date of the first performance of *Hamlet*
- 1.3 The sources of the *Hamlet* story.
- 1.4 The text of the play.
- 1.5 Tools of scholarship: textual criticism; emendation; historical criticism; new criticism; others.
- 1.6 Let us sum up
- 1.7 Questions

1.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to provide background information which will be useful for a better understanding of the play. After, reading this unit you will be able to

- appreciate why background information is relevant to the study of a text;
- acquire an understanding of the text of the play.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Hamlet has inspired more critical speculation and comment from critics and scholars than any other play by any dramatist in English Literature, including Shakespeare himself. The character of Hamlet has inspired even more varied, complex, and intense reaction among its audience as well critics and scholars, actors and directors. So much so that Hamlet has often found to have acquired a life of its own, a life outside the context of the play. And the play has become a cultural icon of our times. No other text commands instant recognition of such a large number of moments, images, lines and words as *Hamlet* does.

A work of such value, meaning, and complexity as *Hamlet* must, therefore, be studied in the context of professional knowledge that scholarship of several centuries has provided for us. Before we can go on to understanding the complex issues of meaning and interpretations of the play and the symbolic value of the vision embodied in it, we must understand how literary scholarship determines a number of related, subsidiary issues and how the tools of scholarship are used before we can

written or performed; the sources that Shakespeare drew upon to construct his plays; Shakespeare is notoriously known to have almost always borrowed his stories from outside sources rather than invent them himself. Shakespeare's plays have come down to us in many versions and the most authentic and reliable texts of his plays almost always need to be determined or reconstructed by scholars. We have to learn to understand how this determination is achieved.

1.2 THE DATE OF THE FIRST PERFORMANCE OF *HAMLET*.

There is general agreement that the date of the first performance of *Hamlet* falls in all probability within 1601-1602. There are two reasons offered by scholars who believe that the play was not written before 1598. One, Francis Mere's (1565-1647) list of plays in his *Palladis Tamia* published in this year makes no mention of *Hamlet*. Second, a children's company, the Children of the Chapel Royal--began acting at the Blackfriars theatre in London and Shakespeare and other playwrights of the time treated them with some hostility as they were considered to be a threat to the popularity of the Chamberlain's men, the group to which Shakespeare belonged and for which he wrote plays as well as acted in them. *Hamlet* contains a slurring reference to the child actors--an "aery of children" (II. ii. 354-355)--which could have been made only a year or two after they were in business long enough to cause professional discomfort to Shakespeare and other playwrights of the times. The speculative date of such a reference, thus, appears to be between 1598 and 1601. There is yet another piece of evidence to help determine the date of the play. In an edition of Chaucer's works published in 1598, there is a marginal note by the Cambridge scholar and a friend of Edmund Spenser, Gabriel Harvey (1545?-1630), which states:

The Earl of Essex much *commends* Albion England. . . . The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*; but his *Lucrece*, and his tragedy of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, have it in them, to please the wiser sort.

Essex was executed in 1601. Harvey refers to him in the *present tense* in the same paragraph in which he refers to *Hamlet*, clearly establishing that the play must have been performed before 1601. It is not, then, without a certain knack for detective work that we are able to answer some of the ticklish questions for which we otherwise do not have definite answers.

1.3 THE SOURCES OF THE *HAMLET* STORY

Shakespeare appears to have used an earlier play which told the story of Hamlet. Many references to this lost play have been traced and this play, much to the convenience of all, is referred to as *Ur-Hamlet* (the "original" *Hamlet*). Thomas Nashe (1567-1601) makes an indirect reference to it in his *Epistle to the Gentlemen Students of Both Universities*, prefixed to *Menaphon*, a novel by Robert Greene (1558-1592), which was published in 1589. Nashe writes: "... yet English Seneca read by Candle light yields many good sentences, as *Blood is a beggar*, and so forth; and if you entreat him faire in a frosty morning, he will afford you whole *Hamlets*, I should say handfulls of tragical speeches." *Ur-Hamlet* must have been very well known, indeed, in London in the 1590s. Philip Henslowe (d. 1616), the manager of Admiral's Company, a theatrical group, records a performance of a *Hamlet* on June 11, 1594 at the theatre at Newington Butts, when it was jointly occupied by

Admiral's Men and Chamberlain's Men (the latter being the theatrical group to which Shakespeare belonged, wrote plays for and also acted). The fact that a mere eight shillings was the cost of the ticket suggests that the play was on the boards for some time and was not exactly sought after by the London theatre-goers. Thomas Lodge (1557/8-1625) in his *Wits Miserie, and The Worlds Madness* (1596) vividly describes a devil looking as pale as "the wizard of the ghost which cried so miserably at the theatre, like an oyster wife, Hamlet, revenge." As the theatre up to 1596 was occupied by Shakespeare's company, the Chamberlain's Men, Hamlet obviously belonged to it. Thomas Dekker's (c.1572-1632) play *Satiromastix* (1601) contains a reference which is generally regarded as an allusion to *Ur-Hamlet* rather than to Shakespeare's play as the phrase "Hamlet revenge" does not occur in Shakespeare's play: "my name's Hamlet revenge: thou hast been at Parris garden, have you not?" (IV. I. 150)

Scholars have relied upon a German play, *Der Bestrafte Bruder-Mord* (*Fratricide Punished*) to gain an idea of what *Ur-Hamlet* was like. *Ur-Hamlet* itself owes its origins to the early Scandinavian folk tales focusing on the essential Hamlet story which acquired a literary form in the hands of the Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus (1150?-1206). A version of the Hamlet story appears in *Histoires Tragique* by Francoise de Belleforest (1530-1583) which he found in Saxo. The author of *Ur-Hamlet* owed much, it seems, to both de Belleforest as well as Saxo for constructing his tale.

Shakespeare put together the story of Hamlet thus on the basis of his familiarity of *Ur-Hamlet*, which in turn was based on an account of Hamlet in Belleforest and Saxo. There are many elements of the story of Hamlet that Shakespeare took from the earlier sources: fratricide, incest, antic disposition and the shape and form of Hamlet's relationship with the other characters in the play. But then there is much that Shakespeare adds to the Hamlet-story on his own. The doubt regarding the certainty of the crime as well as the criminal is planted in the play by Shakespeare himself. Many elements of Hamlet's character, such as his melancholic temperament, owes itself to Timothy Bright's (c. 1551-1615) *Treatise of Melancholy* (1586). Nashe provided a precedent for Hamlet's comments on the bibulous Danes. Some of the details of Ghost as well as Ophelia's burial have come from the Catholic practices in these matters. A sceptical frame of mind that Shakespeare gave to Hamlet may have owed itself to Montaigne's (1533-1592) *Essais* (1580; 1588; 1595) which had been widely known since their first publication in 1580. In the Saxo's version there are no mad songs of Ophelia, nor her suicide, nor the character of her brother. There is no Osric, nor the grave-diggers, or the play and the players. And finally there is good reason to believe the real life and career of the Earl of Essex may have provided a real-life model for Shakespeare to frame the Bard's most popular creation. Shakespeare's own stamp on the character of Hamlet is revealed in the play in the intensity of the impact on Hamlet of his encounter with the ghost, the ambiguity of Hamlet donning a mask of madness, his ambivalent attitude towards Ophelia, his peculiarly cold and insensitive response to the death of Polonius, his development as an unconventional avenger, his obsessive interest in suicide, elements of ambition and a sense of insecurity in his character—all these are the result of Shakespeare developing his tale in myriad directions for which sometimes there is no suggestion in any of the earlier sources, and sometimes earlier elements are put to a different use. An element of ambiguity, in a sense, thus, dominates the play and adds a degree of depth and mystery to the mind and character of Hamlet's character. With the result we have a profounder work of imaginative creativity than any of the earlier versions of the Hamlet story.

Shakespeare, it would appear, did much to distance himself from his original sources and make his own play essentially distinct: his use of long soliloquy points to his

emphasis on Hamlet's inner life, which makes his treatment of Hamlet singularly different from the handling of the character of Hamlet done before or after Shakespeare created his Hamlet. Shakespeare's interest in the inner life of Hamlet fascinated his readers long after the play was first written. Both Goethe (1749-1832) and Coleridge (1772-1834), for instance, were fascinated by inner spiritual depths of his character.

1.4 THE TEXT OF THE PLAY

But what exactly do we mean when we talk about the "play"? Contrary to our expectations, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* does not exist in an authentic manuscript—a text that we could claim Shakespeare wrote and left for us to read, study, examine and interpret. If you look around you might find that the text of *Hamlet* is available in a number of editions—all quotations for example from the present lesson are taken from the New Cambridge Shakespeare (second edition 1936; reprinted 1971) edited by John Dover Wilson. Many other readers, scholars or students use different editions, such as the Oxford Shakespeare, the Arden edition or the Riverside Shakespeare or the editions prepared by scholars in earlier centuries, such as by Pope (1723), Theobald (1733) and Rowe (1709) in the eighteenth century, and by Clark and Wright (1872) and Dowden (1899) in the nineteenth century. Different editions of the same play tend to be in some sense different from each other. And these differences are the result of thoughtful analysis rather than personal whims or fancies or mere individualistic preferences of the editors of these editions.

The answer to the question with which we began this section is that there are so many editions because there is no standard text of the play—the play as it was written by Shakespeare and performed by his theatrical group to which he belonged. Unfortunately there is no such thing as a finite, fixed object called Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. When we look around we find that there are at least three versions of the play which can claim to be the authentic Shakespearean text.

As was the custom, a *Hamlet* was entered in the Stationers' Register ("the official organisations of the Elizabethan printers and publishers") on July 26, 1602 as "A book called the *Revenge of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*." And there are three different texts of the play: the *first quarto* edition which appeared in 1603, the *second quarto* edition which was published in the following year, in 1604, and the *first folio* edition which was published in 1623. (The quarto editions were so called on account of the size of the publication (approximately the size of an ordinary book today) while folio editions were larger in size, almost double the size of quarto editions.) The first quarto is generally believed to be the worst of all the texts, a "bad quarto" (bad quartos is a label attached to early corrupt quarto editions which are full of omissions and interpolations and garbled passages), perhaps a pirated edition as its text "distorts the meaning and mutilates the verse" (as Campbell and Quinn have remarked in *The Readers' Encyclopaedia of Shakespeare*; p. 284), and this was the result, it is believed, of "memorial reconstruction": either actors or the printers' agents who sat among the audience later tried to recollect the play from memory to publish unauthorised editions. When the memory failed the "writer" filled in lines from other sources, perhaps from the *Ur-Hamlet*, or lines from other parts spoken by other characters.

The second quarto was published as "*The Tragical History of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*. By William Shakespeare. Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much again as it was, according to the true and perfect copy. At London, Printed by I.R. for N. L. and are to be sold at his shop under Saint Dunston's Church in Fleet-street. 1604." First folio edition is believed to be the transcript of a "prompt book"

(that is how the copies of the plays for use on the stage were referred to) made by a careful, even a professional scribe. It is shorter than the second quarto edition by about two hundred lines and leaves out many passages full of philosophical and or moral elements. For instance, it leaves out the last long soliloquy ("How all occasions . . .") (IV. iv. 32-66).

Of all the three versions the second quarto is the longest—about 4000 lines, and appears to have been printed from a corrected copy of the first quarto and partly from Shakespeare's "foul papers"—an author's original but uncorrected draft of a play, marked with deletions, interlineations and corrections, before it was finalised and copied on clean sheets and became a "fair copy," suitable for submission to an acting company. Shakespeare is also thought to have generally worked only on foul papers as his drafts of plays needed little revision and corrections. Any changes needed were worked into the drafts only. The second quarto contains many new scenes, some of the characters have been given new names (Corambis becomes Polonius, and Rosencraft, Rosencrantz) and some of the important passages are truly recast and enriched. The following lines from the first quarto

To be, or not to be, I there's the point,
To Die, to sleepe, is that all? I all . . .

are transformed to .

To be, or not to be, that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The Slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take up arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing, end them. To die, to sleep—
No more . . .

(III.i.57-62)

The first folio leaves out some well known lines such as ("How all occasions do inform against me") – and it is shorter by a total of 222 lines but contains eighty-three new lines.

1.5 TOOLS OF SCHOLARSHIP

What, then, we have is three versions of the printed text of *Hamlet*. But which one of these is *the* text of the play?—the authentic, correct, true, original, real text of the poet-playwright? And can we ever hope to find out which of these could possibly have been the text that Shakespeare either wrote, or approved for performance or publication? The answer to all these question is: perhaps not. On top of it, to bring in the question of performance is to make matters even more complicated. Why must we think of a play in terms of its manuscripts; what about the performance of the play; could one not claim that the first, original, first night performance was *the* performance of the play. But performance of a play is never the same night after night. So which one is the authorial, authentic text—on stage or page?

Scholars down the centuries have dealt with this problem by using their judgements on a variety of issues and have given us critical editions of the play that in their view represent the authorial intentions the most—most faithfully reflect the contemporary tastes and circumstances, the level and the kind of authorial skill that we have come to expect as the targeted audience, or the moral and intellectual framework within which a playwright writing in the Elizabethan times functioned. Many indeed are

the scholarly tools, methodologies, analytical skills and arguments employed to recreate an authentic text of the play in the form of a critical edition of the play. Essentially what an editor seeks to achieve is coherence, impart an architectonic quality to the form of the play so that the play can be made to embody, and then impart, a similarly coherent meaning—a coherent vision of man's predicament in the universe and meaningful insights into the value if any in human existence.

But before interpretation can be achieved scholarship employs tools to arrive at meanings in the parts before the whole can be imparted meaning. In other words, once the larger question of the text of the play has been established, scholarship gets to work on the subtler issues. "Textual critics," for instance, use "emendation" to free the text of errors due to careless printing. W. W. Greg has explained "emendation" thus: . . . A conjectural correction inserted in a Shakespearean text by an editor in an attempt to restore the original meaning." He goes on to define an acceptable "emendation" as "one that strikes a trained intelligence as supplying exactly the sense required by the context, and which at the same time reveals to the critic the manner in which the corruption arose." One of the finest example of "emendation" in *Hamlet* was the one proposed by John Dover Wilson to correct a first folio reading of Hamlet's first soliloquy in line 129 of act one, scene two, which reads: "O that this too too *solid* flesh would melt . . ." while both the first as well as the second quarto read this as "sallied" flesh. No emendation was traditionally felt necessary until John Dover Wilson pointed out that "sallied" should be treated as misprint for "sullied" as in Elizabethan handwriting "a" and "u" could be easily confused. Also, Wilson points out,

"sullied flesh" is the key to the soliloquy and tells us that Hamlet is thinking of "kindless" incestuous marriage as personal defilement. Further, "sullied" fits the immediate context as : "solid" does not. There is something absurd in associating "solid flesh" with "melt" and "thaw"; whereas Shakespeare always uses "sully" or "sullied" elsewhere with the image . . . of dirt upon a surface of pure white; and the surface Hamlet obviously has in mind is snow, symbolically of the nature he shares with his mother, once pure but now befouled. [*Hamlet*. The New Shakespeare. John Dover Wilson, ed. (1971), p. 151-2.]

Historical Criticism, heavily relying on scholarly research, similarly seeks to place Shakespeare in his own times and to study his plays in the light of Elizabethan philosophical, moral and dramatic traditions and beliefs and prepare a Shakespearean text for us to understand and appreciate it better. Historical critics study the contemporary language, social and philosophical concepts and the political structures and relate them to the study of Shakespeare. New Criticism brought to bear upon the text of the play their finer insights and consolidated the meaning behind the authorial intentions through a focus on the texture of the play.

A great deal of scholarship focuses on the detail rather on the larger issues.

Some of the more stimulating and, in fact, provocative insights into the challenge that a scholar faces in interacting with *Hamlet* frequently take the form of brief notes and short comments. Journals such as *The Explicator*, *Notes & Queries* and *The Shakespeare Newsletter* provide much needed opportunities for the scholars to share such insights with their peers. In a short note, Dominick I. Bongiorno ["Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, 1.5.23," *The Explicator*, 54(2) (Winter 1996):67.] points out how there is more to a distraught Hamlet's visit to Ophelia's chamber in Act 2, scene 1 than suggested in the theories generally held by scholars, such as Hamlet is pretending insanity or that he is mentally disordered. Bongiorno seeks to establish that Hamlet's visit to Ophelia is exploited by the playwright to establish "the identity between the King's ghost and the son" through "the grammatical similitude intrinsic to their frightening entrances as also by establishing that Hamlet is driven, much like

the ghost, by a need to find someone compassionate, as Ophelia puts it, "To speak of horrors."

Describing Hamlet's visit to her chamber, Ophelia tells Polonius that Hamlet looked "Pale as shirt, his knees knocking each other, / And with a look so piteous in purport / As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors - *he comes before me.*" The use of the third person singular pronoun, "he", followed by "comes" occurs before Hamlet's visit to Ophelia only with reference to the dreadful coming of the ghost. Bernardo, in Act one, scene one, is interrupted by an excited Marcellus: "Peace! break thee off! Look where *it comes* again!" Ninety lines later Horatio speaks: "But soft! Behold! Lo, where *it comes* again!" ; and then, later, again, "Look, my lord, *it comes.*" In all the four instances grammar is combined with the a mood of dismay to create resemblance between Hamlet and the ghost. Also, Ophelia's later description of Hamlet's facial expression as similar to the ghost's establishes "an additional, shared identity, one of mood". In lines such as "Ghost: List, list, O list!" "list" is generally glossed as "listen" or "hear" as in *OED*, v2, 1. But it should be obvious. Christopher Baker ["Why Did Hamlet Enter Ophelia's Closet?," *The Shakespeare Newsletter* (Summer 1996): 32. maintains, that ghost does not want Hamlet merely to receive the information passively but more in the sense of "to desire, like, wish *to do something*" as in *OED* v1, 2. It is for example in this sense that this word is used in Wyatt's poem "Whoso list to hunt." Hamlet thus is commanded not only to "Hear of this murder!" but "Desire this revenge." The modern remnants of this sense of this word exist in, for example, "listlessness" which *OED*, b, defines as "characterised by unwillingness to move, act or make any exertion."

Lisa Hopkins draws attention ["Hell in *Hamlet* and '*Tis Pity She's a Whore*," *Notes and Queries* (March 1997): 102-3] to echoes from *Hamlet* in '*Tis Pity She's a Whore* (c.1626) by John Ford (1586-post 1640): "But soft, methinks I see repentance work" appears to echo "But soft, methinks I scent the morning's air." But this apparently minor verbal parallel serves to point up "both a larger similarity between the two plays as well as some fundamental difference between them." The two plays define the horrors of the Hell in similar terms to point to what awaits mankind after death. Both Hamlet and Vasques are very anxious for their victims to be killed while in the act of committing habitual crimes so that their souls may go straight to hell. Both the plays make an issue of Catholicism. Hopkins maintains: "In the case of Hamlet, it is worryingly noticeable that the Protestant prince, hailing from the heartland of Lutheranism and educated at Wittenberg, a university famous in England chiefly through its association with Luther and the Pope-baiting Faustus himself, nevertheless has a father whose ghost is in Purgatory, a location in which only Catholics believe." In '*Tis Pity She's a Whore* Ford presents two faces of Catholicism in the virtuous and conscientious Friar and the venal cardinal. Ford's invoking the earlier play is used to draw attention to the role purgatory plays in avoiding damnation.

James Persoon, in a provocative short note in *The Explicator*, ["Shakespeare's *Hamlet*," *The Explicator*, 55 (2) (Winter 1997): 70-71] focuses on Ophelia's words: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; / pray you, love remember. And there is / pansies, that's for thoughts." Persoon wants us to ask *what* is Laertes to remember and what are to be his thoughts. A meaningful interpretation of the symbolic function of the flowers can be arrived at, he suggests, by focusing on the "inner resonance" within the play. While conventionally flowers signify funerals, courtship or marriages, and pansies specifically suggests love's wounds or an Ophelia bruised in love, a useful way of looking at this context will be to look at the two conventional meanings Ophelia assigns to flowers. Remembrances echo throughout the play—such as when Ghost seeks to goad Hamlet to avenge his death. "Remember me!" or

"do not forget", when in his mother's closet Hamlet seems to forget his darker purpose. Similarly "thoughts" too resonate throughout the play. Hamlet's thoughts are directed towards revenge: he blames them for impeding his immediate purpose in almost every soliloquy. Persoon concludes: "Ophelia's flowers are thus not so much funereal and memorializing, . . . , as they are epiphanies focusing the earlier energies of revenge into a camera-like close-up evoking the causes, meanings, and results of the revenges that are blossoming in the second half of the play."

David Thatcher points out how names for Shakespeare "confer status, reputation, lineage, legitimacy" ["Shakespeare's *Hamlet*," *The Explicator*, 54 (3) (Spring 1996): 134-36]. And yet Claudius remains a nameless king. In *Hamlet* "The erasure of the pejorative Claudius seems complete. . . ." Only at one juncture the king's name makes its presence felt, paradoxically in the form of an elision. In the quatrain

For thou dost know, O Damon dear,
This realm dismantled was
Of Jove himself: and now reigns here
A very, very—pajock

editors have sought to emend "pajock" as "peacock" (as Pope felt it should be emended), "patchcock", apart from arguing for emended spelling for "pajock" itself. It has been suggested that a clue to a meaningful emendation lies in Horatio's reply to this quatrain: "You might have rhymed" and a widespread view maintains that Hamlet was about to finish with the word "ass"—a suggestion that Theobald first made. Thatcher proposes: "Not just 'ass,' . . . which is metrically deficient, but the word Hamlet cannot bring himself to utter: Claudius, that is, *Claudi-ass*. Claudius as the end word for this line was first proposed by Appleton Morgan a hundred years ago but has remained ignored even though it fits rhyme, meter, and context. Thatcher offers three additional arguments in its favour. Throughout the play Hamlet is extremely partial to the word "ass"; he is addicted to word-play, especially to quibble; and the practice of punning on names rhyming or near-rhyming with ass was common in Shakespeare's time. Hamlet thus "took advantage of the latter end of his uncle's name to share a victor's witticism with comprehending confidant."

A valuable source of insights into the complexities of *Hamlet* is comparative studies that seek to examine *Hamlet* in the light of insights gained from one's study of literary texts from other cultures and languages. Over the last few decades the work of the Greek-Egyptian poet C. P. Cavafy (1863-1933) has received a great deal of international attention and acclaim. The impact on the life and times of the poet of the culture and empire of Great Britain has been much analysed. Martin McKinsey has translated some of Cavafy's original Greek material into English and has added valuable commentaries ["C. P. Cavafy on Shakespeare: 'King Claudius' and Two Early Essays," *In-between: Essays & Studies in Literary Criticism*, 6 (i), No. 11 (March 1997):3-18].

This includes Cavafy's refashioning of the events of a literary text in "King Claudius," and two of his early essays, "Shakespeare on Life" and "Greek Traces in Shakespeare." In its eleven syllable blank verse the poem, "King Claudius" narrates:

In all the houses of the poor
they wept for him—secretly,
for fear of Fortinbras.

Claudius is portrayed as

A mild and peace-loving monarch
(the land had suffered much

from the campaigns of his predecessors)
 he treated everyone with respect,
 both great and small. He avoided
 throwing his weight around, and always,
 in affairs of state, sought advice
 from serious, seasoned counsellors.

Claudius, thus, is portrayed as a benign monarch. The poem develops oppositionally and the opposing elements in Cavafy's retelling are "Hamlet's *idanikai* (abstract, conceptual) suspicions" and the people's perception of Claudius as a just ruler. McKinsey quotes Diana Haas who points out how King Claudius" can be read in terms of Cavafy's conversion from decadent Romanticism to a post-Enlightenment rationalism. What chiefly appears to have interested Cavafy is the political dimension of "these contending ways of thinking": while the poem is not an attack on monarchy as a form of government, it does reduce to its essential absurdity the belief of the divine right of the kings. The poem, as McKinsey points, out belongs to the listeners. In equating the "majority" with the "poor" Cavafy may have had a political motive in terms of his own place and time. The British had occupied the Egypt since 1882 and the occupation had proved devastating for the Greek merchant-class who had lived in Alexandria.

1.6 LET US SUM UP

It is thus of utmost importance for us to realise that our initial obligation, before we attempt to study, analyse and understand a Shakespearean text, is to establish the text of the play by using the tools of scholarship as well as the resources that scholarship has amassed for us for this purpose. The use of scholarly tools, such as "emendation," or critical approaches such as New Criticism, illustrated above, point to the need for an ever alert, sensitive attention that a literary text—any text—requires before it can be fully studied by professional students of literature, or even read by non-professional readers for pleasure and profit.

1.7 QUESTIONS

1. Why is it necessary to master the tools of scholarship for a professional student of literature? How would our understanding of *Hamlet* suffer if we ignore this aspect?
2. Write short notes on (i) emendation; and (ii) textual criticism.
3. When was *Hamlet* first staged? What is the nature of the evidence available to establish this fact?
4. What are the major variations in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as compared to the sources he drew upon?

UNIT 2 INTERPRETATIONS

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 *Hamlet* as a revenge play
- 2.3 Theatre as a theme in *Hamlet*
- 2.4 *Hamlet* as a Tragedy
- 2.5 *Hamlet* as a Religious Play
- 2.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.7 Questions

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After a careful reading of this unit you will be able to understand

- what *Hamlet* is about
- what it seeks to talk to us about
- how it is a revenge play and
- how it can be variously interpreted.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Once the text of a literary work has been established to our satisfaction—or we have, at least, decided to accept a certain version, pending final judgement—on the basis of the principles of authenticating a text, the more complex part of the critical endeavour begins to seize out mind and thought.

A work of art is an organic whole. It is one work. It has one voice and that voice must speak for the whole work. It must speak collectively for every part that makes up the whole that the work of art before us is. It is not the same thing as suggesting that a work of art must or can have only one meaning. Great books have a tendency to speak to each reader in a different mood and meaning and impart a different significance. In fact, each reader finds himself responding to a different significance each time he reads a great work of art. But that one meaning must answer every question that that text must raise, and justify all that happens, for instance, in a play, in its every word, gesture and action. In other words, all interpretations proffered as meaning of a play must derive validity from the text of the play itself.

What we are *not* looking for is the most authentic meaning—how are we to arrive at its authenticity?—or the meaning that the author may have had in mind when he wrote—we have no access to the mind of William Shakespeare. One way of looking at this issue is to remember that once a work of art is written the author is merely a reader of this work; one more reader of this work. Maybe a principal, even the principal reader of this work, but merely a reader nonetheless. Once a text sees the light of the day—or the darkness of the print, if you like—it becomes an angle in the triangle with the author and a common reader or a professional scholar as the other two angles. The interaction between these three angles offers endless possibilities of intellectual pleasure and profit. But our ultimate focus is the work of art that is before us. The meaning that we are looking for is the one that satisfies a reader the most and explains in every way the complex entity that the work of art in question is.

There is thus a great deal of freedom for the professional student of literature to apply his mind and look at the text of the play in any way his personal predilection, sensitivity to life and letters and professional training lead him to. A work such as *Hamlet* with its endless diversity and richness, is likely to provoke myriad responses compared to, say, an average play by minor playwright. Yet, one must contend that certain interpretations of the play might appear to do greater justice to the readers' expectations from the playwright; or even respond to the expectation of the times in which the play is being read, the mood, the pressures and knowledge that is brought to bear upon the play by a reader.

After such a heavily qualified caveat, how does one look at *Hamlet*? What is *Hamlet* about; what does it seek to talk to us about; what does it mean—the meaning, the voice that will acquaint us most meaningfully and profitably with the heart and soul of the play?

2.2 HAMLET AS A REVENGE PLAY

Revenge is an important part of the plot structure of a large number of Renaissance tragedies. Thomas Kyd's (1558-1594) *The Spanish Tragedy* (published perhaps in 1589) was perhaps the first Elizabethan play in which revenge is the primary motivating force both for the protagonist as well as the plot. The tragic denouement of the play shows the murderers as well as the avengers alike being killed. Kyd introduced many elements in his play which became standard conventions for the revenge plays that followed: the ghost, intrigue, betrayal, a hesitant, unsure hero, and his inaction chiefly based on moral scruple, madness, and melancholia, the black dress, the reading of a book and philosophical musings and a gradual deterioration of the hero's moral stature which alienates the audience's sympathy for the hero. Many more plays followed Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*: John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, Tournier's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* and John Fletcher's *Valentinian* are some of the plays that belong to the literary tradition that Kyd appears to have initiated. Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* and Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* were great crowd pullers. A major influence on the development of the Elizabethan revenge play was that of Seneca, the Roman dramatist and essayist who died in A.D. 65. He was translated in the sixteenth century and was much admired for his revenge tragedies that had many of the features that Kyd made popular through his play, *The Spanish Tragedy*. Other sources of influence include Italian *nouvelle* and the works of writers such as Machiavelli.

Even though revenge-focused literature during the Renaissance was very popular, the general attitude to revenge was one of disapproval, even revulsion. Christian ethics disapproved vengeance as personal principle --

Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Thou God, to whom vengeance belongeth, show thyself.

Be ye angry and sin not: let no the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. *St Paul*

Father forgive them; for they know not what they do.

-- and the law of the land made personal revenge anti-social and punishable. The moral preachers and church fathers characterise it as immoral and constantly spoke against it from the pulpit. Much debate was carried out in public to condemn revenge as morally and legally totally indefensible. Revenge fostered anti-social behaviour, made men self-centred as they set themselves up as judges of their own cause, leading to an exaggerated rather than a fair view of the injuries suffered, and discourages forgiveness and a charitable temper. Yet it is clear that there was understanding shown—if full approval was not accorded—for certain kinds of acts of revenge. The Elizabethans believed, despite legal and religious disapproval, that personal honour had to be defended. Murder had to be avenged. A son had a sacred duty to avenge the murder of his father. The sixteenth century civil law could deny the heir of a murdered father his inheritance unless he avenged the unnatural death of the victim. For the Elizabethans, there existed a well known work which defined the properties for honourable revenge: *The Courtiers Academie* by Count Remei which became available in an English translation around 1598. Francis Bacon wrote in 1625:

Revenge is a kind of wild justice; which the more man's nature run to, the more ought law to weed it out. For as for the first wrong, it doth but offend the law; but the revenge of the wrong putteth the law out of office. Certainly, in taking revenge, a man is but even with his enemy; but in passing it over, he is superior. . . .

The most tolerable sort of revenge is for those wrongs for which there is no law to remedy, but then let a man take heed the revenge be such as there is no law to punish; or else a man's enemy is still beforehand, and it is two for one. Some when they take revenge, are desirous the party should know whence it cometh. This is the most generous. For the delight seemeth to be not so much in doing the hurt as in making the party repent. . . .

This is certain, that a man that studies the revenge keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well. Public revenges for the most part are fortunate, as that for the death of Caesar. But in private revenges it is not so. Nay rather, vindictive persons live the life of witches, who, as they are mischievous, so end they unfortunate.

The public sentiment thus acknowledged the official and religious disapproval of the acts of revenge but showed understanding for the avenger's passion.

It is against this background that we should attempt to appreciate Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Revenge as an aspect of the plot structure of the plays appears in many plays of Shakespeare. It appears in varying degrees of importance in *Richard II* as well as in *Tempest*. As a minor motif it appears several other plays such as *Othello*, *Macbeth*,

Romeo and Juliet, *Julius Caesar* and *Richard III*. *Hamlet* it is which embodies Shakespeare's most significant handling of the revenge theme.

Hamlet has not one but four revenge plots. Hamlet commits himself to avenge his father's death at the hands of Claudius, his uncle, who also marries his mother and usurps the throne of Denmark. Another son, Laertes, vows to take revenge for the killing of his father by Hamlet. Fortinbras invades the kingdom of Denmark to avenge his father's death at the hands of old King Hamlet. And there is yet another son who vows "revenge" in *Hamlet*: Pyrrhus slaughters Priam, whose son had killed Pyrrhus's father.

A typical structure of a revenge play can be viewed in five parts. The first part of the structure of a revenge play was an "exposition" usually by a ghost but in some plays exposition is carried out by other characters, even victims in the moments of their death. The exposition is followed by "anticipation" in which an elaborate plan for carrying out the revenge is prepared. A central and most dramatic part of the structure of the revenge play used to be the "confrontation" in which the avenger and the intended victim come face to face, so to say, though some time the confrontation takes a different form as it does in *Hamlet* in the prayer scene. "Delay" is a major structural device which allows the revenger to deliberately keep postponing taking action on account of moral scruples, a feeling of inadequacy to the intended task that lies ahead of him, or for other reasons. The "fulfilment" or "completion" of revenge takes the form normally in which both the victim and the avenger are destroyed along many other innocent bystanders.

Hamlet opens with the officers guarding the royal palace who are terrified by the appearance of the ghost who would not speak to them. Nor will the ghost confide the reason for his appearance in Horatio who joins the guards on the third night. But he speaks to Hamlet:

List, list, O list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love-- . . .
Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. . . .

Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange and unnatural. . . .
O, horrible! O, horrible! Most horrible!
If thou hast nature in thee bear it not,
Let not the royal bed of Denmark bell.
Adieu, adieu, adieu, remember me.

[Act I, sc.v, ll. 24, 26, 27-8, 80-83 and 91]

Hamlet is horrified to learn that the murderer is Claudius who had seduced his wife and poured poison in his ears as he slept. Hamlet promises to carry out his obligation as a son and avenge his father's death. But many weeks pass and no action is taken. Hamlet suspects that the ghost may have been an evil spirit. But chiefly he does not relish the role of an avenger. He needs to make sure that the ghost did give him facts. To ascertain the truth he feigns madness which confounds his enemies but brings him no closer to the certainty of truth.

A group of actors comes to castle and Hamlet decides to have them act out a tragedy which contains an incident much like the murder of Old King Hamlet: Hamlet hopes to determine Claudius's guilt by the latter's reaction to the play. If he reacts guiltily, the ghost was not an evil spirit. Claudius suspects the truth is out and plans to send Hamlet to England. When the players present the enactment of the murder of the Old King Hamlet, Claudius leaves the royal court in terror of retribution at the hands of

Hamlet. He orders Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to take *Hamlet* to England and plans to have him killed.

Alone, Claudius tries to pray:

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven,
It had the primal eldest curse upon't,
A brother's murder! Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect. . . .

Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash [this cursed hand] white as snow? . . .

O bosom black as death!

O limed soul, that struggling to be free,
Art more engaged; . . .

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without never to heaven go.
[Act III, sc. iii, ll. 36-43; 45-46; 67-69; 97-98.]

Hamlet find Claudius "a-praying"—

And now I'll do't. . . .
. . . and am I then revenged
To take him in the purging of his soul
When he is fit and seasoned for his passage?
[Act III, sc. iii, ll. 74; 84-86]

--and decides not to avenge his father's murder.

On the one hand Hamlet vacillates between his belief that the ghost was actually his father's spirit and had just cause to approach his son, and his apprehension that it was an evil spirit and meant to cause trouble. Hamlet's ambivalent thinking reflects the confused thinking of his times. Unlike the other pagan heroes of the Icelandic sagas Hamlet is burdened with the value-system of his faith—the Protestants had no faith in ghosts which came to haunt the earth on account of their unfulfilled desires.

What makes Shakespeare's *Hamlet* a different and superior work is not its faithful adherence to the conventions of revenge plays which dominated Elizabethan stage and drew admiring crowds for many decades in the Elizabethan age. Even though *Hamlet* is a revenge play, the focus of the play is on higher principles of life and living. Hamlet is shocked as much by his father's murder as by his mother's unfeeling haste with which she marries another man. He finds Ophelia collaborating with her father against him totally repugnant, Polonius's lack of loyalty to the old King Hamlet, his friends' attempt to allow themselves to be used by the King for his own nefarious purposes are acts which violate the social laws, moral order and religious sanctity. Shakespeare endows Hamlet with finer characteristics which raises him above level of the stock protagonist of the revenge play. Hamlet's sensitivity to the values of personal relationships is another characteristics that enriches his character. The crudity of violence gives place to intellectual reflection that dominates a major part of the play.

The psychological emphasis placed upon plays characters makes it a finer work of art than any other revenge play produced during the Elizabethan dramatic tradition. Hamlet procrastinates; but he thinks. He finds himself unable to stoop to revenge; but he knows and ruminates upon a myriad issues that are issues of pivotal significance to man's life. Above all the great poetic richness of the play raises it to a higher plane of enriched creativity and distances it away from the average revenge play and their insistent focus on blood, violence and amoral and villainous unthinking protagonists.

But there are other view-points. There are readers of the play who consider any attempt to read *Hamlet* as a tale of vengeance a great disservice to the memory of the great poet and a denigration of the play. In their recent book, *Hamlet*, Thompson and Taylor maintain that the treatment of the play by scholars such as John Dover Wilson, Eleanor Prosser and Fredson Bowers, among others, who focus on the revenge theme their respective studies of the play. Such studies with their focus on the revenge theme, Thompson and Taylor remark:

... while illuminating many aspects of the play, set it in a relatively remote historical and literary context by putting stress on such things as the ethics of revenge and the Elizabethan belief in ghosts. Thus *Hamlet* may have begun to seem in the mid-twentieth century primitive and quaint, an appropriate subject for academic and antiquarian investigation but not very relevant to the modern world. ... [p. 5]

But the study of the revenge theme in a Shakespearean play has some justification: The Elizabethan revenge play has a long generic tradition. Moreover, revenge had and continues to have, one might say a social and psychological reality. Our own sense of legal subtleties, Francis Bacon notwithstanding, recognises consolatory justice as a necessary part of a civilised society.

Despite the overwhelming support that the play extends to those who wish to read *Hamlet* as written in the Elizabethan tradition of revenge theatre, the play can be read in many more ways. There is a sense in which *Hamlet* is less of a revenge play than a play about revenge. Shakespeare subjects the human compulsion to seek revenge under a philosophical enquiry to show all facets of this human compulsion and its impact on man. As we have already seen, Francis Bacon maintains:

This is certain, that a man that studies the revenge keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise would heal and do well. Public revenges for the most part are fortunate, as that for the death of Caesar. But in private revenges it is not so. Nay rather, vindictive persons live the life of witches, who, as they are mischievous, so end they unfortunate.

The desire for revenge and its influence on an avenger find an elaborate analytic expression in the narrative of the play.

But *Hamlet* can be studied many more vastly different ways.

2.3 THEATRE AS A THEME IN *HAMLET*

In no other play does Shakespeare subject to intense and detailed scrutiny the art of theatre itself. Shakespeare's belief in the importance of theatre led him to focus on theatre as one of the social institutions. He universalises the concept of character as

role and stage as universe by showing all of life in Elsinore as play-acting. So much so that the submerged theatre within the play, as if, takes over and, we have in *Hamlet*, reality looking like theatrical activity. Life in Elsinore becomes full of theatrical activity. Plays are staged, role-playing is resorted to, false, metaphorical, as well as real, masks are put on—as Claudius does—to deceive others. The power of art to change the world is put under a question mark. Shakespeare apparently makes enormous claims behalf of the craft that he practices. But in the end his scepticism regarding theatre as an infallible weapon to perceive and discover the truth prevails. Characters are actors in the hands of forces which pull their strings and that is how the meaning of life is achieved.

Shakespeare is expansive with fulsome praise when he dwells upon actors: a magnanimous tongue it is that he puts into the mouth of Polonius when Shakespeare seeks to compliment them:

The best actors in the world, either of tragedy, comedy, history, pastoral, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral, scene indivisible or poem unlimited.

... what a treasure hadst thou!

He gives them most generous praise when he wants pay them a tribute:

They are the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time: after your death you were better have a bad epitaph than their ill report while you live.

A reference in *Hamlet* to a group of boy-players who had been enjoying a great deal of success in London provokes an outburst (not of anxiety about a threatened livelihood) but of professional jealousy:

Rosencrantz. . . but there is, sir, an aery of children, little eyases, // that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for't: these are now the fashion, and so // berattle the common stages (so they call them) that many // wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills, and dare scarce come thither. [III. ii. 342-47]

Hamlet. . . What, are they children? Who maintains 'em?// . . . Will they pursue the quality no // longer than they can sing? [III. ii. 348-50]

Bad acting is strongly castigated:

O there be plays that I have seen play—and heard others praise, and that highly—not to speak of profanely, that neither having th'accent of Christians, nor the gait of Christian, pagan, nor ,an, have so strutted and bellowed, that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had men. And not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably. [III. ii. 28-34]

Among any audience there are "the judicious" as well as "the unskilful" and "barren" theatre-goers: Hamlet would want actors to never play to the gallery but only to judicious, discriminating audience.

After Hamlet hears one of the actors deliver a speech, he reflects:

Is it not monstrous that this player here
But in fiction, in a dream of passion,
Could force his soul so to his own conceit
That from her working all his visage wanned

Tears in his eyes, distraction in his aspect,

A broken voice . . .

. . . and all for nothing! . . .

. . . what he would do,

Had he the motive and the cue for passion
That I have? He would drown the stage with tears.
And cleave the general ear with horrid speech,
Make mad the guilty and appal the free,
Confound the ignorant, and amaze indeed
The very faculties of eyes and ears; . . .

[II. ii. 554-559; 560; 563-569]

The play within the play is the central action of the play and is the key to the very mystery of the plot. "The play is the thing," says Hamlet, "wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king." And he succeeds. Simulation, dissimulation, acting, role-playing are the weapons that he resorts to throughout the play to achieve his objectives.

Hamlet is full of references to the language of theatre. Words like "play," "perform," "applaud," "prologue," "part," etc. The players are "the abstract and brief chronicles of the time," and the purpose of the theatrical art is

at the first, and now, was and is, to hold as t'were, the // mirror upto nature,
to show virtue her own feature, // scorn her own image, and the very age and
body of the // time his form and pressure. . . . [III. ii. 21-24.]

The play contains numerous private jokes, as if, shared between the actors of the play, such as the comment in act III by the actor playing Polonius: "I did enact Julius Caesar"; or in act II, "... thy face is valanced since I saw thee last . . . Pray God your voice . . . be not cracked."

All the characters in the play have an obsessive compulsion to act a role. Frequently, characters seek to "By indirections find directions out," [II. i. 66] and role-playing is the method used. In the play, no opportunity is missed to exploit the potential of a theatrical situation: eight deaths, high-pitched rhetorical speeches, the play-within-play, the fencing match, the grave-yard scene, the duel between Laertes and Hamlet and numerous rhetorical speeches including Hamlet's own soliloquies: The humanity's histrionic predilection has never before or since and nowhere else been put on show in such exciting terms.

2.4 HAMLET AS A TRAGEDY

As we have remarked earlier, Hamlet rises above the average revenge play and answers to subtler demands of a great tragedy. In the end *Hamlet* turns out to be a great tragedy rather a mere revenge play.

In his *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as:

The imitation of action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a

narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.

Later he defines the tragic hero:

There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice and depravity but by some error of judgement, . . . The perfect Plot, accordingly, must have a single, and not (as some tell us) a double issue; the change in the hero's fortune must be not from misery to happiness but on the contrary from happiness to misery; and the cause of it must lie not in any depravity, but in some great error on his part.

Hamlet responds to the definition of an Aristotelian tragedy in more ways than one though there are elements which are typically Shakespearean. In a Shakespearean tragedy the accent is on human responsibility rather on supernatural intervention, chance, fate or any other extra-human factor. The fate, destiny, the "written," too, plays a role but in the ultimate analysis it is the protagonist's own actions that bring about his tragic fall. In *Hamlet* the extra-human agency takes the form of the Ghost but the tragic disaster occurs on account of Hamlet's acts of commission or omission. Hamlet's tragic flaw that brings about the tragic end to the total human endeavour is his failure to act; or act fast enough; or act as a result of premeditation and reflection rather impulsive aggression. As Coleridge remarked:

Hamlet's character is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical. He does not want courage, skill, will or opportunity, but every incident sets him thinking, and it is curious and at the same time strictly natural that Hamlet, who all the play seems reason itself, should be impelled at last by mere accident to effect his object. I have a smack of Hamlet, if I may say so. . . . [from *Table Talk*, 1827]

A thinking Hamlet with his compulsive reflective habit remained a standard view of Hamlet for a long time in the history of *Hamlet* criticism. That his failure to act is not the result of any other factor is easy to establish. That he is not a coward the play gives us many opportunities to establish. He is a thinking man, given to retrospection and self-analysis. That he hesitates and is often irresolute is provable, too. But what he is not is a coward, incapable of decisive action. His tragic flaw, as Coleridge saw it, is that he thinks too much.

2.5 *HAMLET AS A RELIGIOUS PLAY*

The Christian element so predominates the play that *Hamlet* comes across as concerning itself with the theological questions of sin, damnation and salvation. Elizabethans had an obsessive concern with after-life and believed in heaven, hell and purgatory. Hamlet is obsessed with the thoughts of after-life--

O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. . . . [I. ii.129-32]

--and longs for the peace that the end of life alone can bring, regretting that suicide is forbidden. In his famous soliloquy, "To be, or not to be," he reflects upon the uncertainty of what follows death:

To die, to sleep;
 To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there is the rub.
 For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
 When we have shuffled of this mortal coil,
 Must give us pause. . . .

The undiscovered country from whose bourn
 No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
 And makes us rather bear those ills that we have
 Than fly to others we know not of?

The ghost describes his experience of the purgatory where he had to go as he died without an opportunity to confess his sins. Ophelia is denied a Christian burial as she was considered to have committed suicide. The question whether the ghost is “a spirit of health, or goblin damned” resounds through the whole play. Hamlet’s refusal to take advantage of the opportunity to avenge his father’s death when he comes upon Claudius in prayer, is the result of his belief in sin and salvation.

2.6 LET US SUM UP

There other themes and other foci with reference to which, too, *Hamlet* can be studied for a meaningfully enriched understanding of the text. *Hamlet* has been treated as a study in melancholia and madness, as a study in ambition and political manipulation, as a philosophical enquiry into a number of issues that feature in the writings of Montaigne, or even as a study in the art of characterisation.

2.7 QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that the primary focus of the play’s thematic burden lies on interpreting *Hamlet* as a revenge play?
2. Comment on the nature and significance of the ethics of revenge in *Hamlet*. How do various characters in the play respond to the issue of revenge?
3. How does the preponderance of the metaphors of theatre, acting, stage etc. in *Hamlet* condition our response to the play?
4. Does your own reading of the play suggest to you that one could profitably read and enjoy the play without paying attention to the issue of “theme” and “meaning.”?

UNIT 3 LANGUAGE OF LITERATURE

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Words
- 3.3 Rhetorical Devices
- 3.4 Imagery
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Questions

3.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to acquaint you with Shakespeare's use of language in *Hamlet* and how words have been used to convey the meaning of what is being said. At the end of this unit you will understand the use of rhetorical devices as well as the imagery employed in *Hamlet*.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

When we, along with Hamlet, finally arrive at the end of the play and gain our share of the wisdom, "The rest is silence!"—we suddenly realise that in one sense *Hamlet* progresses through a whole series of events, actions and ruminations to grapple with the significance of the absence of silence. Language seeks to make possible apparently what is not possible through silence—communication. And in *Hamlet* characters constantly question the wisdom of relying upon words. Words fascinate them, and there is an ongoing debate in the play about the use, abuse and futility of resorting or not resorting to the medium of words.

One of the major issues in *Hamlet* appears to be: Does language stand in polar opposition to action? Is it irreconcilable to action? Can it, or can it not, further or motivate action? Can language be considered a valid tool to evaluate actions, their validity, morality and justness. The philosophical relationship between thoughts, words and deeds, thus, turns out to be a major issue in the play.

3.2 WORDS

Words stand out in our recollection of *Hamlet* as much as vivid visual images. One of the intriguing things about *Hamlet* is the fact that everybody remembers words

from *Hamlet*—more than any other play by Shakespeare or any one else. Everyone can recollect, quote, or recognise quotations from *Hamlet*:

Language of
Literature

To be, or not to be, that is the question . . .

There is divinity that shapes our end . . .

What a piece of work is man . . .

The time is out of joint . . .

The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns . . .

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy . . .

If almost all these words that linger in our mind long after we finish reading the play belong to *Hamlet*, it is also because the prince who speaks these words is much better with words than with actions. To justify his procrastinating taking action he plays with words, argues with them, through them, for and against them—of course in words. *Hamlet* is full of long conversations with Polonius, Claudius, Gertrude, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and just about every other major or minor character. He talks too much. He repeats. **Repetition** of words and phrases occurs so frequently in the speeches of *Hamlet* as also in those of other characters that one suspects that an ongoing march of words is used to reflect one of the major themes of the play, procrastination. Expressions such as “This *too too* sullied flesh,” abound in the play. Horatio’s language is full of a different kind of repetitive effect: “law and heraldry,” “hot and full,” “here and there,” “food and diet,” “strong hand and terms compulsory.” *Hamlet* has a knack for deliberately “misunderstanding” other people’s words and indulge in puns.

King. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Hamlet. Not so, my lord, I am too much in the “son.” [I. ii. 66-67]

Polonius . . . What do you read, my lord?

Hamlet. Words, words, words.

Polonius. What is the matter, my lord?

Hamlet. Between who?

Polonius. I mean the matter that you read, my lord?

[II. ii. 192-196]

And so does one of the grave-diggers:

Hamlet. Whose grave’s this sirrah?

I Clown. Mine sir-- . . .

Hamlet. What man dost thou dig it for?

I Clown. For no man, sir.

Hamlet. What woman then?

I Clown. For none neither.

Hamlet. Who is to be buried in’t?

I Clown. One that was a woman, sir, but rest her soul she’s dead.

[V. i. 126-132]

Characters are sensitive to words and their implications: Claudius in the prayer scene says:

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My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
 Words without thoughts never to heaven go.
 [III. iii. 97]

Speech is important; understanding what one may hear is important: Horatio, the scholar, is asked to make sense of what the Ghost says--"Thou art a scholar, speak to it Horatio" [I. i. 42]—and at the end of the play he is requested by Hamlet to "tell my story" [V. iii. 349.] whose "mouth" Horatio offers to become to tell Fortinbras the story of the prince. Ophelia's language of madness draws a response:

Her speech is nothing.

Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
 The hearers to collection; they yawn at it,
 And botch the words up to fit their own thoughts,
 Which as her winks and nods and gestures yield them,
 Indeed would make one think there might be thought,
 Though nothing sure, yet much unhappily.
 [IV. v. 7-13]

Polonius, whose verbosity provokes Claudius to demand "More matter with less art" [II. ii. 95] himself objects to the speech by the First Player as "This is too long." [II. ii. 498.] As he reads Hamlet's letter to Ophelia, he comments: "That's an ill phrase, a vile phrase, 'beautified' is a vile phrase." [II. ii. 111-12]

They all play with words. Hamlet indulges in a quibble in responding to Claudius: "A little more than kin, and less than kind." [I. ii. 65] "Suit the action to the word, the word to the action" [II. ii. 17-18], he later tells the players. "Is thy union here? / Follow my mother" [V. ii. 326-27], Hamlet tells Claudius after he forces the king to drink the poison. But Hamlet is not the only who indulges in puns and quibbles. Claudius describes Laertes as one who "wants not buzzers to infect his ear / With pestilent speeches of his father's death." [IV. V. 90-91] Polonius quibbles with words in his advise to Ophelia:

Think yourself a baby

That you have ta'en these tenders for true pay
 Which are not sterling. Tender yourself more dearly,
 Or—not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,
 Running it thus—you'll tender me a fool.
 [I. iii. 105-9]

All the characters resort to **language** to communicate with each other, but in the process they reveal a great deal of their inner selves to us. Shakespeare chooses his words carefully and gives them to his characters in subtler combinations of syntactical complexity and semantic choice. Claudius's speech in ACT I [I. ii. 1-16.] is a case in point:

1. Though yet of Hamlet our dear brother's death
2. The memory be green, and that is us befitted
3. To bear our hearts in grief, and our whole kingdom
4. To be contracted in one brow of woe,
5. Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature
6. That *we* with wisest sorrow *think on him*
7. Together *with remembrance of ourselves.*

8. Therefore *our* sometime *sister*, now our Queen,
9. Th'imperial jointress of this warlike state,
10. Have we, as 'twere with a defeated joy,
11. With an auspicious and a dropping eye,
12. With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage,
13. In equal scale weighing delight and dole,
14. Taken to wife.

Claudius the political manipulator has mastered the art of manipulation through speech and language. It is in his interest that he in his first royal address to the court keeps the focus of attention on matters other than himself. And if he can keep the focus on something that is dear to the heart of people at large, and can practice a degree of self-effacement, even better. He after all had taken over the kingdom of his own brother and married his brother's wife. The people had old King Hamlet. In the whole speech, you would notice, the major part [lines 1-5] is focused on matters away from himself.

And finally he allows the speech to change its course and the focus finally rests on him: "... we with wisest sorrow think on him / Together with remembrance of ourselves." But reference to himself, despite the royal plural personal pronoun, is not assertive, but an understatement tagged to the "wisest sorrow."

The second section [lines 8-17] seeks to assert that he has possessed his brother's wife but the assertion emerges at the end, after a long and meandering passage through the mixed emotions of sorrow over his brother's death and the happiness of having married her.

The political upheaval that has preceded his ascending the throne has to be given a direction. The subjects' minds have to be made to rest upon, not the usurper's violent wresting of the throne from its lawful possessors, but away from it. The whole speech is an exercise in political rhetoric that seeks to manipulate people to respond to the new king in a certain way. And to begin with, Claudius succeeds.

Through the play one would notice, characters are forever asking questions. Hamlet is forever inquisitive about something or the other. "Why may not that be the skull of a lawyer?" "Is not parchment made of sheep-skin?" The questioning frame of mind of Hamlet questions, above all, his own self, his own actions, words, and gestures. The play opens with a question, "Who is there?", and, as if, sets the tone for the whole play.

3.3 RHETORICAL DEVICES

Language plays a major role in the definition of a character's trait in conditioning our response to him. We must appreciate that great popularity that Shakespeare and his characters have enjoyed over the last four centuries owes itself in a major way to the language of his plays. What the characters say is important, because they linger in our minds for what they say as much as for what they do or feel or suffer. But the way they say what they say is of paramount importance. The manner and method of a speaker affects the response of the audience to what they hear. Theatre-goers respond not merely to the meaning of words, but also how the words are conveyed to them. Shakespeare's choice of metre, rhythm, imagery and, of course, diction, determines how we respond to what the characters say, and to the characters themselves. Ultimately this affects—enriches—the total experience of interacting with a play on stage or on page. The meaning of the word is important but attention

should be paid to what goes into making the meaning of words effective communication and manipulation of audience response.

An interesting aspect of Shakespeare's use of language is the fact that certain linguistic features are meant to be appreciated as **rhetorical devices** for their own sake and not merely as starting points for generalisations for the larger context of the text. Rhetorical devices and figures of speech such as chiasmus ("His time a moment, and a point his space"—Pope; "Love's fire heats water, water cools not love"—Shakespeare) or anaphora ("This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle, / This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars, / This other Eden . . ."—Shakespeare) are considered of little importance on a closer examination of the text today. Thompson and Taylor have drawn attention to George T. Wright's analysis of Shakespeare's use of hendiadys, a rhetorical figure which Shakespeare uses over 300 times and there are sixty-six examples of it in *Hamlet* alone. J. A. Cuddon defines a hendiadys as "a figure of speech in which one idea is expressed by two substantives, as in 'gloom and despondency', or 'darkness and the shadow of death': but as Thompson and Taylor elaborate, there is more to it:

It is necessary that two entities being joined should be related but not in exact parallel: there is something odd, unexpected, even uneasy about hendiadys, as if the relationship between the two terms does not quite fit. But this can make the resulting expression more intense, as in Edmund's "nothing like the image and horror of it" [*King Lear*, I. ii. 175] as compared with "nothing like the horrible image of it", or Macbeth's "full of sound and fury" (*Macbeth*, V. v. 27), as compared with "full of furious sound."

In the examples quoted from Cuddon, it is not the same thing if "darkness and the shadow of death" is reduced to the "dark shadow of death," or "we drink from cups and from gold" [*pateris libamus et auro* is the original Latin sentence from Vergil] is reduced to "we drink from golden cups."

Hamlet provides many exciting examples of hendiadys:

The very age and body of the time. [III. ii. 23-4]
So far from cheer and your former state. [II. ii. 164]
Out of the shot and danger of desire. [I. iii. 35]
Divided from herself and her fair judgement. [IV. V. 86]

Wright points out how different characters in the play use hendiadys on different occasions and for different purposes. Laertes's use of hendiadys in his advice to Ophelia reveals his uncertain and divided sensibility while Polonius's use of hendiadys in his instruction to Reynaldo reveals his devious nature. If "misleading dualism and false parallels" is one of the obsessive concerns of *Hamlet*, hendiadys draw our attention to it in vivid detail.

3.4 IMAGERY

Hamlet is rich with **imagery**. Vivid descriptions, carefully chosen words and phrases and used with deliberate effort and intention, provoke us to see imaginative reconstruction of what is otherwise mere communication through words on a page—They add to the pleasure of interacting with a text. Shakespeare appears to have loved imagery. Dr Samuel Johnson remarks:

A quibble is to Shakespeare what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way and sure to

engulf him in the mire. . . . its fascinations are irresistible. . . . A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight that he was content to purchase it by the sacrifice of reason, propriety, and truth. A quibble was to him fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world and was content to lose it.

[Preface to Johnson's edition]

But Dryden was exasperated by the bard's habit of saying "nothing without a metaphor, a simile, an image, or description" [Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*] and he decided to improve Shakespeare by removing as many embellishments from the text as possible. It was later that imagery was found to work by spreading its wings through the whole fabric of a play. Imagery enriches specific moments—

There's such divinity doth hedge a king,
That can but peep to what it would.

[IV V. 123]

But, look, the morn in russet mantle clad
Walks ov'r the dew of yon high eastern hill.

[I. i.166-7]

For 'tis sport to have the enginer
Hoist with his own petar.

[III. iv. 206-7]

--and gains a sharper focus of our attention.

All major plays by Shakespeare have been found to have clusters of images that centre around certain concepts and colour our understanding of the play. The image clusters that dominate a play help us arrive at the "symbolic" vision of the play. Spread through the whole, imagery influences the way we respond to the play and its major issues. That is one of many ways a playwright determines the direction he wants us to take in appreciating his view point as expressed in a work of art.

Caroline Spurgeon who did pioneering work in this area drew attention to the fact that:

recurrent images play a part in raising, developing, sustaining, and repeating emotion in the tragedies, which is somewhat analogous to the action of a recurrent theme of "motif" in a musical fugue or sonata, or in one of Wagner's operas. . . .

. . . as the leaping tongues of flame which illuminate the pages of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* show the visual form which Blake's thought evoked in his mind, and symbolise for us the purity, the beauty, and the two edged quality of life and danger in his words, so the recurrent images in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* reveal the dominant picture or sensation—in terms of which [Shakespeare] sees and feels the main problem or theme of the play, thus giving us an unerring clue to the way he looked at it . . .

When Spurgeon closely looks at *Hamlet* she finds images of sickness, disease, or blemish of the body and "we discover that the idea of an ulcer or tumour, as descriptive of the unwholesome condition of Denmark morally, is, on the whole, the dominating one. Hamlet finds in her mother "rank corruption, mining all within, /

Infects all unseen.” Later he compares the fight between Norway and Poland as a kind of tumour. When he comes upon Claudius in the prayer scene, he exclaims: “This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.” Claudius later says: “diseases desperate grown / By desperate appliance are relieved, / Or not at all.” He begs the English king to help him get rid of Hamlet: “For like the hectic in my blood he rages, / And thou must cure me.” He tells Laertes: “Goodness, growing to a plurisy, / Dies in his won too much.” And he describes Hamlet’s arrival as: “But to the quick o’ the ulcer: / Hamlet comes back.” The dominating thought in *Hamlet* is not even sickness but, Spurgeon points out, “*rottenness*, disease, corruption, the result of dirt.”

3.5 LET US SUM UP

The raw material that goes into the making of works of literature is nothing but words. A close attention to how the words are used and controlled--rhetorical devices, meter, rhythm, intonation, syntax—is of great importance before a meaningful appreciation of the text itself can take place.

3.6 QUESTIONS

1. *Hamlet* is full of comments and observations made by various characters on the failure and success of words as a means of communication. Comment.
2. Write a short note on the use Shakespeare makes of hendiadys to enrich verbal exchanges between various characters. Illustrate and analyse.
3. Comment on Shakespeare’s use of recurrent cluster images. What use does Shakespeare make of them to further his major thematic concern in the play?.
4. Comment on the use of words by Claudius to manipulate his audience on many occasions in the play.
5. Analyse Claudius’ first court speech in act one scene two for what it seeks to communicate as well as hide.

UNIT 4 *HAMLET* : OTHER DIMENSIONS

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 *Hamlet's Soliloquies*
- 4.3 The question of subjectivity
- 4.4 Osric
- 4.5 Claudius
- 4.6 Horatio
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Questions

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to acquaint you with the soliloquy as an important dramatic convention, as well as focus on the many soliloquies present in *Hamlet*. By the end of this Unit you will also be made familiar with the various characters present in the play *Hamlet*.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

A linguistic phenomenon has been described as “the outcome of natural situations and the state of character’s emotions” [Liisa Dahl, *Nominal Style in Shakespearean Soliloquy with Reference to Early English Drama* . . . (sic.) 1969]. Charles Lamb, therefore, thought of the dramatic language as imperfect means of communicating “the inner structure and workings of mind in a character.” Characters do, and at some length, what persons never do—speak alone for a considerable length of time, and in verse, too. But the soliloquy, as we shall see, has this unique ability to suggest the subtleties of the hidden self of the speaker. In the Elizabethan dramatic tradition soliloquy became widely used as a vehicle for subjective utterance and became an important dramatic convention. *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Dr Faustus*, all contain important examples. In the Elizabethan and Jacobean period the playwrights made extensive use of the soliloquy in their plays and the soliloquy, in turn, opened up many dramatic opportunities for the development of theatre. In the process of developing the soliloquy, the Elizabethan verse found an opportunity to attain superior levels of achievement.

Much like a monologue a soliloquy implies a single speaker. It also implies a listener. In the imaginative space of a soliloquy, a speaker as well as a listener become legitimate *dramatis personae*. Frequently, the listeners are the audience. The dramatists, thus, were able to convey a great deal of information about characters—their innermost thoughts, feelings, passions and motives—directly to the audience.

One must add that in *Hamlet* what Richard Hillman describes as “fictional interiority” is created and communicated not only through soliloquies but also “various kinds of monologues, asides and even silences” [*Self Speaking in Medieval and Early Modern Drama: Subjectivity, Discourse and the Stage*, 1997]. Other mechanisms by which the illusion of interiority is maintained include Hamlet’s book in act II: reading can be considered as “one way of presenting interiority, or at least contemplation, on stage,” Edward Burns [*Character: Acting and Being on the Pre-Modern Stage*, 1990] maintains.

The development of the villain as an important ingredient in the dramatic tradition of this period further contributed to the refinement of the soliloquy. Much like the Devil in the Morality plays, the villains, too, comment on other characters and action of the play, manipulate the plot and reveal their own mind and thoughts to the audience. For instance, Iago’s soliloquy in *Othello*.

Soliloquies often tend to be interior debates—that is what Hamlet’s soliloquies are—as much as direct addresses, such as the one Falstaff makes on honour while speaking directly to the audience.

4.2 HAMLET’S SOLILOQUIES

Two of the seven soliloquies in *Hamlet* occur in act I [scene ii, lines 129-159 and scene v, lines 92-111], and one in act II [scene ii, lines 553-585]. There are three soliloquies in act III, one each in scene one [lines 56-88], scene two [lines 371-382] and scene three [lines 73-95]. The last soliloquy occurs in act IV, scene iv [lines 32-66]:

1. that this too too sullied flesh would melt, . . . I.ii.129-159
2. O all you host of heaven! . . . I.v.92-111
3. O what a rogue and peasant slave am I! . . . II.ii.553-585
4. To be, or not to be, that is the question, . . . III.i.56-88
5. ’Tis now the very witching time of night, . . . III.ii.371-382
6. Now might I do it pat, now a’is praying-- . . . III.iii.73-95
7. How all occasions do inform against me, . . . IV.iv.33-66

The first soliloquy occurs before the ghost has appeared and the suggestions of a possible treacherous murder have been made to Hamlet. He comes to the world of Elsinore, so to say, with his heart heavy with grief for his father’s death and the haste with which his mother disowns his father posthumously and accepts Claudius as her husband. Hamlet emerges as a ruminative, reflective and a private person, much loyal to the memory of his father and stunned at his mother’s incestuous conduct. This soliloquy also marks Hamlet’s recognition that the world is full of both evil and good—a world in which Hyperion and satyr are brothers. His mother’s conduct pains him the most—

As if increase of appetite had grown
By what it had fed on; and yet within a month-
... ere those shoes were old
With which she follow'd my poor father's body,
Like Niobe, all tears ...
married my uncle, ...

It is the corruption in his mother's conduct that makes him feel his own flesh "too, too sullied." It is in this frame of mind that Hamlet reacts to what life in the world of Elsinore offers him.

The next soliloquy shows Hamlet committing himself to avenge his father's death. This soliloquy too deepens his disgust with his mother's conduct and the fact that he is his mother's flesh and blood receives a reminder. The third soliloquy finds him remorseful for not having taken any action to avenge his father's death. There is yet another implied and understated reference to his mother in the lines in which he describes Claudius as "bloody, bawdy villain! / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!"

To be, or not to be, the fourth soliloquy, is the most philosophical statement that Hamlet makes in the play and has provoked much debate and is perhaps the most discussed and interpreted. One of the major concerns that Hamlet's ruminations focus on in this soliloquy is the conflict between passion and reason. In the seventeenth century books such as Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Minde* (1601) as well as in books published abroad and circulated in the original as well as in English translation including Philippe de Mornay's *The Defence of Death* (1577) and Nicolas Coeffeteau's *A Table of Humane Passions* (1621), passions clouded reason and it was in the interest of the individual as well as the society to keep them in check. Cicero had described passions as "perturbations, the troubled or stirred motions of the mind strayed from reason: enemies of the mind, and also of a quiet life."

Hamlet is portrayed as possessed of the passion of melancholy—sorrow and fear being two other emotions, it was believed, that accompanied melancholy. Right from the beginning Hamlet is portrayed as melancholic. He himself says: "How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seems to me all the uses of the world." His mother begs him to "cast" his "nighted colour off." "The dread of something after death" constantly hangs heavy upon the mind and thoughts of Hamlet. And yet he admires anyone who can control passions and rise above them. A stoic response to the misfortunes of life is something he aspires to be able to show. He praises Horatio as one who "is not passion's slave." He finds Ophelia, Polonius and especially his own mother slaves of passion.

While reviewing a performance of *Hamlet*, G. B. Shaw once wrote:

And please note that this is not a cold Hamlet. He is none of your logicians who reason their way through the world because they cannot feel their way through it: his intellect is the organ of his passion: his eternal self-criticism is as alive and thrilling as it can possibly be. The great soliloquy—no: I do NOT mean "To be or not to be"; I mean the dramatic one, "O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!"—is as passionate in its scorn of brute passion as the most bull-necked affirmation or sentimental dilution of it could be.

All the soliloquies express various passions associated with melancholy and the longer soliloquies seek to attain the stoic ideal of "imperturbability." "To be, or not

to be," shows Hamlet holding a book, a characteristic gesture on the part of a melancholic—nothing would seem to be more natural.

The fifth soliloquy, "This now the very witching time of night," reveals Hamlet resolute: "Now I could drink hot blood, / And do such bitter business of the day Would quake to look on." He, in this soliloquy, returns to his mother's incestuous, unnatural conduct, refers to Nero (who had had his mother Agrippina put to death, who had poisoned her husband, the emperor Claudius), hopes to be able to control his anger while confronting her with the truth of her actions. The sixth occurs in the prayer scene and contains one more reference to his mother—"My mother stays," as does the last soliloquy—"... my mother stained"

All the soliloquies emphasise the idea of the delay in the mental make-up of Hamlet, as well as the delay embedded in the plot-structure of the play. They reveal Hamlet given to self-reflection and excessively speculative, indecisive, and irresolute. Hamlet also comes across as a scholar, and a poet. The soliloquies reveal Hamlet's tragic flaw that turns *Hamlet* into a tragedy and Hamlet as the prime agent who brings about the tragic denouement: Hamlet thinks too much. He weighs the consequences of action to such an excessive length that action becomes postponed as reflection takes the place of action itself. In a sense, one can characterise all the soliloquies as variations on the same theme: an obsessive concern with his mother's incestuous conduct and the contamination that he feels has befouled him, too, as her son.

4.3 THE QUESTION OF SUBJECTIVITY

Laurel Amtower, ["The Ethics of Subjectivity in *Hamlet*," *Studies in the Humanities*, 21.2 (December 1994):120-133] examines the "uncomfortably close connection between the subjective bias of human values and the so called moral enforcement of an absolute law." *Hamlet*, Amtower maintains, exemplifies a situation in which there exist no absolutes. The task before Hamlet is left to him to interpret, to his discretion. The specifics of his obligation are not identified. Each character's attempt to construct meaning for her/himself according to a perspective is severely limited by a context. If the subject is guided by its culture's value system, the answer is that conformity is illusory as in the play value is always recreated from the standpoint of a subjective agency. Amtower counters the assumption of cultural materialists such as Dolimore, Barker, Reiss and Belsey, that the individual consciousness of the Middle Ages was essentialist and monolithic, isolated from the political and natural spheres, and naively comfortable with its moral responsibilities. Amtower believes that Hamlet's subjectivity is "profoundly and imperturbably pre-modern, a summation in a single character of an entire age and its point of view." Middle Ages thus for him had a highly developed sense of subjectivity. Hamlet thus has to justify his task not only politically and theologically but in the light of "who he is". An early Hamlet seeks to efface his own subjectivity to the fulfilment of absolute prescription. His madness thus is the abandonment of ethics to solipsism of the subject, the abnegating of the social for the fullest satisfaction of the private. Amtower goes on: "Instead of realising that he, like every entity of the play, is moved by the greater contexts of discourse and community that immerse him, Hamlet responds with greater attempts at control and repression, marked by irrational outbursts, manslaughter, and finally murder." The later Hamlet "judges by absolute law—but that absolute law is his own." The tyrannical Hamlet, Amtower believes, "at the end of the play actually prefigures the tyrannical, moralising repression that will later characterise the Puritan Commonwealth. It is thus the later Hamlet, Amtower concludes, who offers a model of modern subjectivity. In *Hamlet*,

he maintains, "The concept of a balanced subject disintegrates, leaving in its stead only victims and tyrants."

4.4 OSRIC

Osric is generally considered a minor character and the only useful function his character serves in the play is to present a contrast through his ridiculous behaviour to Hamlet's serious and dignified conduct. He is also treated by the readers as well as the directors of the play as a clown who provides comic relief in the play.

But the attention that Shakespeare bestows upon his character would suggest that he had much more than this in his mind. He is surely not meant to be a comic character and, thus, a mere source of comic relief in the play. This is clear from the fact that the source of comic entertainment is, more often than not, the prince himself. Also, the gravediggers are the ones who provide comic pleasure in the play either through their own interaction with each other or with Hamlet. Osric performs no function in the play other than propose a wager—an action that Shakespeare could easily have assigned to any other unimportant character. He appears in one of the most important scenes in the play, in an important moment, and is shown interacting at some length with the play's most important character. The attention then that Shakespeare lavishes upon Osric is not without a larger purpose. But, then, where does lie the significance of the character of Osric?

He lends a certain lightness of tone to the play's last sombre moments and presents a contrast to the protagonist himself. Apart from this, Osric by his presence lends a sharper focus to some of the major themes of the play. He signifies the hollow courtier which is one philosophical strand in the thought-pattern of the play, and of which Claudius is the most important icon in the play. Osric stands for the emptiness of the youth and its predilection for the pointless pursuing of current fashions in dress, conduct and behaviour. Hamlet alludes to a lack of balance between the individual merit and reward; Osric is a perfect example of it. He is a double-dealing hypocrite, has scrupulous disregard for everything that could stand in his way of "advancement."

Claudius plans a scheme for involving Hamlet in the fencing match:

We'll put on those shall praise your excellence,
And set a double varnish on the fame
The Frenchman gave you, bring you, in fine, together,
And wager o'er your heads. [Hamlet], being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils, . . .

[IV. vii. 130-135]

Osric, like Laertes, is a stooge and a pawn, and a weapon in the hands of Claudius. He is the source of dread and tension—as he sets out to encourage Hamlet to lay a wager—as much as he is the source of immediate comic pleasure. Our sense of the impending disaster does not allow us to treat him merely as a source of comic relief. More than comic relief or comic pleasure he provides what has been described as "comic tension."

4.5 CLAUDIUS

After the ghost has revealed the story of the unnatural murder of the old King Hamlet, Hamlet describes Claudius as "O villain, villain, smiling villan / My

tables—meet it is I set it down / That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain.” Villain in the sense of “That character in a play, whose motives or actions form an important element in the plot” [OED] is the attribute easily and most commonly associated with Claudius. Hamlet refers to Claudius again later as “Bloody, bawdy villain. / Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain.” [II. ii. 608-9]. There are seven other occasions when Hamlet refers to Claudius as a villain.

Apart from the meaning that “villain” is commonly understood to have, for Shakespeare, it also meant “a low born base-minded rustic”; OED also describes “villein” to mean as “one of the class serfs in the feudal system.” The two words in the Elizabethan English were interchangeable and, therefore, denoted base or bastard birth. Therefore, when Hamlet calls Claudius “A murderer and a villain” it means, “a murderer and a bastard” and not “a murderer and a wicked man.” As David Berkeley points out: “Villain” is the richest, most stinging, most unsheddable curse that can be offered a king in Shakespeare’s rich vocabulary of swearing. Hamlet’s extreme indignation against Claudius, partly founded on his knowledge that he a true born son of a true born father must yield the throne of Denmark to a bastard “villein” cannot be reconciled with the reiteration of the relatively waterish “villain” [in the ethical sense of the word].” That each time Hamlet refers to Claudius as a bastard has far reaching implications in the play and is of singular importance and must be appreciated.

Generally, Claudius is accused of incest, hurried remarriage, murder and being a usurper of the throne of Denmark. We must remember that Hamlet’s one major accusation against him is that he is a bastard. In a society to which Shakespeare belonged and which was essentially a class-ridden society, being a bastard meant a searing flaw. Shakespeare constantly invokes the images of “weed” and uses words such as “rank” and “gross” to imply “the base-born.” In his first soliloquy [“that this too too sullied flesh would melt,” . . . I.ii.129-159], Hamlet remarks: “Tis an *unweeded* garden, / That grows to seed, things *rank* and *gross* in nature / Possess it merely.” Later in act III, he tells the queen: “And do not spread the compost on the *weeds* / To make them *ranker*.” Shakespeare describes Claudius in comparison with his brother not in terms of wickedness but in terms of a bastard birth.

Hamlet draws attention to Claudius’s unprepossessing appearance --“hyperion to a satyr.” Hamlet asks his mother: “Could you on this fair mountain leave to feed / And batten on this *moor*?” For Shakespeare, lack of pleasant looks indicates an unethical character, while those of “gentle” birth had attractive looks. For the poet “beauty breedeth beauty” [*Venus and Adonis*, line 167]. In act III Hamlet himself is described as “the rose of the fair state” and “the mould of the from.”

Claudius lacks courage: he meekly listens to Laertes accusation, “O thou vile king,” and submits to Hamlet’s forcing poison down his throat without much resistance. Bastards, the Elizabethans believed, had envy as their ruling passion. As Francis Bacon remarked: “. . . bastards are envious, for he that cannot possibly mend his case will do what he can to impair another’s.” [*Of Envy*]. Claudius’s whole life arrears to be a series of attempts to “legitimise himself.”

In Unit One I referred to C. P. Cavafy’s version in which he recreates Claudius’s character in the light of his own post-colonial pre-occupations. You might like to compare his version with the assessment of Claudius’s character given above. The poem “King Claudius” is as follows:

King Claudius

My mind travels to distant parts.
I walk the streets of Elsinore,
I wander its squares, and remember
that sorrowful tale of an ill-starred
king
slain by his nephew, on grounds
of certain abstract suspicions.

In all the houses of the poor
they wept for him--secretly,
for fear of Fortinbras.
A mild and peace-loving monarch
(the land had suffered much
from the campaigns of his
predecessor)
he treated everyone with respect,
both great and small. He avoided
throwing his weight around, and
always,
in affairs of state, sought advice
from serious, seasoned counsellors.

They never said with certainty
why it was his nephew killed him.
He suspected him of murder.
His grounds for this suspicion
were that one night, while walking
the ancient battlements, he saw,
or thought he saw, a ghost,
with whom he held a conversation.
They say the ghost made certain
allegations concerning the king.

It was just his overheated
imagination,
of course, his eyes playing tricks.
(The prince was exceedingly
high-strung.
As a student at Wittenburg, he was
thought
quite deranged by many of his
fellows.)

A few days later, he went
to see his mother about certain
family matters. Suddenly,
in mid-sentence, he lost control
and started howling, screaming
that the ghost stood there in front of
him.
But his mother saw nothing.

The very same day he slew an elderly
nobleman, for no reason whatsoever.
Since in a day or two the prince

was due to sail to England, the king
did all he could to hasten his
departure

and deliver him from harm.
But people were so outraged
by this brutal, senseless murder
that a rebellious mob tried to storm
the palace gates let by Laertes,
son of the victim (a bold
and ambitious youth; in the
confusion,
certain of his friends shouted
"Long live King Laertes!").

When things had quieted down
and the king, thanks to his nephew,
was in his tomb (the prince
had never gone to England--
he'd skipped ship along the way),
a certain Horatio came forward
and tried to clear the prince's name
with all sorts of convoluted stories.
He said the trip to England
was just a ploy: word had been sent
to put the prince to death
(though this was never clearly
proved)

He also spoke of poisoned wine,
the king's handiwork. True,
Laertes said the same thing.
But what if he was lying?
What if he'd been duped?
And when did he say it?
While dying--his mind wandering,
no idea what he was saying.
As for the poisoned swords,
it later turned out the king
had nothing to do with it,
Laertes himself put the poison there.
But when pressed, Horatio
brought in the ghost as witness.
The ghost said this, the ghost said
that.
The ghost did this and that.

So while they may have listened
to what the fellow said, in private
most people mourned the goodly
king,
who with phantasms and fairytales
was basely slain, and flung aside.

Fortinbras, however, who'd had
the kingship fall into his lap,
paid close attention
to every word Horatio said.

Hamlet : Other Dimensions

4.6 HORATIO

Horatio is generally considered an uninteresting if not a completely unimportant character in the play. He speaks some memorable lines but generally his role is expected to be a mere foil to the protagonist. But Horatio appears in nine scenes of the play compared to Ophelia's six. He speaks about half as many more lines as she does and is the most important speaker both at the beginning and at the end of the play. He delivers a long speech in act I, scene i on the preparation of war in Denmark and the long history of discord between Denmark and Norway, vividly recalls the portents of Caesar's fall and how the spirits behave. His second speech is often remembered: "A mote it is to trouble the mind's eye." He speaks minor passages of little significance until the last act when he grabs the poisoned cup from *Hamlet*.

Careful readers of the play have encountered a number of inconsistencies involving Horatio in the play. Horatio comes across to the readers as the primary source of information on the appearance of the old King Hamlet and the likeness of the ghost to him.

Hamlet. Is it not like the king?
Horatio. As thou art to thyself.
 Such was the very armour he had on
 When he th'ambitious Norway combated.
 So frowned he once, when in an angry parle
 He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.
 [I. i. 63-66]

Later he remarks: "I knew your father; these hands are not more like." In reply to Hamlet, he says about the ghost's beard, Horatio says: "It was as I have seen it in his life, / A sable silver'd." Horatio thus gives the impression that Horatio knew the king personally well, at least was well acquainted with the old King Hamlet's personal appearance. But he later says, "I saw him once; a was a goodly king." Suggesting that he had not known him well enough—not well enough to account for all that he has earlier said about him. But the answer lies in not reading "I saw him once; a was a goodly king" literally to mean that he had seen the old King Hamlet only *once*. After all, "once" can also be taken to mean "when": "I saw him once; a was a goodly king" can also be read to mean that when Horatio saw him on a certain occasion, "a was a goodly king."

Hamlet addresses Horatio as a "fellow student" and therefore it is naturally assumed that both Hamlet and Horatio are about the same age. But the later elements in the play do not bear this out. We are told in the gravediggers' scene that the duel between the old King Hamlet and Fortinbras took place thirty years ago, the same year young prince Hamlet was born. So if Horatio was among those who witnessed the duel, he must be appreciably older than Hamlet. But there is no reason to believe that fellow students, even those who are closely acquainted with each other must be of the same age group.

Yet again Horatio is presented as one who is unacquainted with the custom of accompanying royal toasts with cannonade even though he also gives the impression of having been closely familiar with the current Danish political and other matters. There is nothing in the play to suggest that Horatio came from Elsinore. He, in fact, could have come from anywhere in Denmark and may have, thus, been unfamiliar with customs of the royal court and the city life and its ways in Elsinore.

There is yet another matter involving Horatio. We discover that a month elapses between the royal funeral and the royal wedding. Horatio tells Hamlet that he had come to Elsinore for the funeral but they meet only after the royal wedding. Obviously he had remained in Elsinore for the whole month without having once met Hamlet. How is it that they did not meet during this period? But this too appears understandable in view of the fact that during this month Hamlet should have been preoccupied with the funeral of his father and political and other developments in the court.

There is little doubt that Hamlet and Horatio were friends but their friendship need not have been too close as is obvious from the fact that Hamlet uses "you" while addressing him. He uses "thou" when he addresses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. It is only later that he starts using "thou" for Horatio. Of course, when he discovers the truth about his two friends, he uses "you" for Guildenstern in act II, scene ii. There is little doubt that Horatio matters to Shakespeare as he does to Hamlet. Shakespeare draws upon the long-standing tradition of heroes's companions which imparts much significance to such a character.

Hamlet forever addresses his friend by his name—in the second scene Hamlet addresses Horatio by his name five times in about twenty lines. Horatio is portrayed as a scholar and a sceptic. He is a man of much courage: he is not afraid to confront the ghost, though his loyalty to the prince demands that he try and dissuade him from confronting his father ghost. For Shakespeare's audience that was a dangerous enterprise.

Horatio enjoys Hamlet's trust, friendship, and confidence. More than that, Hamlet respects Horatio for some of his personal virtues:

Horatio, thou art e'ven as just a man
As e'er my conversation cop'd withal. . .

Nay Do not think I flatter,
For what advancement may I hope from thee
That no revenue hast but thy god spirits
To feed and clothe thee? Why should be flatter'd? . . .

Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice,
And could of men distinguish her election,
Sh'ath seal'd thee for herself: for thou has been
As one, in suff'ring all that suffers nothing,
A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
Hast ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
Whose blood and judgement are so well commedled
That they are not a pipe for Fortune's ffigure
To sound what stop she pleases. Give me that man
that is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
In my heart's core, ay in my heart of heart,
As I do thee. . . .

[III. ii. 54-55; 56-59; 63-73]

He does come across as a "foil" to Hamlet after the play-within-the-play scene: to Hamlet's feverish questioning, he gives replies that are cool, objective and his demeanour calm. "Didst perceive?" "Very well, my lord." "Upon the talk of the poisoning?" "I did very well note him." Horatio's stoic calm is Hamlet's greatest advantage.

4.7 LET US SUM UP

There are, in addition, many aspects of the play that should be looked into. The opening scenes in the plays of Shakespeare always have a major significance. In *Hamlet* a number of other scenes must be carefully analysed for additional value; the closet scene, the nunnery scene, the prayer scene, the grave-diggers' scene, the dumb-show and the play scene, the fencing scene: these are some of the situations in the play that are imbued with meaning. Similarly, a careful analysis of the characters --other than the most important ones--Hamlet, Claudius, Getrude-- should be done. The characters of Ophelia and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern should be examined. Hamlet's character can be further studied as a scourge or purifying agent or even as a Fool. His madness, his attitude to his mother remarriage, his father's death, his attitude to his father, his character as pulled in the opposing directions of the twin forces of sentimentality and intellectualism, his divided nature, his eloquence, his romantic nature are other angles which provide useful insights into his personality. You might like to look up a reference work such as *Index to Hamlet Studies* [1990]: there are numerous entries listed under appropriate headings which would suggest various approaches to a topic. There are, in fact, hundreds of entries under the heading "Hamlet."

There are many issues that are part of the current critical debate about *Hamlet*: the question of "delay" is one of those issues. It has been on the minds of readers-theatregoers-scholars for longer than two hundred years in the history of *Hamlet* criticism. Hamlet's attitude to Ophelia is also a question that deserves a closer examination. *Hamlet* has been examined in the light of philosophical notions such as appearance and reality, or idealism versus pragmatism. The dominance in *Hamlet* of the ideas of death, decay and corruption, both of the body as well as mind and soul, has caught the readers' attention. *Hamlet* has been studied in comparison with Greek tragedies, in the context of Elizabethan culture, Elizabethan and Jacobean politics and in many other contexts such as current interest in psychoanalytical, literary criticism.

Some of these issues are discussed in greater detail in many books and articles listed in the bibliography appended to the last unit.

4.8 QUESTIONS

1. What are the major themes in *Hamlet's* soliloquies? How do they contribute to the major thematic concerns of the play?
2. Analyse "To be, or not to be" in act III, scene i, for its dramatic significance in the context of the play.
3. Analyse the role played by Osric in the larger context of the Danish politics as reflected in the play.
4. "Claudius rather than *Hamlet* is the protagonist of the play." Do you agree?

UNIT 5 "THE WORLD AS STAGE" : WIDER PERSPECTIVE

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 *King Lear* and *Hamlet*
- 5.3 Reinventing *Hamlet*
- 5.4 Privatisation of *Hamlet*
- 5.5 Universalization
- 5.6 Let us sum up
- 5.7 Questions

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this Unit is to make you look at *Hamlet* from a wider perspective. By the end of this Unit you will be able to see how other cultures respond to *Hamlet* and how it has emerged as a cultural icon and also be able to assess its canonical status.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the first four units we have looked at *Hamlet* with a close-focused eye. We began, in Unit I, with an appreciation of the problems of identifying the text of *Hamlet*: the long gap of four hundred years has surely put us at a disadvantage. We tried to determine the date of the first performance of *Hamlet*, the sources that Shakespeare drew upon to construct the *Hamlet* story, the various versions of the text of the play that have come down to us from various sources. We then went on to appreciate the tools of scholarship and various methodologies such as textual criticism, emendation, historical criticism, new criticism, among others.

In Unit II we attempted to examine the meaning of *Hamlet* in the light of the Elizabethan revenge tradition—a perspective which perhaps brings us closer to seeing *Hamlet* as the Elizabethan audience themselves might have understood and enjoyed the play. We examined ways of determining the meaning of a Shakespearean text, attempted to interpret *Hamlet* as a revenge play, and looked, albeit briefly, into various other interpretations of *Hamlet* that have found favour with scholars as well readers and theatre-goers.

Subsequently, Unit III was devoted to learning how to read *Hamlet* between the lines: the language of Shakespeare, his interest in rhetorical devices and imagery and other related matters. Unit IV focused on *Hamlet*'s soliloquies, the question of

subjectivity in the play as well its general philosophical implications in the context of the early modern literature, and looked at the issues raised by various characters such as Osric, Claudius and Horatio.

Having looked at *Hamlet* at such close quarters, it is time we withdraw ourselves a little and look at *Hamlet* from a wider perspective, in larger contexts. We can look at *Hamlet* in the context of Shakespeare's work. We can assess its canonical status down the centuries, as well as at the present time. We shall take a look at the raging controversies among the lovers of *Hamlet* and the admirers of *King Lear* for allotting the pinnacle of glory to either play. *Hamlet* has emerged as cultural icon in the twentieth century: it has emerged as a cultural icon not only in the Western world but also elsewhere in the world. It might be interesting to look at how other cultures have responded to the mystery and joy of interacting with *Hamlet*. There are *Hamlet* versions in print, on stage, and screen in which *Hamlet* is re-constructed according to the needs, pressures, and the inner urges of those who have dealt with the play as creators and artists and even as readers and theatre- and cine-goers.

5.2 KING LEAR AND HAMLET

R. A. Foakes in his 1993 study *Hamlet 'versus' King Lear* demonstrates how an unprecedented shift took place in the canonical status of *Hamlet* between 1955 and 1965. During the decade *Hamlet* was displaced by *King Lear* as the Bard's greatest tragedy. *Lear* was interpreted "not as a redemptive parable but as bleak version of suffering and despair. The mood of the cold war period with its threat of total nuclear devastation found a new topical meaning in lines such as "Is this promis'd end / Or image of that horror?" [*King Lear*, V.iii.264-5]. In the late twentieth century world controlled by old men obsessed with power, *Lear* echoed the thoughts of men more than did the violent musings of the brooding prince. *Lear* surely speaks to us in more ways than one. But *Hamlet* is surely back at its eminent position. *Hamlet* occupies a significant place in the cultural landscapes all over the world.

No wonder *Hamlet* is described as a "cultural work of formidable status," and "a literary and cultural phenomenon of enormous proportions." Words and phrases in no other play by Shakespeare are so instantly recognisable to anyone anywhere. The language of *Hamlet* can be found to be seeping into the very fabric of the mind or thought everywhere in the world. *Hamlet* is a challenge of immense proportion for any actor/director creative artist as *Hamlet* becomes a milestone in the life of any artist. No other work of Shakespeare has been subjected to such varied and myriad transmutations as *Hamlet*. As Thompson and Taylor argue later in their book:

If a political interpretation of *Hamlet* was topical around 1600, it has also seemed relevant when *Hamlet* has been staged more recently in countries where there has been a real fear of the secret police, such as the former Soviet Union and the eastern Europe ... [p. 30]

5.3 RE-INVENTING HAMLET

Michael Cohen ["On Reading *Hamlet* for the First Time" [*College Literature*, 19.1 (1992):48-59] considers "the desirability and the difficulty of approaching *Hamlet* without preconception, without a kind of 'pre-reading'." He wonders whether it is

possible to find someone who does not come to the play with foreknowledge of the details of the play or whether one can create conditions in which one can read the play for the "first time." Considering the power the play wields as a cultural icon—"the extra textual *Hamlet* has a real, unquenchable and even frightening existence"—it would be a gigantic task to shed, or persuade readers, students and others to shed, the baggage of familiarity, to "unlearn" before one could teach!

There is little doubt that an innocent first reading of *Hamlet* unencumbered by one's prejudices—acquired by being part of a social and cultural context—has always been considered an ideal pre-condition to a fuller and meaningful appreciation of the play. An innocent first reading of the play, the recovery of that pristine experience "uncontaminated

by our subsequent intellectualising" of the play has been considered inescapable to our attaining the truth. And there are a great many believers in the truth of the first impressions: Cohen refers to G. B. Harrison, Thomas Kettle, Karl Werder, A. C. Bradley, G. Wilson Knight, C. S. Lewis, and Maynard Mack, among others.

Attempts have been made to view the question of reading *Hamlet* for the "first" time as a historical problem and to recover what must have been the initial response of the Bard's own audience. Cohen refers to the studies done in this regard by Mushat and McGee. What both the first-impression school of critics as well as the historical-retrieval school of critics seek to do is to offer an *ideal reading* of the play.

That Shakespeare seems to have made an attempt to "make new" (and to take away the predictability of the plot from an existing story) can be easily inferred. Cohen quotes Susan Snyder who believes that Shakespeare did his best to make the plot of *Hamlet* less predictable by throwing a shadow of obscurity, for example, on the queen's guilt and ghost's reliability. In other words "Shakespeare did his part towards making it possible to read or see *Hamlet* for the first time." In other words Shakespeare saw the "merit of reading a play for the first time."

What we have today is "a reading of *Hamlet* . . . overdetermined from the beginning: in the mind of the person reading *Hamlet* for the 'first' time, a culturally determined received extratextual interpretation of *Hamlet* joins a culturally determined way of receiving any text."

But what is the solution to this problem? Cohen locates the genesis of his problem in the scholarly practice of preparing an "editorial" text which the editor always insists is the real thing. We have looked into this question at some length in Unit I. Cohen finds these scholarly reconstructed editions of the play as "social constructions." The current editions of the play are nothing but a modern-type, modern-spelling confections of early printed texts that reflect the individual editors' whims and outdated, unexamined assumptions and prejudices about the early printed texts.

For Cohen the solution lies in the suggestion made by Michael Warren when the latter recommended a text providing "the earliest versions—the First Quarto, the Second Quarto, and the First Folio—in photographic reproduction with their original confusions and corruptions unobscured by the interference of later sophistications . . . the editions get between the student or the scholar and the peculiar originals from which they derive." Editors generally privilege the Second Quarto but almost all editors adopt readings from the other versions of the play, too. The editorial principles themselves, thus, are not consistently followed.

It is in one sense no exaggeration to say that no student reading only a modern edition of the play has read the play yet. A student who reads either all or any one of

the three versions of the play has the best chance of reading the play for the first time. If then it is desirable to be able to have a first reading of the play at all, the solution lies in abandoning the editorially reconstructed textual editions of the play as "given" and allow the students to "compose" their own texts by reading all the three versions in photographic facsimiles. Leaving the student alone to decide what the real *Hamlet* is to offer them the best chance of achieving the first reading of the play.

On the other hand this also is true that admirers of *Hamlet* have sought to make up, in more ways than one, for the unfortunate lack of opportunity of having been there when the play was first staged to taste the flavour of the original! There are *Hamlet* versions in print, on stage, and screen in which *Hamlet* is re-constructed according to the needs, pressures, and the inner urges of those who have dealt with the play as creators and artists and even as readers and theatre- and cine-goers: and these reconstructions are unique, different and new. *Hamlet* has been printed, screened and staged in many different ways to give it a new shape and form and fit the needs of the time and space in which, and for which, it was being reconstructed.

5.4 PRIVATISATION OF HAMLET

Bowdlerised Shakespeare. Thomas Bowdler [1754-1825] was a clergyman and editor. He prepared a four volume edition of the works of Shakespeare in 1807 (which he later expanded to ten volumes in 1818) in which his objective was to offer to the readers an edition "in which nothing is added to the original, but those words and expressions are omitted which cannot with propriety be read in a family." Shakespeare's plays, he felt, had given us "an inexhaustible fund of instruction as well as pleasure which even the severest moralist would not wish to withhold from innocent minds." He thus prepared a version of Shakespeare's plays which could be read in a family in the presence of women and children "unmixed with anything that could raise a blush on the cheek of modesty," or that could be unfit "to read aloud by a gentlemen to a company of ladies." The Bowdlerised Shakespeare, called *The Family Shakespeare*, was widely read throughout the nineteenth century and earned high praise from many including the poet Swinburne who remarked that "no man ever did better service to Shakespeare than the man who made it possible to put him into the hands of intelligent and imaginative children."

Marowitz *Hamlet*. Charles Marowitz, the author, critic, playwright and director, has decided to take *Hamlet* "imprisoned by three-and-a-half centuries of critical appreciation and grand acting," (as the blurb to the Penguin Plays edition [1968] of *The Marowitz Hamlet and The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus* describes it), "boldly, broken it into pieces and reassembled it in a collage which he hopes makes its meaning real again." *Hamlet* is described in the sub-title as "A Collage Version of the Shakespeare's Play." In his introduction to this edition Marowitz says:

Can a play which is well known be reconstructed and redistributed so as to make a new work of art? If *Hamlet* were a precious old vase which shattered into thousand pieces, could one glue the pieces all together into a completely new shape and still retain the spirit of the original. . . . if Shakespeare is our contemporary, why can't we speak to him in our own tone of voice, in our own rhythm about our own concerns? . . . [p.10]

And that is what precisely the play turns out to be: a collage of broken pieces put together again into a shape. And the play opens in the very first scene with:

Hamlet and Fortinbras standing facing each other. After a moment Fortinbras moves down to meet the Captain. Hamlet falls in behind the Captain like soldier in the ranks.

Fortinbras: Go, Captain, from me greet the Danish King . . .

and we have *Hamlet* beginning his famous soliloquy, "How all occasions . . ." at line sixteen of act one, scene one!

The Haunted House *Hamlet*. Tamahous Theatre of Vancouver, Canada presented a version of *Hamlet* in the summer of 1986) which was spread all over a three-storey house. Every room in the house had a scene from *Hamlet* being staged and the audience were free to roam about the three floors, peep into different rooms and piece together what was going on in those rooms and re-construct a *Hamlet* for themselves. The beginning of the play as well as the ending, along with the Players' scene was all that the entire audience shared in common. Otherwise while some watched Claudius in his court, some others went and eavesdropped on the conversation between Horatio and Hamlet or between Polonius and Ophelia. There was the whole house full of goings on that would remind the audience of the play that they know as *Hamlet*, but it was also a new play. The angry outbursts of Hamlet could be heard when Ophelia sat whimpering in one room and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern plotted their own plans in another. The house became a metaphor and the householders revealed themselves, an unhappy lot, each with a tale of his own to tell.

Hamlet was staged outside Britain fairly soon. It reached France in 1745, Russia in 1748 and in America 1759. Within the next hundred it was being staged all over the world: so much so that foreign companies would come to London to perform their versions of *Hamlet*. An Indian company was in London 1877 to stage a performance of *Hamlet*. There are more than half a dozen film versions known to exist: those by Olivier, Kozintsev, Richardson, Bennett, Zeffirelli.

5.5 UNIVERSALIZATION

Hamlet thus appears to speak a universal language. In the West Shakespeare occupies a position of unique centrality. Harold Bloom has recently maintained in *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* [1994], Shakespeare "is the central figure of the Western Canon" [p.2] "... more central to the Western culture than Plato and Aristotle, Kant and Hegel, Heidegger and Wittgenstein." [p. 10] Shakespeare's "aesthetic supremacy has been confirmed by the universal judgement of the four centuries," [p. 23] Bloom tells us. "His powers of assimilation and contamination are unique." [P.3] "We owe to Shakespeare not only our representation of cognition but much of our capacity for cognition." [p. 40]

"The enigma of Shakespeare," Bloom says elsewhere, "is his universalism: Kurusawa's film versions of *Macbeth* and *King Lear* are thoroughly Kurusawa and thoroughly Shakespeare." [p. 524] Bloom then isolates what makes Shakespeare so unique and so universal:

What is the Shakespearean difference that demands Dante, Cervantes, Tolstoy and only a few others as aesthetic companions? To ask the questions is to undertake the quest that is the final aim of literary study, the search for a kind of value that transcends the particular prejudices and needs of societies at fixed points in time. Such a quest is illusory, according to all our

current ideologies . . . *There is substance in Shakespeare's work that prevails and that has proved multicultural, so universally apprehended in all languages as to have established a pragmatic multiculturalism around the globe, one that already far surpasses our politicised fumbblings towards such an ideal. Shakespeare is the centre of the embryo of a world canon, not Western or Eastern and less and less Eurocentric; . . .* [p. 62; emphasis added]

But let us not forget that even in the West Shakespeare's supremacy has not gone unchallenged. Charles Forker, a noted Shakespeare scholar, once remarked to this writer in an interview:

In America black American response to Shakespeare is a racial response. A black American student regards Shakespeare as a white man's cultural baggage. In my classes very few black American students take interest in Shakespeare or even attend classes. When they are educated at higher levels, they respond to Shakespeare much the same manner as educated Indians. But an average educated black American tends to contain his interest in Shakespeare. . . ."

Referring to one of his black American student who did his doctoral work on Shakespeare, Forker said, "But then he is not too popular with his fellow black American students who regard him as having identified with a symbol of white man's oppression." But generally speaking one could say that Shakespeare in America is an off-shoot of British literature and the Bible and Shakespeare are the two most profound and pervasive influences on American literature. Even the Gettysburgh address by Abraham Lincoln, Forker claimed, could be shown to embody these two influences. Not only in Britain, but also in America, Shakespeare is treated not merely as literature or theatre but has become a cultural construct.

Indian failure to respond to deal with Shakespeare at deeper levels is perhaps because English language and literature is associated in the minds of the people with the oppressors which the British colonisers were for a such a long time. In Japan, where they did not have the advantage or the disadvantage of a similar cultural interaction forced upon them, Shakespeare has permeated the life of the Japanese obviously because of a choice deliberately made and consciously cultivated. Thus the cultural and literary scene in Japan is inundated with novels, poems, films and other artistic manifestation derived from, or inspired by, Shakespeare. But Shakespeare came to India early, indeed.

Hamlet in India. *Hamlet's* Indian connection took shape even before the play crossed over to the Indian ocean. The third voyage sponsored by the East India Company to India left England in 1607. One of the three ships, *Hector*, while anchored at Sierra Leone, is reported to have had two performances of *Hamlet* aboard done by the sailors of the ship. The development of the Parsi theatre in the mid-nineteenth century led to an upsurge of interest in Shakespeare in India. The Parsi theatre companies had grown out of amateur theatrical activities organised by the Parsi community, British-run schools and colleges and clubs such as the Elphinstone Club. About this time British administrators were looking for ways and means to create a class of Indians who would share the burden of running the administration of the country at lower levels. The desire to improve the native cultures through the means of British education too was not far from their minds. Even the educated Indian leadership believed in the need for revitalising the Indian culture. The Parsi theatre's attempt to appropriate Shakespeare and package it for the Indian audience received a great deal of encouragement. *Hamlet* in Urdu translation done by Munshi Mehdi Hasan with a new title, *Khune Nahaq*, was

performed in 1898 by Parsi Alfred Company. *Hamlet*, we must remember was not the only play that was being staged by the Parsi theatrical companies. *Othello* and *Macbeth* were frequently staged, as also *Cymbeline*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Winters Tale*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Measure for Measure*. With the advent of the motion pictures, many theatrical companies turned to film-making. Sohrab Modi and his elder brother Rustem filmed their popular play *Hamlet* or *Khoon ka Khoon* in 1935 in which Sohrab and Naseem performed. Another Marathi adaptation of *Hamlet* called *Vikar Vilasit* featured Kamlabai Gokhale at the age of four as a boy in the "play" scene.

I remarked in an earlier unit that *Hamlet* has often found to have acquired a life of its own, a life outside the context of the play. No other text commands instant recognition of such a large number of moments, images, lines and words as *Hamlet* does. Words and phrases from the play have become part of our daily vocabulary. In a recent edition of the *Delhi Statesman*, a news item commenting on the uncertainty surrounding a politician's joining a political party carried the title: "To be or not to be—that is the question Madam!" [March 11, 1998] *Hamlet* exists in translation in many vernacular languages. In fact, there are many translations of *Hamlet* even in Sanskrit!

Another interesting example of an alien culture taking to Shakespeare is South Africa. *Hamlet* was first produced in South Africa in 1799 in Port Elizabeth and has enjoyed continued popularity ever since. Most Shakespeare productions were organised by English speaking whites and one of their objective used to be to ensure the triumph of English culture in a society where the Blacks and the other minorities were considered, under the then prevailing laws, inferior. The first Afrikaans production was staged in 1947 and was received with a great deal of enthusiasm. Afrikaners travelled from all over the country to see the production. So much so that first Afrikaans production was seen as part of the resurgence of Afrikaner nationalism. Afrikaans culture, considered crude and inferior by the English speaking whites, sought to claim for itself the sophistication of a great English playwright by staging *Hamlet* in Afrikaans.

Shakespeare in South Africa thus, always became a showcase for cultural sophistication whenever staged by the English speaking whites, Afrikaners, Coloured, or Indians. The English speaking whites used Shakespeare to maintain their cultural superiority, the Afrikaners sought to challenge this colonial-imperial pride and to validate their own culture. Other minorities groups such as Indian, Coloured and Blacks to claim a place in an equal opportunity, just society. Their access and ability to negotiate a play by Shakespeare was used to prove that they, too, were cultured or sophisticated groups within the South African society.

5.6 LET US SUM UP

Hamlet, thus, should be understood and appreciated not merely as a literary text in the context of the times and the literary conventions in which it was written. Over the last many centuries the world has become a much smaller place and cultural artifacts have tended to break loose from the tyranny of their geographical roots. In the larger context of today a play such as *Hamlet* has been appropriated by many other cultures. It is useful to examine how such diverse and varied readers from diverse and varied cultures have responded to it.

5.7 QUESTIONS

1. *Hamlet* is credited with a unique ability to communicate with diverse audiences in varied countries and cultures all over the world. Which elements of the play make it possible for the play to achieve this universal appeal?
2. Analyse Cohen's views on the significance of reading a play "for the first time" with reference to *Hamlet*.
3. Bowdlerised Shakespeare represents censorship at its worst. Comment.

UNIT 6 CURRENT CRITICAL APPROACHES TO HAMLET

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Introduction
- 6.2 Twentieth Century Approaches upto the Sixties
- 6.3 Modern Literary Theory : Structuralism
- 6.4 Feminism
- 6.5 Marxism
- 6.6 Psychological Criticism
- 6.7 New Literary Theory and *Hamlet*
- 6.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.9 Bibliography

6.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit you will gain a knowledge of

- Critical approaches : Twentieth Century Scene upto the sixties
- New literary theory : major approaches and
- New Literary theory and *Hamlet*.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As professional students of literature post-graduate students must realise that their obligations as students, and as future researchers and scholars, are not confined merely to reading literature, however diligently and meaningfully. The joy of immersing oneself into mankind's endless source of pleasure and instruction is in itself a great reward. But works of literature have to be studied for a fuller appreciation of their meaning and significance, also in the light of the organised body of thought that has developed in response to scholastic attempts to understand and appreciate literature.

Over a period of time an organised body of literature about literature—many schools of thought, approaches and view-points governing literary criticism—of myriad hues and shapes and forms has emerged. Some of the finest minds over the last many centuries have developed the discipline of literary studies and studied

works of literature in the light of intellectual methodologies specially created to make study of literature a rewarding exercise. Even when critics do not consciously belong to a specific school of thought and subscribe to a definite ideology, they certainly speak from a position of reasoned thought.

6.2 TWENTIETH CENTURY APPROACHES UPTO THE SIXTIES

In the twentieth century upto about the sixties literary criticism developed in many more complex ways. René Wellek's monumental study of the twentieth century criticism initiates his study with "symbolism" and goes on to devote a section to the academic critics who functioned within the universities and furthered the discipline of literary studies. He then devotes a chapter each to The Bloomsbury Group and another to The New Romantics. The focus then shifts to the early pioneering work done by T. E. Hulme, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis and the consolidation of the early work into a substantial body of admirable proportions by T. S. Eliot and I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis and the contributors to *Scrutiny*, the widely influential literary journal that Leavis helped found and edited for twenty years, and critics such as F. W. Bateson and William Empson.

Some of these approaches particularly benefited students of Shakespeare. Some other schools of thought and critical approaches, in turn, received a fillip because of their attempts to engage the Shakespearean canon.

Upto the sixties, then, the islands of certainty included a number of notions: That there is an entity called literature as different from what is not literature. Journalistic writing is not literature, for example. Literature was considered an activity specially carried out by those who are competent to do so. The existence of an author was always taken for granted. When we did not know for sure who had created a particular work, a large body of scholarship developed to figure out the identity of the author. Also, scholarship; literary criticism and other related activities were subordinate to literature. An act of critical appreciation was secondary to, next to, even inferior to an act of creativity. Interpreting a work of art constituted the effort of lesser mortals.

Also, there was something ineffable--inexpressible, unutterable, transcendent--about the act of creation. Even Aristotle who gave us the view that art is an imitation of life ended up suggesting a great deal more about the creative faculty than his concept of literature as mimetic activity would otherwise suggest. In section iv of *Poetics*, Aristotle distinguishes between the world of poetry produced through mimetic activity and points out that "... the reason of delight ... is that one is at the same time ... gathering the meaning of things." Aristotle returns to this gathering the meaning of things through mimesis which produces poetry in section IX: "The poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened but the kind of thing that might happen ... The distinction between the historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other writing verse ... it consists really in that one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is more philosophical and graver in import than history, since its statements are of the nature universals whereas those of history are singulars." Poetic imitation thus becomes creative imitation because it is something more than the actual. In section XVII Aristotle gives yet another dimension to the concept of mimesis by defining the nature of the faculty involved in the art: "Hence it is that poetry demands a man with a special gift for it or else with a touch of madness in him."

Again, the concept of mimesis has to be appreciated also in terms of what is said about the structural aspect of a work of art. To Aristotle unity is what gives a poem or a drama its wholeness. And this question is also a question of beauty. In Section VII he says: "... to be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts but also be of certain definite magnitude." So, mimetic activity involves an act of ordering, an act of producing a new organism. Equally significant, in this context, is Aristotle's view that characters should be described as they ought to be, and his insistence that poets need not use language "such as men do use." No wonder the Greeks used the same word for poet [creator=maker=writer] as they used for God. Creativity was special for sure, and depended on the creative abilities of very special, divinely gifted individuals.

"Language such as men do use"—Ben Jonson used the phrase for his choice of diction for his highly mimetic poetic activity—right in the tradition of Aristotle. Also established, as another major concept of Anglo-American tradition of literary critical thought, was the fact that language is a transparent medium—a medium that remains non-interfering totally objective, a kind of container, a paper-bag which receives from the giver what is given and remains available to yield its contents, totally untouched, unimpaired, or modified.

6.3 MODERN LITERARY THEORY STRUCTURALISM

In the sixties a new view of literary critical practice emerged and almost all these literary orthodoxies were subjected to intense scrutiny. The traditional view of the significance of literature, the role of criticism, the value of language, the very notion of an "author," the moral and aesthetic values of literature, and its cultural and political context, literary history, literary biography: all these notions underwent a sea-change. Modern literary theory changed the way we look at literature in more ways than one through, as Rice and Waugh put it, "its unprecedented attack on the grounding assumption of the Anglo-American critical tradition." Let us look at these major departures from the tradition one by one.

Structuralism. One of the most trenchant attack on the literary orthodoxies came from the structuralists who chose as their primary concern "language" in its most general sense. Literature, the followers of structuralism believed, does not reflect reality or life through the medium of language: it is the product of language. In other words, literature is born out of language, not out of the rigours of life or living. The site for literary works to be born out of is not life but words. As I have remarked earlier, the view that that language is a transparent medium—a medium that remains non-interfering, totally objective, a kind of container, a paper-bag which receives from the giver what is given and remains available to yield its contents, totally untouched, unimpaired, or modified—this view of language took a heavy beating. Ferdinand de Saussure [1857-1913] revolutionised thinking by maintaining that words signify objects—the word 'table' refers to an object called 'table' only arbitrarily and such denotation of any external reality has no connection with any inevitably absolute logic. All signs [=words] signify objects [=signifiers] which are arbitrarily so equated.

Saussure observed:

Psychologically our thought—apart from its expression in words—is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. Philosophers and linguists have always agreed in recognizing that without the help of signs we would be unable to

make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula. There are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language.

And:

. the absolutely final law of language is . . . that there is nothing which can ever reside in *one* term, as a direct consequence of the fact that linguistic symbols are unrelated to what they should designate.

Also:

The arbitrary nature of sign explains in turn why the social fact alone can create a linguistic system. The community is necessary if values that owe their existence solely to usage and general acceptance are to be set up. . . .

Saussure also drew a distinction between a specific language (English, Hindi) and a particular sentence, text or speech in a particular language as individually employed by a user, as also between the language as a phenomenon to be identified (or studied) through its growth and development, historically speaking, and a body or system of language existing at any given point in time. Thinkers such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Noam Chomsky and Ronald Barthes contributed to structuralism by adding new dimensions to it. Lévi-Strauss, for instance believed that the way human beings interacted in society (the pattern of interaction or behaviour and other social structures (=institutions) depended on the modes of communication that they employed.

Based on his theory of language Saussure sought to develop a "general science of signs" (Semiology). While structuralism grew out of Saussure's attempts to develop semiotics, it spread its wings far and sought to examine a wide variety of cultural phenomena. More than the "meaning" that Saussure sought to investigate through the opposites in his "general science of signs," the structuralists were more interested in understanding the conventions that make it possible to arrive at "meaning," the conditions that make it possible for a language—and therefore meaning—to arise in the first place, the communicative function of language. They sought to define, describe and understand the system rather than its individual manifestations. The desire to achieve this led Todorov to propose a general grammar or poetics of literature. What the structuralists, then, aimed at was the general principles as embodied in individual works. Form rather than content was given pride of place in this system. And a science of literature was sought to be developed. While a unified system was sought to be developed, texts were treated as manifestation of the system in operation. Works of literature were, thus, divorced from their socio-historical contexts. Structuralism, on the one hand sought to analyse a literary text, and on the other, developed itself as method of understanding the conditions of existence of literature (as a system) and a text (as manifestation of the system in operation).

Structuralism more or less put an end to the notion that literary studies had to exist in some kind of isolated vacuum even within the humanities. Literary studies were now for sure interdisciplinary in nature. Now there was a larger context to put a literary text in. But its supposed antihumanistic, overtly "scientific" attitude to the study of literature and an attempt to create a "science" of literary studies drew great hostility.

wished to point to, not the source of completer, comprehensive meaningful pictures, but to the limits of the ability of discourse and understanding to impose such coherent patterns upon what apparently appeared as chaotic and formless. Deconstruction aims at examining and questioning self-evident truths, and registers its distrust of appropriating all new inexplicable phenomenon into structuralist models of meaningful order.

6.4 FEMINISM

There were, in fact, other pockets of dissatisfaction which led the questioning of the long accepted principles on which the citadel of literature and literary studies rested. Feminism was in the forefront of the demolition squad that sought to change the very texture of literature and literary studies. Endless expressions of the repressed and agonised clarion call for arms included Simone de Beauvoir's who wrote in her highly influential *The Second Sex* (1949):

... humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as autonomous being. ... She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other. ... Woman lack concrete means for organising themselves into a unit which can stand face to face with the correlative unit. They have no past, no history, no religion of their own; and they have no solidarity of work and interest as that of the proletariat. ... The proletariat can propose to massacre the ruling class, and a sufficiently fanatic Jew or Negro might dream of getting sole possession of the atomic bomb and making humanity wholly Jewish or black; but women cannot even dream of exterminating the males. The bond that unites her to her oppressor is not comparable to any other. The division of the sexes is a biological fact, not an event in human history. ...

Simone de Beauvoir sought to analyse the social construction of the gender and drew attention to the distinction between gender and sex. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* focused on the oppression of women under the patriarchal social system and the stereotyping of women's rôle in it. The early feminists in the seventies for example sought to analyse the image of women in cultural representations such as literature. While the development of the feminist view-point developed in many directions, some of its manifestations were the result of uncritical hostility to the rising domination of women in various walks of society.

Let us look at the two widely familiar Indian novels and see how the principles of feminist discourse have been understood by their authors and what kind of application and treatment these principle receive in these two books. Feminism finds itself treated in them rather overtly and deliberately and in many ways rather simply. In Kamala Markandaya's *Nectar in a Sieve*, the protagonist young Rukmani's reactions to the world around her are motivated by a recognition that life is for living and when the going gets tough the human mind must draw its strength from an unambiguous acceptance of the inescapable, and that the desire to escape is anathema. Not to break-up or destroy, but to persist and rebuild is what life is about. Not self-pity but self-esteem is what human existence must derive its sustenance from. Rukmani is endowed with an awareness of the possibilities of life. She sees value in living. For her the act of living is important; life is important. And therefore the question of woman's search for identity, meaning, alienation, or fulfilment in marriage within and without, must be part of the larger question of life and living.

Markandaya's strength lies in the fact that the female protagonist of her novel emerges as a character whose engagement with the inevitable conflicts of life and living do not take the form of vulgar dog-bite-dog situations so familiar from some of the more recent feminist fiction. One can illustrate this point from the other novels.

Shashi Deshpande's feminist heroine in her otherwise admirable and delightful novel, *That Long Silence*, experiences, as the blurb goes, "[d]ifferences with her husband, frustrations in their seventeen year old marriage, disappointment in her two teenage children, claustrophobia [sic] of her childhood." One of the episodes in which the female protagonist seeks to correct the imbalance of her marital life is as follows:

"The keys," he says, holding out his hand.

But the woman, ignoring that importunate hand—it becomes that as he continues to hold it out--takes some keys out of her bag and unlocks the door. Still ignoring him she enters the flat. He continues to stand there for a moment, the hand held out, it now looks like a supplicatory gesture, and then he abruptly follows her in, closing the door firmly behind him.

She goes on to justify her action:

We all do it is part of family life. Rahul refusing to have his bath before meals, Rati refusing to tell us who it was she was talking to on the phone, Appa crushing a raw onion and eating it with relish...

Deshpande's female--therefore discontented, suffering, and oppressed--protagonist does not appear to struggle to find meaning, identity, or even escape from a context that she finds antagonistic. She only has contempt for human relationship. Her contempt for her husband who had "reconciled to failure" in life is motivated by her lack of understanding that to cushion an individual's failure is what a family is all about. She is too narcissistically self-centred to appreciate her contribution to a deteriorating relationship.

Thus even though the universe of *Nectar in a Sieve* is dominated by a protagonist who is a woman and in which the authorial focus is on a woman's interaction--even confrontation--with the world around her, that universe is not artificially narrow, not sequestered, nor an insular world inhabited by insular characters. In their anger to destroy the wrong that the world has done to woman, some of the feminists have tended to ignore the fact that women are and have to be, and inescapably so, part of the same universe. I have quoted Simone de Beauvoir's allusion to this point earlier.

A world-view conditioned by the necessity of its having to be a feminist world view distorts the nature of its objective. Rukmani, in Markandaya's novel, looks at the world around her through the eyes of a human being: for her--and for her creator--her being a woman remains incidental to her being a human being.

In *That Long Silence* woman's search for self, identity, and meaning so easily takes the form of low comedy that genuine, finer issues of life and living are soon forgotten. What distinguishes Rukmani's character in her encounters with the facts of life is that Markandaya proposes to project not the crude encounters of a life of which one gets an inkling from Deshpande's award winning novel. Markandaya's heroine responds to the drama of life in its entirety. She treats life as one, as a whole in which man-woman relationship is only one aspect. Failure to appreciate that life is larger than love, even sex, even man-woman relationship, leads to an inadequate appreciation of the very nature and significance of human predicament.

Shashi Deshpande misjudges the import and significance of the feminist movement and thought. Elaine Showalter, one of the most influential feminist writer, thinker and intellectual, even as she drew attention to the heavy sexist bias in the male dominated liberal tradition, believed that ultimately there is one human nature; human nature encompassing both male and female human nature. There is, thus, a universal human nature. She treated literary tradition as a continuous, unbroken chain despite the feminist interruption of this tradition that the radical feminists sought to achieve. It is interesting that despite Showalter's attempt to chart the course of an alternative female literary tradition, and her belief that the female experience of life had something unique to offer, she was treated by more radical feminists as affirming the orthodox beliefs.

Showalter pointed out how feminist criticism can be divided into two categories: first type is concerned with women as reader: "consumer of male produced literature It probes the ideological assumptions of literary phenomena. Its subjects include the images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and the fissures in male-constructed literary history." The second kind of feminist criticism is concerned with women as writer: "Its subjects include psychodynamics of female creativity, linguistics and the problem of female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career; literary history and, of course, studies of particular writers or works.

Along with Simone de Beauvoir another influential name was that of Virginia Woolf who in *A Room of One's Own* focused on the problems of the woman writer. She concluded that lack of "a room of one's own"—implying a lack of a certain kind of economic and social independence—meant that a woman's ambition in the area of literature remained constrained. The literary forms had developed—"hardened"—in such a manner that they were not suitable for women to deal with or work through.

What feminism does not do, therefore, is to hit back—do unto men what women have been done to: feminism as a movement is not an extended historical revenge play that Shashi Deshpande makes this ideology out to be.

Like the Marxists, the feminists were concerned with the wider social and cultural issues before turning to imaginative literature, and found much to be dissatisfied about. As we can thus see, feminism developed not merely as a movement in literature but developed in many directions. And one thing that they all had, and have, in common for sure was, and is, intensity.

Briefly, feminist literary critics were concerned with women's experience as presented in literature. They questioned the age-old dominant male phallogentric ideologies and male evaluation of literature to the latter's advantage to perpetuate the status quo. They questioned male notions of how women feel and think and act — and by implication are supposed to feel and think and act. In short male prejudice about women and the later stereotyping were attacked and questioned. Women had been politically exploited and suppressed and the balance could be righted by examining the socio-political issues and the political machinations behind these issues.

6.5 MARXISM

It is common knowledge that Marx and Engels chiefly concerned themselves with an appreciation of capitalist theory and mode of production and their primary interests

were political, economical and philosophical. An aesthetic of art, literature or culture was far from their minds, even though Marx always managed to say just the right thing about classical, traditional literatures. But the followers of Marxist thought who were concerned with literature, for instance, adapted "socialist" thought to put together a theory of literature. The Marxist critic therefore responds to a work of literature from the stand-point of Marx's political, economic and philosophical ideas. Class-struggle is uppermost in his mind and socio-historical and socio-economical factors shape the thought that is applied to a work of literature. As J. A. Cuddon points out: "... Socialist realism required a writer ... to be committed to the working class cause of the Party. And it required that literature should be 'progressive' and should display a progressive outlook on society. This necessitated forms of optimism and realism. Moreover, literature should be accessible to masses. ..." And: "Modernism in Western literature was deemed to be decadent ... because it was, among other things, subjective, introverted and introspective and displayed a fragmented vision of the world." The focus of a Marxist critic, therefore, was on the content, rather than form and literary ingenuity was not valued.

6.6 PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM

Ever since the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud has, so to say, dominated the minds of literary critics in more ways than one. The gains from the study and development of psychology as discipline were readily applied to literature. Literature was psychoanalysed for a variety of reasons. It allows for disconnected, syncopated structures and disparate apparently unconnected details in a narrative to be appreciated as part of pattern. Psychological criticism also allows us to read multiple interpretations of a work of art simultaneously. Recent reinvigorated interest in Psychological criticism emerges from its appropriation by feminists and deconstructionists, for example, to reach, and connect literary texts, with political power, female sexuality and the current complex attitudes to language.

6.7 NEW LITERARY THEORY AND HAMLET

How have these developments changed our response to Shakespeare?

Let us start with how the use of feminist political ideology and the resultant literary critical apparatus has influenced our reading of Shakespeare.

We must realize that when a literary ideology is the result of its having been borne out of a political or socio-political ferment, literary-critical responses are naturally conditioned by our appreciation of that ideology. The political agenda and the goal of the feminist ideology was — one has to unfortunately simplify such matters to be able to go any further at all — to fore-ground, to lay bare, what always lay hidden, the suppression of the female self. If the repression, the silence, and the denial of identity to a living human being by virtue of her gender has been the fate of women, the political ideology of the feminist movement was and is to expose, question and then compensate for the wrongs done to women. The literary splinter group of this movement seeks to examine literary texts with a view to performing a similar task: the exposition of the repression, the silence, and the denial of the identity to a living human being by virtue of her gender, as found in literary texts. Women want to be redefined and given true identities, not the identities men have chosen for them. Men make women their points of reference. Women should have the freedom to define themselves as individuals rather than as symbols to suit men's preconceived

notions of what women should stand for, become and contribute to a society that is determined thus, by the needs and desires defined by men. Literary texts in this context were treated as instruments of perpetuating the patriarchal ideologies.

We have had a brief look at how the feminist ideology as part of the literary critical movement as it developed and where it drew its sustenance from. Now we can turn to see how a text like *Hamlet* gains or suffers at the hands of a feminist ideologically committed critic.

One would not think Shakespeare would earn high marks at the hands of feminist ideologues considering how totally conventional – patriarchal – his depiction of, and the resultant inherent attitude to women are. A number of major feminist scholar critics have sought to examine women characters in *Hamlet* and have insisted on drawing inferences that have frequently been at variance with what can be called commonly accepted readings of those characters. There are a number of questions that the feminist critics have focussed on to create a variant, politically correct reading of Gertrude, for example. Rebecca Smith points out that the two major accusations against Gertrude, that she is involved in the murder of her husband, and that she had an adulterous relationship with her present husband even as her first husband was alive can be easily examined in her favour. And yet, Gertrude has always suffered at the hands of a tradition in which men wielded the pen that wrote their fate. Smith points out how the old kind *Hamlet's* Ghost makes no mention of Gertrude's involvement in his murder. He accuses Claudius of taking his life but not Gertrude. One could argue that the Ghost wants his son to avenge his murder but at the same time leave his one-time beloved wife to her conscience and her ill-conceived actions to the judgement of the fate. Again, Gertrude never admits to her guilt on account of her involvement in her husband's murder.

When she reacts to *Hamlet's* aggression—

Such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of innocent love
And sets the blister there, make marriage vows
As false as dicers' oath – O such a deed
(III.IV.40-45)

--her reaction—

Ay me, what act
That roars so loud and thunders in the index?

--underscores her innocence rather than anything else – certainly not any admission of guilt.

Rebecca Smith goes on to examine the second question, the one regarding Gertrude's adulterous behaviour. The Old King Hamlet's ghost describes her as "...so lust.../will sate itself in a celestial bed/And prey on garbage" (I.V.55-7) it would seem to imply that at least the Ghost considers her guilty of an extra-marital relationship. Even Bradley agrees with the ghost: "She did not merely marry a second time with indecent haste: she was false to her husband while he lived." Bradley also goes on to argue: "This is surely the most natural interpretation of the words of the ghost .. coming as they do before his account of the murder."
(Shakespearean Tragedy)

adulterous relationship with her present husband. All the biting innuendoes could be taken to mean that all those morally culpable actions took place after her second marriage. There is a sharp and pointed comparison made between her first and second marriage by the ghost. Also, seen through the eyes of Hamlet, whose father it is who is wronged, at least in the eyes of the son, she would be considered guilty even if she merely rejected her first husband by not mourning long enough for him. *Hamlet* has numerous references to inadequate mourning: Not enough tears are shed for Ophelia, for Polonius, certainly not for old king Hamlet: "...a beast that wants discourse of reason/Would have mourned much longer," (I.II.150-1) *Hamlet* regrets.

Smith insists that *Hamlet's* pain is at the speed with which she married his uncle, disowning his father's name and memory and rejecting the life and time that she spent as his wife and queen.

Lisa Jardine in her analysis of Gertrude's character maintains that *Hamlet's* anger stems from not the immoral haste with which she marries, but the fact that the haste implies lust and it is this that led Gertrude to hastily embrace a man who then became an obstacle between *Hamlet* and his ambition. After *Hamlet*--if he were to remain childless it is now the first-born of Claudius and Gertrude who will inherit the crown. Gertrude then should be viewed in the light of a theme of the play--certainly not one of the central themes of the play but rather on the relative periphery--in which she is portrayed as the target of much anger and aggression, much of which is made to sound moral, self-righteous, and 'well-deserved.'

As you would notice, an attempt to view Gertrude as a victim rather than a guilt-ridden, lustful, murderous woman can present itself as an alternative reading of the play in fully convincing and cogent terms.

6.8 LET US SUM UP

Similarly one can apply other critical approaches that we have briefly discussed above to the play to arrive at conclusions that are totally different from the ones we have studied so far. The post-colonial discourse, for instance, views *Hamlet* as a symbol of the colonial-imperial hegemony and how in a climate marked by new awareness, different cultures such as South Africa, for example, interpret *Hamlet* to suit their new aspirations, as we have discussed in Unit V. The Marxists, the structuralists, the deconstruction devotees, admirers of Freud and Lacan and many more in-between, have given myriad ways of looking at *Hamlet*. And there are other approaches that open up new vistas of thought and emotions leading to versions of *Hamlet* that are so different from each other as *Hamlet* is from *Waiting for Godot*. But does that matter, indeed? After all there is a sense in which *Hamlet* is no different from *Waiting for Godot*.

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4

THE ALCHEMIST : A STUDY GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION TO BLOCK IV

The Alchemist is among the most popular of Ben Jonson's comedies. An all-time favourite of theatre-goers, the play addresses Jacobean England's concerns in such depth that it retains its relevance even today. Jonson's amazing modernity is highlighted in recent reassessments by T.S. Eliot in England and Harry Levin in U.S.A. As aids towards analysis and appreciation, the first two units deal with the dramatic career of Ben Jonson and Jonsonian Comedy; the next three present varying perspectives on the major aspects of the play-structure, performance, stage craft, characterization, language, and critical reception. Questions and Annotation passages appear at the end of each unit. A sample of scholarship in the topics identified is offered at the end of each unit, and indicated in the Selected Bibliography.



at the Abel Druggers
Opposite York buildings in the strand

LONDON

GARRICK AS ABEL DRUGGER
TRADE CARD OF JOHN LUCAS, TOBACCONIST

UNIT 1 THE DRAMATIC CAREER OF BEN JONSON

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Life and Works of Ben Jonson
- 1.3 Chronology
- 1.4 Critical Extracts
- 1.5 Questions
- 1.6 Annotation Passages

1.0 OBJECTIVES

Our primary objective in this Unit is to offer a bird's eye view of i) the major phases in Jonson's dramatic career and ii) landmarks in Jonson's biography so that his achievements as an artist can be examined against the background of his time and his involvement with the theatre and fellow playwrights.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The growth and development of Ben Jonson, the dramatist, has been for a long time treated as following an apriori critical commitment, and therefore, linear in character. A closer study indicates how restless Jonson was as an experimenter and how he repeatedly did not adhere to a formula. He was not trapped by success. His career appears to open a new chapter in the history of English drama because he conferred on comedy a dignity unknown earlier.

1.2 LIFE AND WORKS OF BEN JONSON

For students of British drama, Ben Jonson's career has a special interest partly because he was the first playwright to whom plays mattered, partly because his life is documented in greater detail than that of his fellow playwrights, and finally because his plays seem to bear a direct relationship to developments in the theatre and to the larger social milieu. While others acquiesced in the inferior rank accorded to plays as ephemeral and trivial, Jonson secured for the dramatic art its due place in serious literature. Jonson's inclusion of his plays in the 1616 folio edition of his works is a milestone in the history of the theatre. By thus elevating the status of plays, he probably paved the way for the publication of the first folio of Shakespeare seven years later. From this perspective, Jonson's two seminal observations on Shakespeare, "Would he had blotted a thousand," and "He was not of an age but for all time" may be said to inaugurate a new earnestness in the criticism of drama. Jonson was well known as an epigramatist, grammarian, and a writer of odes, lyrics, and masques. But this account focuses on his plays, and seeks to locate *The Alchemist* against the wider canvas of his life and other plays selectively highlighted in the accompanying 'Chronology'.

Tradition has it that Ben Jonson's ancestors hailed from Scotland. His grand - father is said to have made the move from Carlisle to London and prospered for a while. In

course of time, the family estate was lost and Jonson's father became a clergyman. Jonson himself was born probably in London in 1572 a month or so after his father's death. With the re-marriage of his mother to a bricklayer, Jonson spent most of his childhood in the vicinity of Charing Cross. In the face of his step-father's indifference to academic pursuits, Jonson was fortunate enough to attend a private school in St. Martin's church. Subsequently, in the Westminster School, he came to the notice of his teacher, William Camden, the eminent scholar and antiquary, the first and foremost influence on the boy's career.

Jonson's schooling came to an abrupt end when he was about sixteen. For a while he was apprenticed, against his wishes, in brick laying. Unable to proceed to Oxford or Cambridge, he enrolled himself in the English Expeditionary Force, and fought in Flanders in 1591-92. During a lull in the fighting, he killed in single combat an enemy soldier "in the face of both the camps". Elizabeth Cook brings out the significance of this event: "The scene is an emblem of his life; the giant figure, a party to neither faction, warring alone in the classic manner before his awed onlookers". Jonson's carrying back the weapons of the enemy as *opima spolia* reverberates throughout his many literary battles with rivals and foes. In 1594 he married Anne Lewis who bore him a son and a daughter who died in their infancy.

Like most playwrights of his time, Jonson too seems to have begun his career as an actor and a hack. An early version of *A Tale of a Tub* is often assigned to 1596. In 1597 Jonson figures as "a player" in the theatre manager, Philip Henslowe's *Diary*. In the same year Jonson was sent to jail for his share in Thomas Nashe's "seditious" play, *The Isle of Dogs*. In 1598 the Children of the Chapel performed Jonson's *The Case is Altered*. He probably considered them minor and did not, therefore, include them in his *Works*, but he revised the former play in 1633, four years before his death. Jonson perhaps wrote a few tragedies which are lost, for Francis Meres mentions him as a leading playwright, among "our best for tragedy".

EVERY MAN IN HIS HUMOUR

The year 1598 appears quite eventful. His first major play, *Every Man in his Humour*, was staged by the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Curtain theatre with Shakespeare in the cast. Within a few months he was imprisoned in Newgate, this time for killing the actor Gabriel Spencer in a duel. He turned a papist, and pleading benefit of clergy, escaped hanging after being branded on the thumb. On the curious situation of Ben Jonson in 1598 right after his release, Herford and Simpson comment: "he went out of prison, a recusant, a branded felon, and a pauper, but untouched in life and liberty, inspired by a lofty intellectual ambition, and the author of the best example of genuine comedy yet produced in England".

The original Florentine setting of *Every Man in his Humour* was changed to London and the revised version was published probably in 1605 and the first to be included in Jonson's *works*. The title provides a clue to Jonson's characterization from the perspective of Renaissance physiology. The excess of a 'humour' or a fluid in the body, viz. phlegm, choler, blood and black bile would produce phlegmatic, choleric, sanguine, and melancholic temperaments. Thus was born the Comedy of Humours and unfortunately his reputation as the virtual inventor of this genre eclipsed his many-sided achievement. The humour of the merchant, Kiteley is jealousy which is roused during a visit of his brother-in-law Wellbred and his friends. He suspects them of dishonourable intentions against his wife, and his sister Bridget. Wellbred is accompanied by his servant, Knowell, the mischief monger, Brainworm, his country cousin, Stephen, besides, Bobadil the boastful soldier, and Matthew the town gull. Complications arise through the inordinate concern of Knowell's father for his son's virtue, and the trapping of Kiteley through luring him to discover his wife at the water-house. Through Justice Clement's intervention de-humouring takes place and wedding bells for Knowell and Bridget mark the close of the play.

The Prologue to the revised version of the play succinctly captures a programme for comedy as he envisages it:

**The Dramatic Career
of Ben Jonson**

He rather prays you will be pleas'd to see
One such to-day, as other plays should be;
Where neither chorus wafts you o'er the seas,
Nor creaking throne comes down the boys to please...
But deeds, and language, such as men do use,
And persons such as comedy would choose,
When she would show an image of the times.

The focus is unmistakably not on persons but follies in order to portray contemporary life realistically.

In the very next year, 1599, The Lord Chamberlain's Men produced at the Globe, *Every Man out of his Humour*, "a comical satire" as Jonson describes it, a truer and more forthright expression of his views on the nature and function of comedy and humour. Set in the "Fortunate Island", the play castigates the dramatis personae explicitly through a prefatory note on "the characters of the persons", Jonson, suspecting that John Marston had ridiculed him in the sketch of the poet-philosopher, Chrisoganus in *Histrion-Mastix* parodied with characteristic deftness Marston's affectations in speech. This incidental portrait marked the beginning of the War of the Theatres which raged for the next three years, and Jonson's further skirmishes are celebrated in *Cynthia's Revels* and *The Poetaster*. To *Every Man out of his Humour*, Marston responded with an unflattering portrait of Jonson as Brabant Senior in his *Jack Drum's Entertainment*.

In *Cynthia's Revels* staged by the Children of the Chapel in 1601, Jonson as Crites, attacked Marston, and for some obscure reason Thomas Dekker too as Anaides and Hedon respectively. The Queen's participation was hinted in the early production by the role of Cynthia. Marston, in turn, portrayed Jonson as the vainglorious Lampatho Doria in *What you will*.

Jonson countered this attack with *The Poetaster* produced in the same year again by the Children of the Chapel. In the self-portrait as Horace, he poured ridicule on Marston and Dekker through the figures of Crispinus and Demetrius. The former was given an emetic so that he could throw up all his recondite vocabulary. Dekker exposed Jonson's arrogance and peculiarities of appearance in *Satiromastix or the Unmasking of the Humorous Poet* (1602). For his part Jonson appended "The Apologetical Dialogue" to the *Poetaster*, not an expression of regret, much less a holding out of an olive branch.

The War of the Theatres, "*Poetomachia*" as Dekker called it, made the children's companies so popular in the city that adult groups had to seek a living in the countryside. Shakespeare takes note of this recent innovation:

... there is, sir, an eyrie of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question and are most tyrannically clapped for't. These are now the fashion, and so berattle the common stages (*Hamlet*, II.ii).

The fame of Jonson became a settled thing. As M.C. Bradbrook sums up, : "The War established Jonson's reputation among the judicious: hence forth he was 'dramaticorum sut sacculi facile princeps'".

In spite of this success, Jonson found himself out of favour with the players, playwright friends and some influential people. In poverty, and possibly because of domestic discord, he left home to be with Sir Robert Townshend and later on with Esme Stewart, Lord of Aubigny. He occupied himself with epigrams and hack work on *The Spanish Tragedy*. In 1603 he turned his hand to tragedy for the reasons

... since the Comick muse
Hath prou'd so ominous to me, I will trie
If Tragedie will have a more kind aspect.

The result was *Sejanus* produced by the King's Men in 1603. This scholarly and faithful re-creation of Roman life and history proved unpopular and was hissed off the stage. In the context of the conspiracy of Essex, he was summoned to appear before the Privy Council on suspicion of dangerous satire but was let off. But fortunately for Jonson, he was called upon to compose a masque in 1604 by royal favour. This launched him on a new phase of his career till the end of King James's reign.

Jonson returned to the public stage with *Eastward Ho!* collaborating with Chapman and Marston. For his share in poking fun at the Scots, they were hauled up by the authorities, and were released after a brief period of imprisonment. Jonson's voluntary surrender before the court has been noted by his biographers. His integrity was such that with the wiping away of suspicion, he was restored to favour. In 1605 he was commissioned to discover the conspirators behind the Gunpowder Plot, though he remained a Catholic.

VOLPONE

Volpone, produced by the Kings's Men at the Globe in 1606, marks a turning point in Jonson's personal and professional fortunes. During the next ten years, he wrote his "mature comedies", according to most critics. To this period belong *Epicoene*, or *the Silent Woman*, (1609), *The Alchemist* (1610) *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), the monumental *Works* (1616), and the second tragedy *Catiline* (1611).

The action of *Volpone or the Fox* is set in the 'home' of corruption, Italy. The play is about cheating people, a game in which the magnifico, Volpone, pretends to be on his deathbed in order to extract gifts from the hopefuls for his legacy. His servant Mosca (the fly) lures the lawyer Volpone (the vulture) the merchant Corvino (the raven) and others.

Greed is the master theme of *Volpone*, a power degrading man and making him sink to the sub-human level. The animal symbolism lends the characters a fierce energy through a reversal of the fabliaux mode. For the dominant notes of Jacobean London affluence and acquisitiveness, Jonson finds a parallel in Renaissance Venice. Volpone's feigning ironically mirrors a deep sickness, matched by the depravity of the gulls, notably that of the merchant willing to prostitute his wife. Even more impressive than Volpone's apostrophe to gold, and his sensuality is his irresistible love of acting, of dissimulation. The English visitors, Sir Politick – would – be and his Fine Madame provide the necessary foil. The element of spectacle is exploited theatrically. In investing eccentricity with a rare intensity Jonson succeeds in depicting characters driven by an obsession.

After a lapse of three years Jonson returned to the stage with his *Epicoene*, acted by the Children of the Queen's Revels in 1609. The noise-hating miser, Morose is on the lookout for a silent woman as his wife. Assisted by his nephew, Sir Dauphine, he does succeed but very briefly. His wife, after marriage, turns out to be a loud mouthed chatterer, and worse, a boy who is passed off as the bride. With the restoration of the inheritance to his nephew, Morose obtains his release. Dryden chose this play as the model of excellence in his "Examen" and the play has been, since then, a favourite with theatre goers.

THE ALCHEMIST

From the monomaniacs of these two plays, Jonson turns to sketching an acquisitive society in *The Alchemist* produced by the King's Men in the year of the plague, 1610

Chicanery is the effect rather than the cause of the mischief in this comedy. Alchemy is employed as a metaphor for man's proneness to be gulled. Many critics consider this his best, if not the best in the English language. Lovewit, the master is away in the country, the servant, Captain Face colludes with Subtle, the quack, and Dol Common, the whore, to defraud a number of gulls through promising to fulfil their fond hopes for wealth, youth, business success, love and so on. The sudden return of Lovewit forces the cheats to flee, abandoning their earnings. Jonson's comic realism, whether it be in the varied jargon of diverse professions, the evocation of the Blackfriars neighbourhood, the mastery of the alchemical know-how, or the numerous topical references, locates the play firmly in Jacobean London. Yet its universal appeal, despite occasional obscurity of phrase, has remained unrivalled. The morality of Lovewit's appropriating Dame Pliant to himself, the resolution of the play's action, has been much debated. The play's enormous and enduring success in the theatre is indisputable. The unforced economy of the action, the immense improvisation demanded of the actors and the sustained threat of exposure contribute to its power on the stage.

At the pinnacle of his fame, Jonson decided to return to tragedy, a genre in which he apparently failed earlier. *Catiline* was acted by the King's Men in 1611, and was a failure on the stage. Most of the next year, Jonson spent in Europe as tutor to Raleigh's son.

BARTHOLOMEW FAIR

In 1614, *Bartholomew Fair* was performed by the Lady Elizabeth's Men at the Hope. More loosely structured than his earlier comedies, the wide canvas of the play reflects a greater variety of characters and motives. While in *The Alchemist* Jonson seems to be more on the side of the cheats than that of the gulls, a greater balance is evident in *Bartholomew Fair*. The presiding deity, so to say, of the Fair, Ursula, the Pig Woman, errs on the side of frailty and has a touch of Falstaff about her. Another contrasting feature is that while in *The Alchemist* the impression of many characters is an illusion produced by the cheats, the cast of *Bartholomew Fair* is quite large befitting its social realism. The rogues here have been aptly compared to Hogarth's in vivacity, especially the horse-trader Knockhoun, the prostitute aptly named Punk Alice, and the pickpocket Edgeworth. The play set the tone for the Restoration Comedy of Manners.

The publication of Jonson's *Works* in the folio edition of 1616 is considered a milestone in English drama. Jonson left out his ventures prior to *Every Man out of his Humour* and chose for some mysterious reason not to include *Bartholomew Fair* also. Among the plays in this edition are: *Every Man out of his Humour*, *Cynthia's Revels*, *The Poetaster*, *Sejanus*, *Volpone*, *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist*, and *Catiline*. The revision, often an expansion of some of the plays, reflects Jonson's scrupulousness in matters of detail.

Soon after the publication of his *Works*, the King's Men produced *The Devil is an Ass*. This play along with *The Staple of News* (1626), *The Magnetic Lady* (1632), and *A Tale of a Tub* (1633) is ranked by Dryden and a number of critics among Jonson's "dotages". Recent critical evaluations of these plays have, however, highlighted Jonson's refusal to follow the beaten track and the surprising freshness of the pastoral and nostalgic elements in the late plays.

Jonson had already been awarded a pension of 100 marks annually by King James. As F.H. Mares notes, "In the first decade of James's reign begins the transformation of Asper ---- into 'Father Ben', the corpulent literary dictator, compelling the admiration of the best brains in London at a love-feast in the Devil tavern". Jonson undertook a walking tour of Scotland in 1618, and stayed briefly with William Drummond of Hawthornden who recorded his conversation, a not totally reliable record. On his return to England he was awarded an honorary M.A. degree by Oxford University, a gesture unparalleled till today. Herford and Simpson rightly

observe: "It was a tribute, rare in the history of the University before or since, to a great scholar-poet who owed nothing to Universities".

The decline in Jonson's fortunes is evident in a series of calamities. In 1623, a fire reduced to ashes the books and manuscripts in his personal library. Five years later, he suffered a stroke and was paralysed. Still, he continued to write. When he died on August 6, 1637, the inscription on his tomb, "O rare Ben Jonson!" captures the popular image of the man and the playwright, more than any long-winded tribute.

Jonson's career spanning the closing years of Queen Elizabeth's reign and those of Charles I has been stereotyped as a linear development till 1616, followed by a decline. Anne Barton challenges this theory and rejects the alleged Jonsonian consistency as too simplistic an explanation. She underscores Jonson's flair for creative adventure, his rare sensitivity to the shifting pressures of his time and his deliberate refusal to be trapped by success into repeating a "formula". Ranking *Volpone*, *Epicoene*, *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair* among Jonson's great works, she undertakes a revaluation of his later plays and notes in them a return in depth to older forms and a new pervasive tone of nostalgia. The dotage-theory, she argues, does not account for the freshness of the unfinished *The Sad Shepherd*. Jonson's enormous creativity in the non-dramatic verse of this period is cited as further justification.

David Riggs views Jonson the man as Rabelaisian in egotism, ever compulsively driven by persistently neurotic impulses. He cites as evidence Jonson's boasts, duels and imprisonment. In a striking contrast is the artist, ever in control of method and material, employing humour and the act of writing primarily for their therapeutic function. Recent assessments including those of Marquette Chute, Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth and others endorse Anne Barton's re-mapping of the pattern of Jonson's dramatic career.

1.3 CHRONOLOGY

1572 (June 11)	Birth of Ben Jonson
1572	Mother's marriage to a brick layer Favourite pupil of William Camden
1588	Apprentice bricklayer
1591	Enrolment in English Expeditionary Force
1594	Marries Anne Lewis
1596	Draft of <i>A Tale of a Tub</i>
1597	Mentioned by Henslowe Collaboration on <i>The Isle of Dogs</i> Imprisonment
1598	<i>The Case is Altered</i> performed by the Children of the Chapel. <i>Every Man in his Humour</i> performed by the Lord Chamberlain's <i>Men at the Curtain</i> Hailed as "The best for Tragedy" by Francis Meres. Killing Gabriel Spencer Imprisonment Claiming benefit of clergy Becomes a Catholic
1599	<i>Every Man out of his Humour</i> performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men at the Globe
1600	<i>Cynthia's Revels</i> performed by the Children of the Chapel
1601	<i>Poetaster</i> performed by the Children of the Chapel
1602	Living in the home of Lord Townshend

1603	<i>Sejanus</i> performed by the King's Men Charge of Treason – imprisonment.
1604	Invitation to write a Masque <i>Eastward Ho!</i> in collaboration with Chapman and Marston, performed by the Queen's Revels at the Blackfriars
1605	Revised version of <i>Every Man in his Humour</i> acted by the King's Men
1606	<i>Volpone</i> acted by the King's Men at the Globe.
1609	<i>Epicoene</i> acted by the Children of the Queen's Revels
1610	<i>The Alchemist</i> acted by the King's Men Return to the Anglican Church
1611	Catiline acted by the King's Men
1612	Continental tour as tutor to Raleigh's son
1614	<i>Bartholomew Fair</i> performed by the Lady Elizabeth's Men
1616	<i>Works</i> – the folio edition <i>The Devil is an Ass</i> performed by the King's Men at the Blackfriars.
1618-19	Walking tour to Scotland.
1619	Honorary Master of Arts – Oxford University
1623	Library destroyed in a fire Virtual Poet Laureate "Sons of Ben" like Robert Herrick meet in the Apollo Room of the inn, The Devil and St. Dunstan Death of King James Return to public stage under Charles I
1626	<i>The Staple of News</i> performed by the King's Men at the Blackfriars.
1628	Paralysis
1629	<i>The New Inn</i> acted by the King's Men at the Blackfriars
1632	<i>The Magnetic Lady</i> acted by the King's Men at the Blackfriars
1633	<i>A Tale of a Tub</i> , revised and acted by the Queen's Men
1637	Death – burial in Westminster Abbey.

1.4 CRITICAL EXTRACTS

M.C. BRADBROOK

The introduction to *Every Man out of his Humour*, his first manifesto, contains a definition of his new type of comedy, and a justification of his departure from classical models. At the same time he sought constantly to defend his Art, so that the introductions, epilogues and incidental comments in his plays furnish the most complete theory of the drama which the age produced, based not upon scholastic arguments but upon practical experience.

CLAUDE J. SUMMERS AND TED-LARRY PEBWORTH

Although his final plays were neither popular nor critical successes, they represent continued experimentation with theatrical form. When he died, he left an unfinished manuscript of a pastoral drama, *The Sad Shepherd*, perhaps his most lyrical dramatic composition. He continued writing non dramatic poetry in his last years, too, and his final poems show no great diminution of poetic power. Perhaps most remarkably, they avoid despair and sentimentality, embracing instead quiet dignity and gentle humor.

RENU JUNEJA

Jonson began with the traditional New Comedy, largely affirmative in its conclusion, moved to satire, thence to irony, and finally concluded with comedies which have

rich symbolic and ritualistic overtones....Insofar as Jonson's world view is consistent, his norms of judgement constant, his universe may be said to be unchanging.

HERFORD AND SIMPSON

But no earlier British poet had so truly reigned, or been commemorated at his passing, with honours so signal, on purely literary grounds, as Jonson... A square flag of blue marble was alone to be seen, rudely inscribed with the legend: 'O rare Ben Jonson'... That brief vernacular ejaculation, so naively human in its contrast with the sententious Latin epitaphs around conveys the impression made by Jonson upon his age more vividly than any formal obituary... The Jacobean world saw in this doughty champion of unpopular traditions the most incisive individual personality, the most commanding personal force which had, within its memory, mingled in the world of letters. For it, he was not the assertor of commonplace, but the 'rare', the incomparable, the unique, Ben Jonson.

F. H. MARES (1967)

He was a public figure, a man of strong (sometimes overbearing) character, arrogant, opinionated, disputatious, convivial, but of great courage, honesty, and integrity, and surprising tenderness and delicacy of feeling... This independence is like Jonson's own, who served the court for years without ever seriously compromising his own integrity, who could beg from great men or dedicate to great ladies in a tone that never allows compliment to decline into flattery. When Jonson prepared his text for the printer of the folio he did not write in all the details of stage-business, especially if they were clear from the dialogue... It is the assumption of this edition that the 1616 folio represents Jonson's considered intention...

D.H. CRAIG

In the early part of his career, when he was establishing himself as a writer of humorous comedies and as the English Horace, his emphasis is positive, stressing the reforming and innovative aspects of his drama. In 1605, in his *Volpone* prologue Jonson defines his allegiance to classicism negatively, as an act of opposition to contemporary popular culture... The failure of *Sejanus* on stage in 1605 was the key event in this development it.

D.V.K. RAGHAVACHARYULU

Ben Jonson's famed erudition was thus organic and functional to his world – view of which all his work as a dramatist was paradigmatic. In his understanding of tradition and individuality, Ben Jonson is astoundingly modern, which explains the recent sea-change in his critical reception, long overshadowed by the Shakespeare Goliath.

1.5 QUESTIONS

1. What was Jonson's contribution to the status of plays in England?
2. Write notes on : a) Comedy of Humours, b) The War of the Theatres.
3. Sketch the personality of Jonson.
4. Why did so many of Jonson's plays, in spite of their success, involve him in controversies ?
5. Comment on Jonson's stated goals in the realm of comedy.
6. What are the aspects of Jacobean society depicted in Jonson's plays ?
7. Identify the concerns of Jonson's mature comedies.
8. How was Jonson treated by men of letters in his last days?

9. Point out the nature of recent assessments of Jonson's career.
10. What was Jonson's contribution to the status of plays in England?

1.6 ANNOTATION PASSAGES

Annotate the following passages with reference to context.

- i) But I shall put you in mind, sir, at Pie Corner,
Taking your meal of stem in from cooks' stalls,
Where, like the father of hunger, you did walk
Piteously costive, with your pinched-horn nose,
And your complexion of the Roman wash,
Stuck full of black and melancholic worms,
Like powder-corns shot at the artillery yard.
- ii) When all your alchemy and your algebra,
Your minerals, vegetals, and animals,
Your conjuring, cozening, and your dozen of trades,
Could not relieve your corpse with so much linen
Would make you tinder, but to see a fire,
I ga' you count'nance, credit for your coals,
Your stills, your glasses, your materials,
Built you a furnace, drew you customers,
Advanced all your black arts; lent you, beside,
A house to practise in —
- iii) No, your clothes.
Thou vermin, have I ta'en thee out of dung,
So poor, so wretched, when no living thing
Would keep thee company but a spider or worse?
Raised thee from brooms and dust and watering pots?
Sublimed thee and exalted thee and fixed thee
I' the third region, called our state of grace?
Wrought thee to spirit, to quintessence, with pains
Would twice have won me the philosophers' work?
Put thee in words and fashion? Made thee fit
For more than ordinary fellowships?
- iv) Nor any melancholic underscribe,
Shall tell the Vicar; but a special gentle,
That is the heir to forty marks a year,
Consorts with the small poets of the time,
Is the sole hope of his old grandmother,
That knows the law, and writes you six fair hands,
Is a fine clerk, and has his ciphering perfect,
Will take his oath, o' the Greek Testament,
If need be, in his pocket, and can court
His mistress out of Ovid.
- vi) The spirits of dead Holland, living Issac,^o
You'd swear were in him; such a vigorous luck
As cannot be resisted. 'Slight, he'll put
Six o' your gallants to a cloak, indeed.^o

Besides, the Queen of Fairy does not rise
Till it be noon.

- viii) This is my friend, Abel, an honest fellow
He lets me have good tobacco, and he does not
Sophisticate it with sack-lees or oil,
Nor washes it in muscadell and grains,
Nor buries it in gravel underground,
Wrapped up in greasy leather or pissed clouts,^o
But keeps it in fine lily-pots, that opened,
Smell like conserve of roses, or French beans.^o
He has his maple block, his silver tongs,
Winchester pipes, and fire of juniper.^o
A neat, spruce, honest fellow, and no goldsmith.^o
- ix) By a rule, Cap... n,
In metoposcopy, which I do work by,
A certain star i'the forehead, which you see not.
Your chestnut or your olive-coloured face
Does never fail, and your long ear doth promise
I knew't by certain spots too, in his teeth,
And on the nail of his mercurial finger.
- x) The thumb, in chiromany, we give Venus;
The forefinger to Jove; the midst, to Saturn;
The ring to Sol; the least, to Mercury:
Who was the lord, sir, of his horoscope,
His house of life being Libra, which foreshowed,^o
He should be a merchant, and should trade with balance.
- xi) ...There is a ship now, coming from Ormus,^o
That shall yield him such a commodity
Of drugs — This is the west, and this the south?
- xii) Why, now, you smoky persecuter of nature!
Now do you see that something's to be done,
Besides your beech-coal and your corsive waters,
Your crosslets, crucibles, and cucurbites?
You must have stuff brought home to you to work on?
- xiii) This is the day I am to perfect for him
The *magisterium*, our great work, the stone,^o
And yield it, made, into his hands: of which
He has this month talked as he were possessed.
And now he's dealing pieces on't away.
- xiv) Methinks I see him entering ordinaries,
Dispensing for the pox; and plaguy houses,
Reaching his dose; walking Moorfields for lepers;^o
And offering citizens' wives pomander-bracelets^o
As his preservative, made of the elixir;
Searching the spittle, to make old bawds young;
And the highways for beggars to make rich.
- xv) He will make
Nature ashamed of her long sleep, when art,
Who's but a stepdame, shall do more than she,
In her best love to mankind, ever could.
If his dream last he'll turn the age to gold

UNIT 2 JONSONIAN COMEDY AND *THE ALCHEMIST*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Jonsonian Comedy and *The Alchemist*
- 2.3 Critical Extracts
- 2.4 Questions
- 2.5 Annotation Passages

2.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit an attempt is made to (1) trace the origins of English comedy, a divided stream, (2) contrast Shakespearian and Jonsonian comedy, (3) identify the rival traditions of acting and (4) sketch the interaction between the native morality tradition and the classical comic structure.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The appreciation of Jonsonian comedy has been complicated by (1) confining his contribution to the virtual invention of the genre, Comedy of Humours, (2) undue emphasis on his classical erudition and (3) alleging the want of a Shakespearian spontaneity of spirit. Moreover, Jonson's occasional observations on the nature and function of comedy, dispersed, as they are, throughout his plays do not offer a consistent conception of comedy except through an over simplification. Jonson's defining of the impact of his Satiric comedy is further highlighted through attention to the Prologue to *The Alchemist*. Jonsonian Comedy is examined in its literary social and economic dimensions.

2.2 JONSONIAN COMEDY AND *THE ALCHEMIST*

The appreciation of Jonsonian comedy is hindered by the misconceptions about his contribution. On account of the enormous popularity and the notoriety following the production of *Every Man in His Humour* and *Every Man out of His Humour*, he has been dubbed as the virtual inventor of the new genre, the Comedy of Humours. In formulating this form of comedy, Jonson was not attempting to validate his characterization by reference to Renaissance notions of physiology. He was rephrasing the function of comedy in terms acceptable, to the hostile Puritans. By underscoring the therapeutic character of de-humouring, and by re-directing attacks from persons towards follies and foibles, Jonson sought for his comic experiments a *raison d'être*. The point is well raised by Harry Levin when he observes: "The induction to *Every Man Out of His Humour* sets forth the full argument for comedy as a social purgative. It is perhaps as relevant to Jonson's work as psychoanalysis is to the dramas of Eugene O'Neill."

A literal interpretation of the theory behind the Comedy of Humours would also result in the distortion of Jonson's characters. In spite of the mode of caricature Jonson adopts, his characters possess an astonishing range of distinguishing traits and

an undeniable vitality. Narrowly conceived, the Comedy of Humours affords scope only for four characters in four moulds. Bobadil and Kiteley, Brainworm and Wellbred defy stereotyping. Jonson employs "humour" to mean a fad, a fashion, an affectation as well.

Often Jonson's erudition is considered a liability. The star pupil of the eminent scholar, William Camden, had no rivals for learning among the writers of his time. For some mysterious reason, superior knowledge has been held to be the enemy of creative spontaneity. The failure of *Sejanus* is instructive, for this is wrongly attributed to Jonson's fidelity to Roman sources. All claims to originality are summarily dismissed primarily because of Jonson's scholarship. Even Dryden is guilty on this count. L.C. Knights observes: "Dryden said of him (Jonson) that he was a learned plagiarist of all the ancients: 'you track him everywhere in their snow'. But this, the common view, violently distorts the sense in which Jonson is 'traditional'. It completely hides the native springs of his vitality".

By sheer bulk, Jonson's observations on comedy dispersed through his numerous prologues, epilogues, and debates in the course of the War of the Theatres, present a formidable critical corpus. By nature occasional, their significance has a specificity, and taken out of context they tend to appear inconsistent and self-contradictory. This is not to deny him a critical stance of his own which has undergone creative mutations over a span of more than three decades. For instance, the mimetic and pragmatic aspects of Jonson's comic theory can be fallaciously made out to be polar opposites.

One way of defining Jonsonian comedy is to contrast it with Shakespearian Comedy. The dramatic world of Jonson is peopled by citizens, and in the absence of loving relationships it seems to deserve and demand "a harsh ethic". On the other hand, in Shakespeare there is greater interaction among men and women of all walks and stations of life, and the spirit of understanding appears to be pervasive. Hardly any of Shakespeare's creations is "incapable of a generous impulse". Hence, Shakespearian comedy has been labelled as sweet and romantic, and Jonsonian comedy as bitter and satiric. Much mischief was caused by linking the hues of the world of the plays to the temperament of the playwright.

Rightly understood, neither Shakespeare nor Jonson was offering through his dramatic world clues to his temperament. Both were adopting earlier traditions, the Medieval and the Renaissance versions of comedy were derived ultimately from the Latin grammarians of the fourth century. Making up for the paucity of theories of comedy, they viewed tragedy as an illuminating foil. Since tragedy dealt with kings and generals and portrayed a movement from happiness to calamity, comedy had to be peopled by private people and trace the movement from wretchedness to happiness. Unlike in tragedy, life in comedy is not to be dreaded but embraced. Vices and follies are to be punished. Thus, elements of the Romantic comedy and of the Satiric co-existed originally. The Romantic elements surfaced early, i.e. in the Middle Ages; The Satiric lay underground for a long time to become prominent only in the Renaissance, and Jonsonian comedy is a characteristically Renaissance manifestation. It is Shakespeare's Romantic Comedy which harks back to the medieval times, to genial Chaucer. The difference between the two traditions is quite radical.

When Asper, a spokesman for Jonson, states his aim in the introduction to *Every Man in His Humour*,

Well I will scourge those apes:
And to those courteous eyes oppose a mirror,
As large as is the stage, whereon we act:
Where they shall see the time's deformity
Anatomiz'd in every nerve, and sinew,
With constant courage, and contempt of fear

he echoes the views of Renaissance theorists like George Whetstone: "For by the reward of the good, the good are encouraged in well doing: and with the scourge of the lewd, the lewd are feared from evil attempts;" and Sir Philip Sidney, "Comedy is an imitation of the common errors of our life, which he represents in the most ridiculous and scornful sort may be; so as it is impossible that any beholder can be content to be such a one."

In tune with its quinessential corrective function, Jonsonian comedy deals with contemporary movements, real life figures and pastimes. When L.C. Knights remarks, "Of the dramatists handling social themes Jonson is undoubtedly the greatest", he has in mind the gulls and the cheats of a society governed by the acquisitive impulse. Though it is true that the gulls call into being the cheats, and that Jonson's satire is directed against the cozeners, the individuals drawn from varied occupations really present a cross-section of society. A pageant of vices is transformed into an all devouring organism, and both gulls and cozeners are unified by their ruthless individualism and obsessive acquisitiveness. The clerk and the churchman, the shopkeeper and the countryman are welded by their greed and lust.

As a keen observer of nascent capitalism, Jonson documented social change, notably the rise of the new merchant class, dispossessing traditional landed aristocracy. Jonson's concern for realism for "deeds and language such as men do use" is well known. In portraying contemporary manners, he was not content to provide a mere reflection. For Jonson, imitation and mirroring involved praise and blame, i.e. taking a moral stand. The playwright did not adopt the moral standard of the emerging world of entrepreneurs, nor did he express a merely personal code. His standards of moral judgement were indeed from an earlier era, summed up in M.C. Brabrook's phrase "the traditional economic morality inherited from the Middle Ages".

The opening note of the play, the involuntary and habitual projection of three tiers of self-images by the cozening triumvirate, Subtle, Face and Dol constitutes a parody of leading social institutions: in their "republic", Subtle is the "sovereign," Face, the "general" and Dol their "cinque port" and before they call a truce, they are but a cur, a mastiff, and a bitch, and alternately, "Bawd!", "Cowherd!", "Conjuror!", "Cutpurse!" and "Witch!" The abuses hurled at each other and the ranks they assign themselves illustrate the range of roles they can play.

Since the playwright's relationship with the players is a vital dimension of the former's career, Jonsonian comedy had to interact significantly with acting styles of the time. There was the tradition of the Revels, which included mimes and spectacle, and brought actors and audience close to one another. There was also the courtly, academic, learned tradition heavily leaning towards rhetoric, and declamation on moral themes. The former lacked shape and structure for it presented isolated scenes loosely connected. The latter lacked flexibility and spontaneity. Satiric drama, Jonsonian drama called for the greatest interaction between actors and audience, and flourished however briefly because of a fortuitous circumstance -- "The momentary fusion of the popular and learned traditions, the temporary interaction of two modes which were not compatible."

The nature and function of Jonsonian comedy was enunciated in Cicero's dictum cited in the introduction to *Every Man Out of His Humour*: "Comedy is an imitation of life, a mirror of manners and an image of truth". Imitation involved interpretation, mirroring some degree of evaluation, and imaging a certain measure of permanence. Jonsonian comedy because of its focus on the momentous changes of his time makes us aware of "a great reorientation of attitude", which according to L.C. Knights, anticipates our own anxieties and concerns. It is the double focus of Jonsonian comedy on things as they are and as they ought to be, rather than his scholarship, which is of the essence of his 'classicism'.

In the prologue to *The Alchemist*, Johnson envisages "fair correctives" beyond "The rage / Or spleen of comic writers." The foibles of the contemporary scene are to be presented in their essence, their universal dimension with such realism that individuals may not be able to recognise themselves.

If there be any, that will sit so nigh
Unto the stream, to look what it doth run,
They shall find things, they'd think, or wish, were done,
They are so natural follies, but so shown,
As even the doers may see, and yet not own.

Correction is to be brought about not by exposure to consequences of specific manners, vices, or humours, but by the ineffable impact of the deeper, universal dimension of folly. That is why the doer may not own his deed.

2.3 CRITICAL EXTRACTS

J.B. Steane

This does not mean that Jonson is an irresponsible moralist here, or that *The Alchemist* is 'mere' entertainment. It is a very highly organised, sharply pointed moral comedy, but its sting is directed not so much at the exploiters as at the society, which by its greed and folly is so open to exploitation... The gulls are so varied as to show in cross-section a society led by greed and lust to folly and loss. The nobleman, the countryman, the little clerk, the churchman, the small shopkeeper: Jonson's net is cast widely enough over society to take in all these... What might have been a parade of assorted vices gains unity and purpose from the motive that is common to all of them: an obsessive desire for easy money. In this way the play does more than offer a rich collection of satirical portraits; it depicts a whole society, ruthlessly individualistic and acquisitive, and ultimately deluded and impoverished by its own false values... Greed for wealth is so much the unifying factor in *The Alchemist* that it almost seems an end in itself, but Sir Epicure reminds us that the play's attack extends to the delusive ways of life that folk propose to themselves as ends. Here Mammon is the means; the complete Epicure the end. The bed and the table become the twin centres of life.

Michael Jamieson

Professor Nevill Coghill has usefully demonstrated that two traditions of comedy existed in Elizabethan times, with different antecedents, both stemming from theoretical reversals of Aristotle's notions of tragedy. Romantic Comedy begins with wretchedness and the threat of danger but ends happily. Satiric Comedy teaches by exposing the errors of city folk. Shakespeare, and Jonson, Professor Coghill argues exemplify the two comic forms... The quality of a Jonsonian Comedy, however, lies not only in its construction and in its presentation of character as obsession, but also in its language. The master-theme in Jonson's satirical comedies is human folly,

L.C. Knights (1937)

... the material on which the dramatists work – in comedy and history play – is drawn from – has an immediate reference to the movements, the significant figures of contemporary life: the satire on usurers, the profiteers and the newly rich, on social ambition and the greed for money, can be abundantly illustrated. And the social interest that are drawn on are not those of one class alone... Of the dramatists handling social themes Jonson is undoubtedly the greatest... In his handling of ambition, greed, lust, acquisitiveness and so on he implicitly, but clearly, refers to a mayn than nersonal scheme of values. Jonson in short was working in a tradition.

What we have to determine is where that tradition 'came from'... These significant developments- most of them were aspects of the growth of capitalism; and company-promoting, 'projecting' and industrial enterprise certainly formed an important part of the world which Jonson and his fellows observed, the world which gave them their knowledge of human nature. The Elizabethan drama owed, if not its existent patronage of the governing class, a class drawing its wealth mainly from the land and conscious of the encroachment of the 'new man' of commerce and industry.

M.C. Bradbrook.

Sweet and bitter comedy, romantic and satiric comedy, or Shakespearean and Jonsonian comedy have all been used as terms of description for the two main divisions, of which the first may be said to be characteristically Elizabethan, and the second Jacobean Behind Elizabethan drama there lay at least two modes of acting first, the tradition of the revels, whether country or popular, and all that these implied of intimate collaboration between actors and audience... Second, the learned tradition of rhetorical and satiric drama upon moral themes, built up in the schools and universities, found expression in an even more intimate private presentation... When these two traditions coalesced, the great age of Elizabethan drama began. Jonson was bold in his readiness to modify classical precept, he admired the native tradition, and the form which he evolved was as far removed from the pedantic as it was from the spontaneous....

W. David Kay

Like Dickens, to whom he is often compared, Jonson also offers evocative glimpses of the city's seemier side Jonson's local allusions, however, are not merely 'atmospheric', but are instrumental to his satire, and although his humour characters are increasingly particularized, they are conceived as contemporary manifestations of enduring follies and vices, given new artistic life by the realistic detail with which they are invested.

Nevill Coghill

Shakespeare was not simply following the chances of temperament in designing his comedies, any more than Jonson was; each was following earlier traditions, that evolved during the Middle Ages and at the Renaissance, from the same parent stock of thought which is to be found in the writings of the Latin grammarians of the fourth century The Renaissance view of Comedy was entirely different: suddenly the Satiric, after more than a thousand years of hibernation, sprang fully armed out of the ground and possessed the new theorists. For them the proper, the only, concern of Comedy was ridicule; it offered no necessary antithesis to Tragedy, it gave no suggestion, however rudimentary, of containing a narrative line ... Such, then, were the two theories of Comedy, the Romantic and the Satirical, of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance respectively, that twinned out of the late Latin grammarians to flower in Tudor times. Faced by a choice in such matters, a writer is wise if he follows his temperament. Ben Jonson knotted his cat-o-nine-tails. Shakespeare reached for his Chaucer.

Jonathan Haynes

Forcing someone who was borrowing money to take up worthless commodities was a well-known form of sharp dealing, so Face's business sense has a touch of the underworld about it, but it nevertheless extends to a centralized market in credit and commodities.

Marquette Chute

The Alchemist is exactly what the great critic inside Jonson intended it to be- a vast, brilliant portrait of his own times set within the strictest limits of classical

requirements *The Alchemist* is a realistic play, rooted in the Jacobean London of Jonson's own day... some of the touches in the play that sound like a poet's fantastic imagination are actually an echo of sober civic records.

L.C. Knights (1955)

The best of Jonson's play are living drama because the learning and 'classical' elements are assimilated by a sensibility in direct contact with its own age ... 'I believe', said Coleridge, 'there is not one whim or affectation in common life noted in any memoir of that age which may not be found drawn and framed in some corner or other of Ben Jonson's dramas Jonson, in short, is neither the classicist whose learning puts a barrier between himself and the experience of his age, nor the purely native product in whom a certain provinciality is the price of forthright vigour, he is a man who, having seen and learnt from other civilizations, is thoroughly at home in his own time and place. The result of this blend is an uncommon poise and strength The issues with which he chose to deal were among the most deeply ingrained preoccupations of his age... when we think of the sixteenth century we think not only of 'the Development of the Individual', 'the Revival of Antiquity', 'the Discovery of the World and of Man', but of the thrust of capitalist enterprise, the rise of economic individualism, the development of an a-moral 'realism' in political thought and action.

J.B. Bamborough (1967)

The Alchemist has a fair claim to be called Jonson's most brilliant play... The fact that it seems on the stage like improvisation by the characters is a tribute to Jonson's skill Obviously one of the difficulties of the Unity of Place was finding plausible reasons for all the characters to arrive at the same spot... Making Lovewit's house a centre for a sequence of frauds and confidence tricks gets over the difficulty completely; ... Jonson really solved the problem of the Unity of Action by not having a plot at all, but rather a series of episodes unified by involving the same characters and happening in the same place The real Unity of *The Alchemist* is more a unity of theme: it is a study in Greed and Self-deception.

D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu

Ben Jonson's comedy is in the final analysis apocalyptic and terrifying, elemental and intellectual in its perception of mortal time as Kali-Yuga. With a satirical passion as intense as Marlowe's Icarian euphoria and Webster's charnel-house melancholia, Ben Jonson presents his figures as emblems of damnation not to look upon which is to turn to stone. A mimetic world meticulously created and offered not for adoption but avoidance: such is the stern didactic premise of the Jonsonian comedy Ben Jonson lets common sense triumph over abstraction and civilization prevail over attitudinization. The ethical arbitration is motivated by a comic anagnorisis, the essence of which is an awareness of human limitation from which nobody is free.

2.4 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the differences between Shakespearian Comedy and Jonsonian Comedy.
2. Describe the misconceptions about Jonson's theory of comedy.
3. Bring out the note of social realism in Jonsonian comedy.
4. Consider Jonson as a Renaissance theorist of comedy.
5. Comment on the satiric function of comedy according to Jonson.
6. Summarise some of Jonson's dispersed observations on his art.

Annotate the following passages with reference to context.

- i) Now you set your foot on shore
In novo orbe; here's the rich Peru;^o
And there within, sir, are the golden mines,
Great Solomon's Ophir! He was sailing to't^o
Three years, but we have reached it in ten months.
This is the day wherein to all my friends,
I will pronounce the happy word, 'be rich'.
This day you shall be *spectatissimi*.^p
- ii) No more^o
Shall thirst of satin or the covetous hunger
Of velvet entrails for a rude-spun cloak,
To be displayed at Madam Augusta's, make^o
The sons of sword and hazard fall before^o
The golden calf, and on their knees, whole nights,
Commit idolatry with wine and trumpets,
Or go a- buy feasting, after drum and ensign.^o
- iii) But when you see th' effects of the great medicine,
Of which one part projected on a hundred
Of Mercury or Venus or the Moon
Shall turn it to as many of the Sun;
Nay, to a thousand, *so ad infinitum*:
You will believe me.
- iv) He that has once the flower of the sun,
The perfect ruby, which we call elixir,^o
Not only can do that, but by its virtue
Can confer honour, love, respect, long life,
Give safety, valour—yea, and victory,
To whom he will.
- v) 'Tis the secret
Of nature naturized 'gainst all infections,^o
Cures all diseases coming of all causes,
A month's grief in a day; a year's in twelve;
And of what age soever, in a month,
Past all the doses of your drugging doctors.
- vi) Will you believe antiquity? Records?
I'll show you a book where Moses and his sister
And Solomon have written of the art;
Aye, and a treatise penned by Adam.^o
- vii) Such was Pythagoras' thigh, Pandora's tub,^o
And all the fable of Medea's charms,
The manner of our work; the bulls, our furnace,
Still breathing fire; our argent-vive, the dragon;
The dragon's teeth, mercury sublimate,^o
That keeps the whiteness, hardness, and the biting;
And they are gathered into Jason's helm^o
(Th' alembic) and then sowed in Mars his field,
And thence sublimed so often, till they are fixed.^o

- viii) Both this, th' Hesperian garden, Cadmus' story,^o
Jove's shower, the boon of Midas, Argus' eyes,^o
Boccace his Demogorgon, thousands more,^o
All abstract riddles of our stone.
- ix) For I do mean
To have a list of wives and concubines
Equal with Solomon, who had the stone^o
Alike with me; and I will make me a back
With the elixir that shall be as tough
As Hercules, to encounter fifty a night.^o
- x) I will have all my beds blown up, not stuffed;
Down is too hard. And then mine oval room
Filled with such pictures as Tiberius took
From Elephantis, and dull Aretine
But coldly imitated. Then, my glasses^o
Cut in more subtle angles, to disperse
And multiply the figures as I walk
Naked between my *succubae*.
- xi) My mists^o
I'll have of perfume, vapoured 'bout the room,
To loose ourselves in; and my baths like pits
To fall into, from whence we will come forth
And roll us dry in gossamer and roses.—
- xii) The few that would give out themselves to be
Court and town stallions, and eachwhere belie
Ladies, who are known most innocent, for them,^o
Those will I beg to make me eunuchs of,
And they shall fan me with ten ostrich tails
Apiece, made in a plume to gather wind.
- xiii) We will be brave, Puff, now we ha' the medicine.
My meat shall all come in in Indian shells,
Dishes of agate, set in gold, and studded
With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths and rubies.
Dressed with an exquisite and poignant sauce;
For which, I'll say unto my cook, 'there's gold,
Go forth, and be a knight.'
- xiv) My shirts
I'll have of taffeta-sarsnet, soft and light
As cobwebs; and for all my other raiment
It shall be such as might provoke the Persian,^o
Were he to teach the world roit anew.
My gloves of fishes' and birds' skins, perfumed
With gums of paradise, and eastern air—^o
- xv) My venture brings it me. he, honest wretch,
A notable, superstitious, good soul,
Has worn his knees bare and his slippers bald,
With prayer and fasting for it; and, sir, let him
Do it alone, for me, still. Here he comes,
Not a profane word afore him! 'Tis poison.
- xvi) You're covetous, that thus you meet your time
I' the just point, prevent your day, at morning.
This argues something worthy of a fear

- MAEN-01/195

- xxii) I urged that,
And cleared to him that Sisyphus was damned°
To roll the ceaseless stone only because
He would have made ours common.
- xxiii) O, by this light, no, Do not wrong him. He's.
Too scrupulous that way. It is his vice.
No, he's a rare physician, do him right.
An excellent Paracelsian! And has done
Strange cures with mineral physic. He deals all
With spirits, he. He will not hear a word
Of Galen, or his tedious recipes.°
- xxiv) You're very right, sir; she is a most rare scholar,
And is gone mad with studying Broughton's works.°
If you but name a word touching the Hebrew,
She falls into her fit, and will discourse
So learnedly of genealogies,
As you would run mad, too, to hear her, sir.
- xxv) An this be your elixir,
Your *lapis mineralis*, and your lunary,°
Give me your honest trick, yet at primero,
Or gleeck; and take your *lutum sapientis*,°
Your *menstruum simplex*.
- xxvi) O, what else, sir?
And that you'll make her royal with the stone,
And empress; and yourself king of Bantam.°
- xxvii) A townsman born in Taurus gives the bull,
Or the bull's head; in Aries, the ram.
A poor device. No, I will have his name
Formed in some mystic character, whose *radii*,
Striking the senses of the passers-by,
Shall, by a virtual influence, breed affections,
That may result upon the party owns it;

UNIT 3 THE STRUCTURE OF *THE ALCHEMIST*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Structure
- 3.3 Glossary Of Alchemical Terms
- 3.4 Critical Extracts
- 3.5 Questions
- 3.6 Annotation Passages

3.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, the focus is on the structure of the play. An analysis of the play's structure is a preliminary step. This is followed by issues like performance of the play, stagecraft characterisation, and language, in the subsequent units. A variety of perspectives are then presented as aids to evaluating the play's meaning for the modern reader.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Modern science teaches us that substances differ in atomic structure. The so-called base metals can be transformed into gold through a highly expensive process of fission. Jonson's contemporaries, including the learned and the mighty did believe in alchemy. Queen Elizabeth was no exception. The religious aura around the person of *The Alchemist*, his speech interlarded with astrological jargon, and his airs of piety, humility, and simplicity combine to lend him a status above ordinary mortals. In order to enjoy the play, the reader and the spectator need to shed all doubts for the duration of the reading or of the performance.

3.2 STRUCTURE

The action of the play involves the three cheats – Subtle, Jeremy the Butler, and Dol Common who enter into a 'venture tripartite' to cozen eight gulls the clerk Dapper, Druggier the tobacconist, the knight Sir Epicure Mammon, the gamester Surly, the two Puritans, Tribulation and Ananias, the boy Kastril and his sister, the widow Dame Pliant. In the absence of the master of the house, Lovewit on account of the plague, the cheats carry on their trade briskly, luring potential gulls by appealing to their delusions.

The joy of the tricksters in cozening the credulous gulls seems to have an autobiographical basis. William Drummond of Hawthornden, Jonson's host in his Scottish tour recorded that Jonson had tricked a lady by disguising himself as an astrologer. Jonson's common sense attitude towards alchemy is evident in Epigram VI, "To Alchemists".

If all you boast of your great art be true
Sure, willing poverty lives most in you.

Thematically, *The Alchemist* has been linked to Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* and Erasmus' *Colloquies*, the major early satires on alchemy. It has also been suggested that Jonson may have drawn upon *The Puritan, or the Widow of Watling Street*, a play anonymously published just three years before the first performance of *The Alchemist*. In "the immediate model," W. David Kay argues, the elements that might have gone into the making of *The Alchemist* include: "two swindlers posing as a captain and a conjurer, an intrigue plot involving the marriage of a rich widow, and incidental satire on Puritan hypocrisy and casuistry."

The teeming life of London is evoked through numerous local allusions which, besides contributing to the play's realism, are vital instruments of satire. Jonson had used London as the locale for action in *Eastward Ho!* on which he collaborated with Chapman and Marston, and after turning to Venice for *Volpone*, confirmed his preference for London in *The Alchemist* (1610), *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), *The Devil is an Ass* (1666) and the revised folio version of *Every Man in His Humour* (1616). Jonson's many references to the vicinity of the Blackfriars theatre where the play was performed, and to the plague as the time of action made for direct appeal to the audience, to a pressure of the times. The prologue to *The Alchemist* clarifies this intent:

No clime breeds better matter, for your whore,
Our scene is London, 'cause we would make known
No country's mirth is better than our own,
Bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more,
Whose manners, now called humours, feed the stage.

The pace of action does not slacken and is virtually continuous spanning the six hours from 9 O'clock in the morning. The setting is a room in Lovewit's house with a lane facing the front door. The play opens on an almost explosive quelled by the prostitute pickpocket Dol Common. The gulling of the eight assorted victims concurrently contributes to suspense, for some of them are known to one another. Suspense is further heightened by the prospect of Lovewit's return too. When the imaginary laboratory goes up in smoke, the make-believe world is shattered. The rehabilitation of Face, after his master's marriage with the Dame Pliant is arranged, rounds off the action. As in other plays of the time, one character step out of his role partially to comment on the ending: Lovewit's address to the audience,

Therefore, gentlemen
And kind spectators, if I have out-stripped
An old man's gravity, or strict canon ...
Introduces a note of objectivity, demanding the audience's attention.
Face's are the certain lines:
Gentlemen,
My part a little fell in this last scenes;
Yet it was decorum

An absorption in oneself, the strategy required of the cozeners momentarily slips off to reveal his humanity.

An analysis of the plot suggests a patterning of effects in the action. The prologue focuses on corruption in London, the playwright's attempt to correct vices, and above all his care to present correction without embarrassing the tricksters and the gulls. Act-I opens with an interruption of chicanery in progress, occasioned by Face's condescension towards Subtle, and the intervention of the bullying Dol Common. In quick succession, Dapper the lawyer's clerk, Druggier the tobacconist and Sir Epicure Mammon the voluptuary arrive to renew their petitions for a familiar, advice for setting up a shop and the Philosopher's stone respectively. On one protest or other, each is sent away to return after fulfilling certain conditions. Thus, early in the play, the absolute power delusion has over the gulls is sketched. Subtle demonstrates his caoacitv to become whatever the oull s imoninotoon rovinoo

Mammon's re-entry in Act-II, accompanied by the sceptical Surly, establishes the former's sensuality and amorality. A number of ironic turns are noticeable in Subtle's insistence on purity in the pursuit of the Stone, Mammon's causistry in asserting Subtle's purity and his own capacity to buy. Subtle's insistence on patience and purity on Mammon's part is a clear anticipation of the ending of the play. When Face presents Dol as the sister of a lord given to fits of madness, Mammon's carnality comes into the open. The Puritan Ananias' demand for the stone is brushed off by Subtle and Face. Their esoteric mumbo-jumbo leaves him crest-fallen. Grateful for the magical anagram, Druggier mentions Kastril would have his sister widow Dame Pliant marry only an aristocrat, and this brings in a new pair of gulls.

In Act-III Tribulation seeks to make amends for Ananias' rudeness, and gladly accepts Subtle's approval of the plan to make counterfeit coins. Puritan hypocrisy stands thoroughly exposed here for after all only Dutch dollars are involved. Surly in order to woo Dol enters disguised as a Spanish don. While Dapper is ready for a meeting with the Queen of Fairies (another role for Dol), he is blindfolded and his pocket picked. Further, he is gagged and locked in the privy to prevent discovery by Mammon almost at the doorstep.

The action flows on into Act-IV when Face as Lungs helps Mammon to meet Dol as the sister of a lord. As Kastril and Dame Pliant arrive, being a quick change artist resumes his role as Face. Unable to bring in Dol, they think on their feet, and allow Dame Pliant to be alone with Surly in the garden. Kastril is instructed in polite quarrel-too. In the meanwhile, Mammon with his mind set on the philosopher's stone utters the fatal words, and brings on Dol's "fit of madness." Because of Mammon's violation of Subtle's command, the fulfilment of his dream is postponed, and the laboratory literally goes up in smoke. Still Mammon is undecieved. Surly's attempts to win Dame by exposing Face and Subtle are shattered when he had to remove his own disguise in the process. Ananias arrives, but enraged by Surly's gaudy dress, drags him out. To crown it all, Lovewit is just then sighted.

In the concluding act, the goings on in Lovewit's house are made known to him by the neighbours. Jeremy is no longer able to manipulate the situation. While all the gulls rush back and threaten to complain to the police, Dapper calls out for release and meets the fairy of his heart briefly. As the officers knock at the door, Subtle and Dol run away. Lovewit marries Dame Pliant leaving the gulls helpless lookers on. Face alone appeals to the audience to understand his lot.

In spite of the multiplicity of intrigues, the plot has a unity as noted by several critics. In Coleridge's view, *The Alchemist*, *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Tom Jones* have the three 'most effect plots ever planned.' Coleridge perhaps had in mind the union of comic decorum with freedom of and richness of inventions. Evaluating the structure of the play, in terms of seven numbered intrigues which forms the core of the action, Uma Ellis-Fermor draws attention to the inner form of the play-characterized by a rhythmic design, and considers *The Alchemist* "to be without a companion in the drama with which I am acquainted." Paul Goodman offers an Aristotelian approach to the action. The impression of unity is attributed by T.S. Eliot to an "inspiration that radiates into plot and personages alike." Indeed, "as a masterpiece of design, within the compass of the classical unities," says Frederick S. Bocs, "*The Alchemist* takes its place at the head of Jonson's comedies." Here, we have, declares Felix E. Schelling, "the utmost cleverness in the construction, the whole fabric building climax on climax, witty and ingenious, and so plausibly presented that we forget its departures from the possibilities of life." And L.C. Knight avers: "*The Alchemist* is built as the double theme of lust and greed and the whole play is constructed so as to isolate and magnify the central theme. The extraordinary complications of the plot all centre on Subtle and Face, and all work in one end. The play is completely self-consistent; all the characters are actuated by variations of one motion, and no extraneous passions are allowed to enter All the interests aroused in the resfrd

point in one direction." Thus *The Alchemist* has acquired the status of a classical play, and confirmed for better or worse the classicist image the playwright cultivated.

Moreover, the plot of *The Alchemist* is both original and realistic. It is based on the facts of contemporary London life; and Jonson's originality can be seen in using these facts. The spread of the epidemic plague in London and the evacuation of their houses by some of the landlords gave Jonson the idea of using these very circumstances as the background of a play exposing the frauds of the alchemists and the follies and the foibles of their victims.

In *The Alchemist*, the three classical unities have been observed to perfection:

Unity of Action: The opening quarrel of the cozeners has been acclaimed as masterly exposition, intimating the antagonism between Subtle and Face patched up momentarily by Dol and 'the venture tripartite'. The old rivalry surfaces again in moves and countermoves in regard to marrying the rich widow, Dame Plaut, and ends eventually in Face's assertion of his place in Lovewit's household and the hasty escape of Subtle and Dol. The core of the action, the intrigues the cozeners plan, is highly theatrical. The readiness with which Subtle, Face and Dol assume a role on the spur of the moment, their spontaneous realignment because of last minute change of plans (notably during Surly's attempts to expose them) and their skill in improvisation and histrionics are much in evidence throughout the play. Besides the aforementioned episodes, another would be the end of Act III, the bundling of Dapper off to the privy, the transformation of Captain Face into Lungs, and the surreptitious entry (at the start of Act IV) of the amorous Mammon on to an empty stage that a moment before was full of activity; another would be Mammon's guilty attempt to hide and Subtle's simulation of distressed piety after the explosion of the furnace later in the same act; yet another would be the discovery by Lovewit of Face, as he attempts to communicate to Subtle inside the house in Act V scene III. The examples could be multiplied. Discerning students would notice i) that not only are the various minor plots gathered into a single action, but the gathering itself is used to provide a great deal of theatrical comedy; and ii) that the stories of the various gulls interrupt each other and provide repeated opportunities for the oldest and most permanently effective kinds of comic action. This justifies J.B. Bamborough's comment: "Jonson really solved the problem of the Unity of Action by not having a plot at all, but rather a series of episodes unified by involving the same characters and happenings in the same place ... the real Unity of *The Alchemist* is more a unity of theme: it is a study in greed and self-deception. Structurally, Jonson's "brilliant use of alteration," in the opening scene Ailthum Sale observes, makes it "a demonstration of method ... like the prelude to an opera."

Unities of Time and Space

Not only has *The Alchemist* the most complete unity of action of any of Jonson's plays, it also observes the unities of time and place with more exactness than any other play of Jonson. The time of the action is pretty well coterminous with the duration of the play in performance. There is only one place where time can be considered to pass during a break in the action, and that is between Act-II and III. According to Subtle's statement nearly an hour passes between the end of Act II Scene V, and the opening of Act III Scene ii, the two intervening lines contain just 150 lines. There is no anticipation at the end of Act II of the characters who will open the next act; whereas at the end of Act I we are told of the approach of Mammon and Surly; the last words of Act III are addressed to Mammon, who is off-stage, waiting to enter; and Act IV ends with Lovewit seen out of the window, talking to the neighbours with whom we find him when Act V opens. This audience would lose its point if followed at once by an interval in which it could be forgotten. There are no lapses of time indicated between the scenes within the acts, and in most cases there is clear evidence of continuity. On the basis of the discussion we have had till now, it seems reasonably safe to suggest that *The Alchemist* was written to be performed without interruption except for one interval between the second and third

acts. With regard to Unity of Place, too, this play is the most circumscribed that Jonson wrote. The whole action is confined within or immediately outside Lovewit's house in Blackfriars.

3.3 GLOSSARY OF ALCHEMICAL TERMS

No edition for the general reader or playgoer can hope to cover the alchemical background thoroughly, and we have not tried to explain all the terms either in the glosses or in the longer explanatory notes. Jonson's alchemical terms fall into three main classes: (a) materials and substances, (b) alchemical equipment and apparatus, (c) alchemical processes. The following selective glossary may assist the reader and playgoer.

Materials, substances etc.

<i>Adrop</i>	:	the matters out of which mercury is extracted for the Philosopher's Stone; the Stone itself.
<i>aqua fortis</i>	:	impure vitriol
<i>aqua regis</i>	:	a mixture of acids which can dissolve gold.
<i>aqua vitae</i>	:	alcohol
<i>argaile</i>	:	unrefined tartar
<i>aurum potable</i>	:	liquid, drinkable gold
<i>azoth</i>	:	mercury
<i>azot</i>	:	nitrogen
<i>calce</i>	:	powdered substance produced by combustion or 'calcination'
<i>chibrit</i>	:	mercury
<i>chrysosperm</i>	:	elixir
<i>cinoper</i>	:	sulphide of mercury
<i>kibrit</i>	:	sulphur
<i>lac virginis</i>	:	mercurial water
<i>lato</i>	:	a mixed metal which looks like brass
<i>maistrie</i>	:	the magisterium or Philosopher's Stone
<i>realga</i>	:	a mixture of arsenic and sulphur
<i>sericon</i>	:	black tincture
<i>zernich</i>	:	auripigment or gold paint

Alchemical equipment and apparatus

<i>Alembic</i>	:	the vessel at the top of the distilling apparatus which holds the distilled material
<i>aludel</i>	:	subliming pot
<i>athanor</i>	:	a furnace
<i>balneum</i>	:	bath; or process of heating a vessel
<i>bolt's head</i>	:	a long-necked vessel
<i>cross-let</i>	:	crucible
<i>cucurbite</i>	:	a distilling vessel
<i>gripes egg</i>	:	a vessel shaped like a vulture's egg
<i>lembek</i>	:	a still
<i>pelican</i>	:	an alembic

Process

<i>ceration</i>	:	softening hard substances
<i>chrysopæia</i>	:	the making of gold
<i>chymia</i>	:	alchemy
<i>cibation</i>	:	Reverent staec in alchemv

<i>citronize</i>	:	to become yellow
<i>cohabitation</i>	:	redistillation
<i>digestion</i>	:	preparation of substances by gentle heat
<i>dulcify</i>	:	to purify
<i>inbibition</i>	:	a bathing process associated with the tenth stage
<i>inceration</i>	:	softening to the consistency of wax
<i>macerate</i>	:	to steep
<i>potate</i>	:	liquified
<i>projection</i>	:	the twelfth and last stage in alchemy
<i>putrefaction</i>	:	the fifth stage in alchemy whereby impurities were removed by the use of moist heat
<i>solution</i>	:	the second stage in alchemy
<i>spagyrica</i>	:	the spagiric art; Paracelsian chemistry
<i>sublimation</i>	:	conversion into vapour through the agency of heat, and reconversion into solid through the agency of cold

3.4 CRITICAL EXTRACTS

F.H. Mares (1983)

In both *Much Ado* and *The Alchemist* the action depends very largely on a series of deliberate deceptions. This is more the case in *Much Ado* than in perhaps any other comedy of Shakespeare's... The comparison between Beatrice and Dol is a little more elaborate. Dol, clearly, is a fully liberated woman... Jonson, more frequently than Shakespeare, withholds information from his audience... Jonson's comedy is mordant, reductive and conservative, while Shakespeare's is kindly, exploratory and radical.

In marked contrast to Beatrice, the docile Hero is willing to marry who ever she is told to marry. Dame Pliant will marry anyone wearing a Spanish suit. Both ladies are commodities to be acquired, as is clear from the way Face and Subtle discuss the Widow ... the comparison between Beatrice and Dol is a little more elaborate. Dol, clearly, is a fully liberated woman.

It is arranged for Subtle to overhear the raving of Dol as the mad lady; and it provokes his own brilliant charade of outraged virtue. When it is arranged for Beatrice and Benedick in their turns to overhear the account of how each loves the other, we have a little malicious pleasure in the gulling, but we are not moved to admiration by the skill of the performance Beatrice and Bendedick... Like the gulls in *The Alchemist*, their own desires help them to be deceived. The difference is in the nature of their desires and our moral valuation of them. One final point: the agents of resolution in both *Much Ado* and *The Alchemist* are the most simple and stupid people: Dogberry in *Much Ado* and Drugger in *The Alchemist*.

J.B. Steane

Alchemy, however, is essentially a vehicle in the play: the center of interest lies elsewhere, and Jonson is using the particular subject of alchemy as the means to another end. Other kinds of trickery might have sufficed, certainly other ways in which men could be exhibited as capable of infinite self-degradation when confronted with the prospect of easy money... *The Alchemist* too dramatizes this kind of 'possession'. Because they see Lovewit's house as a gold mine, the gulls who come visiting are obsessed with the single idea of gain, and this is now their 'humour'... So by his status in the plot, Lovewit's judgement should be the one which we as audience are called on to respect The rogues themselves ought, in an orthodox morality to be merely nrthless and despicable Instead we find ourselves lavabinn

with them too often... There is every inducement for the audience to identify themselves with the rogues.

Michael Jamieson

The density of the dialogue, the contemporaneity of the comedy to Jacobean audience, makes *The Alchemist* (like *Bartholmew Fair*) more difficult than *Volpone* for readers and playgoers today That he (Lovewit) dodges retribution is psychologically right, and reminds the audience that con-men, like the poor, are always with us.

Arthur Sale

The Alchemist is not only about alchemy: it is itself an alchemical work. Its blood is visual and verbal – especially verbal – transmutation. Reality where all is illusion is the reality of the illusion... The first scene is not merely an exposition transformed from static narration to violent drama by a brilliant use of altercation. It is also a completed alchemical process, a demonstration of method, a telescoping of the whole like the prelude to an opera... Also, more strikingly, indeed marvellously, the coals and stills and alchemical ferments which give such excitement, rich colours, exotic associations, and piled – up solidarities in the play are not facts but words... The glittering captain and the canonical doctor use the language of the gutter to metamorphose each other into animals, beetles, vomit Among other great things Dol is here saying not only that the Heads of State share her equally but also that they are contained in her Subtle, of course, intends that for Mammon it shall remain a vision and a dream, and all the alchemy in the play has this ironic dimension. Subtle and Jonson both use alchemy for their own ends, but the interested motive of the former do not call into question, but enrich; those of the latter. Sexually, Mammon and Subtle embody two ancient and opposed alchemical concepts.

W. David Kay

In the tradition of the 'estate morality', Jonson uses this representative sample to demonstrate how greed and credulity pervade society at all levels... Jonson's attitude toward alchemy is indicated in Epigram VI, "To Alchemists": 'If all you boast of your great art be true; / Sure, willing poverty lives most in you'... The satire in *The Alchemist* thus cuts in many directions at once, mocking fantasies of self-gratification and power, as well as particular forms of credulity and ignorance.

Una Ellis-Fermor

The play, *The Alchemist* is outwardly a comedy of character and event, so that the intrigue and interactions of the plot have one set of relations, analogous to the rhythmic design expressed in the painting by the lines. But the inner form of the play is one which is hardly representational at all of this interaction of event in everyday life, for the characters and consequently the moods they impress upon our minds, exist independently also as something more than the means. For the sake of this brevity I have given each intrigue a number in order of its appearance and used this number to refer to it in the text. Thus the plot set up against Dapper is the first, that against Druggier the second, Sir Epicure Mammon's the third, Surly's the fourth, Ananias' the fifth, Mistress Pliant's the sixth, Kastril's the seventh... As a piece of almost geometrical form, this play appears to be without a companion in the drama with which I am acquainted.

Jonathan Haynes

Subtle and Dol and Face are clearly underworld figures, professional criminals, setting them off from Jonson's sharp gallants and from the inspired amateur Volpone, who glorifies more in the cunning purchase of his wealth than in the glad possession.

They have evolved directly out of the cony-catching pamphlet literature The "Argument" makes the "tripartite indenture" sound like shares in an acting company they here contract. It looks like a joint stock company, the newest form of capitalist organization Alchemy is the grand symbol for this volatile state of affairs. Alchemy makes a neat metaphor for nascent capitalism, and *The Alchemist* fits neatly in the development of Jonson's economic thought between *Volpone*, in which a real pile of ... gold draws "interest" in the old center of mercantilism, and the direct satiric exploration of capitalist "projection" in *The Devil is an Ass* The play toys with the idea that something can come of nothing, but substance is finally the issue; we move from the tripartite indenture to a marriage between the substantial property holders Lovewit and Dame Pliant The play opened with a crisis in the triple indenture, with Subtle claiming he had countenanced Face (pun intended) by sharing his knowledge, and Face claiming to have countenanced Subtle by providing the house, the material means of production.

Renu Juneja

The "honest" Surly in *The Alchemist* fares badly. One sound way of assessing Jonson's attitude to a character is to see how the plot deals with him. The dispute over the worthiness of Surly as against the skulduggery and moral decline of Lovewit can be ended once for all by reminding ourselves that it is Lovewit who succeeds and not Surly. Jonson does not always punish the wrongdoers but nor does he allow them to triumph as unequivocally as Lovewit triumphs

S. Musgrove

Jonson's prime service to Elizabethan comedy was to give it structure and coherence, firm plotting and clear characterization. The overshadowing genius of Shakespeare tends to hide its need of such reform... Jonson's characters, like Marlowe's, are heroically obsessional: needing to become themselves to an absolute degree, they expose the raging vacuum of the self... Each of the gulls seeks to be changed from himself, but only becomes more completely what he really is.

J.B. Bamborough (1967)

The argument is also a first-rate piece of explication for the benefit of the audience, *The Alchemist* progresses largely by a series of quarrels... The out-facing of Surly in these scenes, in Act IV might be regarded as Face and Subtle's finest hour because it is all improvised, whereas the discomfiture of Mammon is something they have planned long before. Effectively, as the audience actually experiences the play, both scenes contribute to the feeling that *The Alchemist* is being made up by Face and Subtle as it goes along *The Alchemist*, and like all Jonson's comedy it demands to be played quickly and without pause *The Alchemist*, indeed, lends a good deal of colour to the charge that Jonson seems at times to approve more of his rogues than his fools... what motivates him in his attempts to expose the cheats is not love of truth, but, as he says, his objection to being gulled It almost begins to look as if in his portrayal of 'natural follies', as he calls them in the preface to *The Alchemist*, Jonson has begun to lose sight of his sterner moral purpose.

Alan C. Dessen

Does analysis of the dramatic possibilities provided by such late moralities offer any insight into the techniques and structure employed by the master of Jacobean satirical comedy, Ben Jonson?... there have been few critical studies which have argued for a definite relationship between any of Jonson's major comedies and the morality tradition ... no allegorical personae intrude into the literal Jacobean scene ... Jonson has here supplied six characters who represent different social stations, different professions, and different age groups but who possess one common denominator, a susceptibility to the wiles of Subtle, Face, and Dol But so does the ending of *The*

Alchemist. Here, as in the morality play or the masque, Jonson has projected his final effect beyond the fictive world on stage into the lives that must be led by the audience after the performance... In general structure, *The Alchemist* has many interesting connections with the late morality... owing to our own culpability, there is only limited hope for improvement in the world outside the theater. *The Alchemist*, particularly in its last two acts, is the culmination of Jonson's moral comedy

Edward B. Partridge

This inflation and explosion of the plot is apparent in the way epithets are used throughout *The Alchemist*. In the first scene two motifs are developed side by side; ... one is the motif of abusive epithets which Subtle, Face, and Dol fling at each other. They call each other rogue, slave, cheater, cut-purse, bawd, and witch... The impostors are compared to mongrels, scarabs, vermin, curs The dog imagery recurs most often. Dol is a bitch, and Face and Subtle are mastiffs. In short, we are among the snarling animals that live on other beings or each other ... that ambiguous world between the animal and the human The imagery of *The Alchemist* is perfectly functional in several ways. First, it develops, as alchemy develops, beginning with base metals, such as a whore, a pander, and a quack, which it tries grandiloquently to transmute into finer beings - finally ending, as the dream of the philosopher's stone ends, in a return to the state of base metals... The imagery is functional in another way. The images work on the same principle that the play as a whole and usually each scene work. They are extravagant, inflated, and ludicrous The monstrous gap that opens between the tenor that we know to be mean and the vehicle that we assume to be great, and the demand that we find some similarities between them to bridge that gap, outrages our sense of decency and decorum... A third function of the imagery is to extend and develop the multiple references that alchemy had in actual life-especially the religious, medical, and commercial references In other words, the imagery suggests that, in *The Alchemist's* world, the acquisition of gold is a religion, a cure-all, a sexual experience, and a commercial enterprise.

F. H. Mares (1967)

It is an over-simplification to say that Jonson's plot 'provided him with exceptional opportunities for satirising two social pests of the age: Puritanism and the profession of alchemy'. Alchemy is not so much the object of his satire as the means he uses to ridicule human greed and credulity The laboratory - It is the dream factory, the most potent instrument of delusion,... This one fixed point in space obliged Jonson to have others: the two doors, right and left, one to the outside world, one to the 'back way' The exit to the laboratory is the focus of the play's physical action, its implied presence behind the scenes is as important... For this reason the localization of the scene is fixed and firmly maintained until after the symbolic explosion... The grandiose imagery proposed by Mammon's fantasy becomes meaningless by its excess, or lurches into grossness:... All through the play there is a disparity between what people are and what they say they are. The servant, the quack, and the prostitute are the Captain, the Doctor, and the Lord's sister, or a priest and the Queen of Fairy. These high titles are counterpointed with abusive ones In *The Alchemist* we are not obliged to hold the play at a greater distance from us by having some characters come between us and it: we are invited to come closer, to identify ourselves with it. Lovewit and Face address the audience directly-Face even offers a comment on the dramaturgy: but they do so without coming out of the characters they have supported in the play This is not to make Jonson a seventeenth-century Pirandello, trapped in the insoluble problem of distinguishing illusion from reality, or a Genet, asserting at once man's inevitable need for illusion and the illusory nature of all conventional moral authorities... Jonson does not doubt for a moment that truth can be distinguished from illusion, that right and wrong are absolute and not relative terms.

Jonson's denouements have an air of the unexpected, in the sense that the dispensation of rewards and punishments is subtly calibrated through a principle of comic justice operating in favour of intelligence and common sense instead of innocence and piety. This administers a kind of comic trauma directed towards the quotidian poise of social order rather than heroic individuality Subtle is no alchemist and the theme of the play is not alchemy. Alchemy is a burnished mirror in which Faustian power is made to cast weird, heraldic images of Mephistophelean appetite Somewhere collaterally stands Sir Apicure Mammon whose auriferous extravagances of fantasy and arabesque serenades of sensuality are products of an excessive romanticism that goes entirely against the Jonsonian norm of classical balance and decorum He is Faustus and Falstaff doubled into one He is the grand anarchy waiting to undo all civilized order; he is a gargantuan Anti-Christ who, in trying to set things right in his own fashion, would destroy the cosmic order itself.

3.5 QUESTIONS

1. Analyse the structure of *The Alchemist*.
2. Bring out the effect of developing the intrigues concurrently.
3. How does Jonson produce the illusion of reality with regard to alchemy?
4. Comment on the impact of the opening scene.
5. Does *The Alchemist* point to a lowering of the standard of judgement? Illustrate from the ending.

3.6 ANNOTATION PASSAGES

Annotate the following passages with reference to context:

- i) He bears
The visible mark of the Beast in his forehead.^o
And for his stone, it is a work of darkness,
And with philosophy blinds the eyes of man.
- ii) The children of perdition are oft-times
Made instruments even of the greatest works.
Besides, we should give somewhat to man's nature,
The place he lives in, still about the fire,
And fume of metals, that intoxicate
The brain of man, and make him prone to passion.
- iii) Where have you greater atheists than your cooks?
Or more profane or choleric than your glass-men?
More antichristian than your bell-founders?^o
What makes the devil so devilish, I would ask you,
Satan, our common enemy, but his being
Perpetually about the fire, and boiling
Brimstone and arsenic?
- iv) We must give, I say,
Unto the motives, and the stirrers up^o
Of humours in the blood. It may be so,
When as the work is done, the stone is made,
The heat of his may turn into a zeal,

And stand up for the beauteous discipline
Against the menstruous cloth and rag of Rome.^o

- v) Have I discoursed so unto you; of our stone?
And of the good that it shall bring your cause?
Showed you (beside the main of hiring forces
Abroad, drawing the Hollanders, your friends,
From the Indies, to serve you, with all their fleet)^o
That even the med'cinal use shall make you a faction,
And party in the realm?
- vi) As, put the case,
That some great man in state, he have the gout,
Why, you but send three drops of your elixir,
You help him straight: there you have made a friend.
Another has the palsy or the drosy,
He takes of your incombustible stuff,^o
He's young again: there you have made a friend.
- vii) A lady that is past the feat of body,^o
Though not of mind, and hath her face decayed
Beyond all cure of paintings, you restore
With the oil of talc: there you have made a friend,
And all her friends. A lord that is a leper,
A knight that has the bone-ache, or a squire
That hath both these, you make 'em smooth and sound,
With a bare fricace of your medicine: still
You increase your friends.
- viii) No, nor your holy vizard to win widows
To give you legacies; or make zealous wives
To rob their husband for the common cause;
Nor take the start of bonds, broke but one day,
And say they were forfeited by providence.
Nor shall you need o'er night to eat huge meals,
To celebrate your next day's fast the better,
The whilst the brethren and the sisters, humbled,
Abate the stiffness of the flesh. Nor cast
Before your hungry hearers scrupulous bones,^o
As whether a Christian may hawk or hunt,
Or whether matrons of the holy assembly
May lay their hair out, or wear doublets,^o
Or have the idol sunfr about their linen
- ix) Nor shall you need to libel 'gainst the prelates,
And shorten so your ears against the hearing^o
Of the next wire-drawn grace. Nor of necessity
Rail against plays to please the alderman
Whose daily custard your devour. Nor lie
With zealous rage, till you are hoarse. Not one
Of these so singular arts. Nor call yourselves,
By names of Tribulation, Persecution,
Restraint, Long-Patience, and such like, affected
By the whole family, or wood of you,
Only for glory, and to catch the ear
Of the disciple.
- x) When you have viewed and bought 'em,
And ta'en the inventory of what they are,
Thy're ready for projection theres no more

To do: cast on the medicine, so much silver
As there is tin there, so much gold as brass,
I'll gi' it you in, by weight.

- xi) She must prepare perfumes, delicate linen,
The both in chief, a banquet, and her wit
For she must milk his epididymis
- xii) He will win you
By unresistable luck, within this fortnight,
Enough to buy a barony: They will set him
Upmost, at the groom-porter's, all the Christmas!^o
And for the whole year through, at every place
Where there is play, present him with the chair,
The best attendance, the best drink, sometimes
Two glasses of canary, and pay nothing;
The purest linen, and the sharpest knife,
The partridge next his trencher, and, somewhere,
The dainty bed, in private, with the dainty.
- xiii) In the third square, the very street and sign
Where the commodity dwells, and does but wait
To be delivered, be it pepper, soap,
Hops, or tobacco, oatmeal, woad, or cheeses.
All which you may so handle to enjoy
To your own use, and never stand obliged.
- xiv) And then for making matches for rich widows,
Young gentlewomen, heirs, the fortunat's man!
He's sent to, far and near, all over England,
To have his counsel, and to know their fortunes
- xv) Hoping that he hath vinegared his senses,
As he was bid, the Fairy Queen dispenses,
By me, this robe, the petticoat of Fortune;
Which that he straight put on, she doth importune.
- xvi) And though to Fortune near be her petticoat,
Yet nearer is her smock, the Queen doth note;
And therefore, even of that a piece she hath sent,
Which, being a child, to wrap him in was rent;
And prays him for a scarf he now will wear it
(With as much love, as then her Grace did tear it)
About his eyes, to show he is fortunate.
- xvii) She now is set
At dinner in her bed, and she has sent you
From her own private trencher, a dead mouse
And a piece of gingerbread, to be merry withal,
And stay your stomach, lest you faint with fasting;
Yet, if you could hold out till she saw you (she says),
It would be better for you.
- xviii) Of gingerbread
Make you it fit. He that hath pleased her Grace
Thus far, shall not now crinkle for a little.

UNIT 4 *THE ALCHEMIST* IN THE THEATRE

Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 *The Alchemist in the Theatre*
- 4.3 Performance and Stagecraft
- 4.4 Critical Extracts
- 4.5 Selected Bibliography
- 4.6 Questions
- 4.7 Annotation Passages

4.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this unit is to discuss (i) *The Alchemist* in the theatre, and (ii) its performance and stagecraft and to place before you the critical opinions of some of the great critics on *The Alchemist* in the theatre and its performances.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

At the end of the unit of *The Alchemist* in the 1616 folio of Jonson's Works is the statement: "This comedy was first acted in the year 1610 by the King's Majesty's Servants". Since then *The Alchemist* became popular and stayed in the repertory until the theatres were closed on the eve of the Civil War. With the Restoration in 1660, it was one of the first plays to be reviewed, and with some minor rises and falls in popularity, it continued to be played for more than three centuries.

4.2 *THE ALCHEMIST* IN THE THEATRE

The enduring popularity of *The Alchemist* is acknowledged by its inclusion in the repertoires of several theatre groups. The first phase of its stage history obviously corresponds to performances during Johnson's life time. The very first performance has been a matter of considerable debate. It was performed in 1610 by the King's Men probably at the Globe, according to Herford and Simpson. The King's Men might have staged the play before July at the Globe; or during the closure of the theatres they might have taken it to the provinces. The possibility of trying at a new play outside London is often discounted. On account of the plague, the theatres in London were closed from July to November. Geoffrey Tillotson discovered evidence of an earlier performance at Oxford in September 1610.

"Since the setting in Blackfriars", Mares avers, "the King's men possibly staged the play at the Blackfriars theatre". A significant detail that emerges, however, is that Burbage played Face right until his death in 1618. Performance at the court in 1623 has also been recorded. In a telling comment on the dramatis personae, William Gifford hits upon the dominant note of theatricality: "The Puritan neighbours tell Lovewit later that they have been visitors of all classes: 'some as brave as lords,' Ladies and gentlewomen, 'Citizens' wives,' knights, 'oyster women'. 'Sailors' wives,' and 'Tobacco men', a good cross - section of the Blackfriars community. The only absentees are actors, but they are already inside the house, putting on the show."

The second phase is marked by the revival of *The Alchemist* at the Restoration. The influence of *The Alchemist* on the emergence of the new genre, the Comedy of Manners has already been noted. This period is characterised by the appearance of great actors and the play's introduction into the repertoire of major theatres. Mrs. Corey who played Dol Common right after the Restoration, was better known by the nickname, Dol. For nearly 40 years during the first half of the eighteenth century, *The Alchemist* was regularly staged at the Drury Lane theatre. The financial crash, known as the South Sea Bubble, gave a new lease of life to the play in 1720. Jonson's critique of nascent capitalism and of man's acquisitiveness found an echo at that time.

For more than a quarter century Garrick by his sheer histrionic talent, won for the play unrivalled acclaim. Beginning with an appearance as Drugger in 1743, he took up that role from 1746 until his retirement in 1776. Garrick's Drugger was at that time compared only with his own Lear. Observations on how he played Drugger are instructive: "Mr. Garrick has taken that walk to himself, and is ridiculous above all conception. When he first opens his mouth, the features of his face seem, as it were, to drop upon his tongue, it is all caution; it is timorous, stammering, and inexpressible. Another notable actor who made the play enormously popular was Macklin, who played Face in the decade, 1737-1748".

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, a new phenomenon makes its appearance, viz, revival by academic and professional groups. The Elizabethan Stage Society, for instance, staged the play under the direction of William Poel in 1899 and again three years later. After the outbreak of the first World War, the play was performed by the Marlowe Society, the Birmingham Repertory Company, and the Phoenix Society. Further drama festivals were occasions for staging *The Alchemist*. Mention may be made of the Malvern Festivals of 1932 and 1934, and in the U.S. the Oregon Festival of 1961.

Among modern experimental productions, mention needs to be made of Tyrone Guthrie's at the Liverpool House in 1944-45 and at the Old Vic in 1947. Reviewing the latter production, Arthur Colby Sprague contrasts the acting style of Alac Guinness with reports on Garrick's performance: "Both actors, it is curious to note, were at their best in moments of invented by-play. Garrick was particularly admired for 'the bottle and boxing scenes'.....As for Guinness, his Abel Drugger, having been sent to fetch the Spanish hat and cloak, returned wearing the showy things, and as he waited outside the house, did a little dance of self - admiration." Jonson's sense of the theatre is a marvel.

The actors appeared in modern dress because costumes of Jonson's day and disguises did not convey social rank or degree of formality to the audience three centuries after the first production. At the Old Vic production attempt was made to further modernise certain details: the plague is replaced by a flu epidemic, and in the opening scene Subtle threatens Face not with a magical vial but with a chamberpot. *The Alchemist* was staged for the BBC, over the TV, and by several dramatic societies of universities.

The appeal of *The Alchemist* is partly because of the impression of crowded action. As Dol plays the distracted gentlewoman and the Queen of Fairies, Face too assumes the role of Jeremy, Captain Face, Lungs, and Ulen Spiegal. The gulls, all eight of them, Dapper, Drugger, Mammon, Surly, Ananias, Tribulation, Kastril, and Dame Pliant, have to cope with an equal number of cozeners. Improvisation and the capacity for quick change of disguises makes the performance spirited and lively.

The offshoots of *The Alchemist* bring out elements in the play which have great histrionic potential and relevance. In the seventeenth century form of entertainment known as droll originated. These are farces based upon well-known comic scenes, and depended for their success on the improvisation the actor could display. These Performances had a special vogue the interregnum and Bartholomew fair and

similar festive occasions were preferred. In 1672 a droll was performed adapting two scenes with Druggier and another with Ananias. Druggier was the favourite of several leading actors beginning with Armin, followed by Garrick, Cedric Harwicke and Alec Guinness. Assessing the importance of Garrick's acting, Robert Gale Noyes rightly concludes: "The history of *The Alchemist* was virtually the history of the role of Abel Druggier."

Another offshoot was "The Tobacconist," Francis Gentleman's prose farce produced in 1770 with revivals in 1782, 1787, and 1800. Edmund Kean's performance as Druggier was much applauded. A recent adaptation of *The Alchemist* is Eric Linklater's *The Mortimer Touch* produced in 1950 during the Edinburgh Festival. The power and appeal of the play is noted by Steane:

"Certainly the relevance of *The Alchemist* to the modern world should be clear enough. Our own acquisitive society is quite as susceptible to exploitation as were the Londoners of 1610. The prospect of big and easy money makes knaves and fools now as it did then," and one of the chief pleasures of the audience is laughing with the rogues. Jonson is modern too in demanding judgement rather than empathy, in being critical and unsentimental.

It is true that on the stage, Jonson's use of a variety of jargons acquires a rare force. The encounter between Subtle and the Puritans is an example. Surly's feigning ignorance of English when he disguises himself as a Spanish grandee and the cozeners' acceptance of the disguise bring out the talent of the actors. Echoing Una Ellis-Fermor's estimate of the play, John J. Enck comments: "It is true that *The Alchemist* is a stunning comedy and nothing else quite equals it in English".

The relation of the script to the action is an aspect of the play that surfaces in the course of performance. *The Alchemist* was entered in the Stationer's Register in October 1610. Franz Fricker rightly infers that the Quarto edition was "printed from a prompt-book." The stage directions, then, "can be interpreted as makeshift notes added to the text." Jonson's use of knocks, and implied exists and entrances confirm the need for reflexive mirror passages. The actors' clues to one another in such passages as Dol's question "Will you have/The neighbours hear you?" and Face's admonition, "Speak lower, rough," re-create mutual responses theatrically. In supplementing voice, gesture, and mood, the mirror passages have a theatrical function. As sophisticated aids to the actor, the passages reveal Jonson's vision of the comic action.

4.3 PERFORMANCE AND STAGECRAFT

In Unit III we have discussed that *The Alchemist* is the most circumscribed play that Ben Jonson wrote. The whole action is confined within or immediately outside Lovewit's house in Blackfriars. The nineteenth century editor, Gifford designated 'a room in Lovewit's house,' 'an outerroom....', 'the lane before Lovewit's house,' 'another room in the same' (three times), 'before Lovewit's door, and finally returned to 'the room' and 'the outer room', again for the last two scenes of his last act. Discerning students will understand that this method of location is novelistic rather than theatrical; that the two outside scenes are the same, and that it is hardly necessary to suppose two locations inside the house, certainly not five. Further, if there were a door to be approached from the 'street' side before entry into a realistic Lovewit's house, there would be no need for Jonson to inform his audience, with the last words of Act I, III, and IV, and at the end of several other scenes, who is going to come on the stage next, and where they are. In the first two acts, not only is the action of the play continuous, but it can easily be scene as taking place in a single location - a quite generalised 'room in Lovewit's house.' Also, it is easy to show that this 'room' requires three entrances - a requirement that could be met by most of the conjectured reconstructions that have been made of the Globe or Blackfriars theatre

The play opens with an explosion; through the central entrance, Subtle and Face rush on to the stage quarreling, which Dol tries to part them. By means of this quarrel, both the pretensions and the true nature of these three are made clear, and a good deal of expositions managed quickly, excitingly and with dramatic probability. The hardly whole-hearted reconciliations provide the motive for the action, and its limitations in time.

The rest of the act serves to demonstrate the methods of the partnership in dealings with Dapper and Druggier, and to establish firmly the significance of the right and left doors. One is to the outside, through which the customers are admitted - or not: 'good wives, I pray you forbear me, now' (i, iii) - and through which Captain Face enters following Abel Druggier, after he has conveyed Dapper 'by the back way' through the exit on the other side of the stage.

Act II introduces Mammon and Surly, and the first scene is set by Gifford in 'an outer room of Lovewit's house! There is no need for this as it is clear from the text that there is no break in the action during the whole of the act, and certain scenes are plainly inside the house and clearly related to the laboratory. Further, Jonson's intention is to attach certain plain significances to certain areas of a non-representational stage:

"Come on, Sir. Now, you set your foot on shore
In novo orbe; here's the rich pern;
And there within, Sir, are the golden mines,
Great Solomon's Ophir! (IV, I,1-4)",

says Mammon to Surly. If we analyse his metaphor, we perceive that when Surly sets his foot on shore in novo orbe, he learns the ocean of the street and enters the house - i.e. through the stage - right door that leads to the street in an arbitrary disposition of the stage. When Mammon points to the golden mines 'there within, Sir' he means the laboratory, the alchemical apparatus, and he points to the central entrance to the stage's through all the act, and particularly in the third scene, the attention of the audience is concentrated on this central entrance. You must note that when Jonson prepared his tent for the printer of the folio, he did not write in all the details of stage-business, especially if they were clear from the dialogue.

Moreover, when - at the end of Mammon's hyperbolical outburst on the life of sensual pleasure he will lead when has the stone, Face says:

"Sir, I'll go look"

A little, how it heightens (II,ii,87-88) and leaves the stage by the central entrance that leads to the laboratory. Strictly afterwards, Subtle enters through the same door at the beginning of scene iii. In the long discussion of alchemy that follows, Face - now Ulen Spiegel - is reportedly called on to give a report on the progress of the works - must repeatedly pass into and out of the laboratory. He may sometimes call out from within, or perhaps the curtains of the "discoverable space" were drawn back, revealing an elaborate piece of apparatus set up and the stage locations of the dream factory is firmly established for future reference.

Also,

"What a brave language here is, next to country!"

says Surly of the discussions of alchemy, but the point of the scene is not only to ridicule the grotesque impropriety of the alchemical language which at the same time establishing the pervasiveness of Subtle and the obsession of Mammon; it is also to establish in terms of stage geography the location of the 'golden mines' in Mammon's rich pern'

In a production in a *proscenium - arch* theatre, the scene that opens Act III, the conversation between Ananias and Tribulation in the lane outside Love wit's house, would probably be presented in front of the stage curtains.

At the end of the scene they would go off, the curtains would open, and they would promptly enter once more. Once the action is back in Subtle's consulting room, the locations so firmly established at the beginning of the play become operational once more. Subtle at once refers to the apparatus within, and could move angrily towards the laboratory entrance, restrained by Tribulation, to set about the threatened work of destruction when Ananias chips in with his protests. When these locations are established they are put to excellent comic use. The pace of the play gets faster as the customers arrive one after another and have to be prevented from meeting.

Act IV begins at the point of Mammon's entrance because this is the beginning of the crisis. It leads to the explosion of the laboratory in scene V. Dol 'in her file of talking' and Mammon could use the 'upper stage' (if there was one) in this scene, but there is no need for them to do so! The scene could with more convenience be managed on the main stage.

Act V begins in the street outside the house and remains there for the first three scenes., while Face is finally forced to telling his master the truth - or some of it. As scene iii ends, and Love wit and Face go into the house through one door, Dol and Subtle bring Dapper out through the other - soon followed by Face - and we are back inside the house again. The loose ends of the plot are tied up one by one. Face blows up one by one - reversing the expectations of Dol and Subtle. The dupes return with officers to search, and are out faced by Lovewit, and the play ends.

You must note that the laboratory - though it is never seen, or need not be - is the symbol at the centre of the play. It is the dream factory - the most potent instrument of delusions, and its presence and locations are firmly established early in the play. This one fixed point in space obliged Jonson to have others; the two doors, right and left - one to the outside world and one to the 'back way'. Jonson the scholar was no doubt pleased to construct a play that fitted so neatly the neo-classical prescriptions of the unities of time, place, and action; Jonson the man of the theatre turned these strict limitations to brilliant account - in contriving comic stage-business-comings and goings quick changes unexpected entries, double takes, and so on. But scholar and theatre craftsman are but subservient to the imaginative artist, who saw the apparatus for making gold - the get-rich quick machine - as the central symbol of a play about human greed and credulity, and their inevitable consequence in disappointment and loss.

4.4 CRITICAL EXTRACTS

J.B. Steane

The Alchemist is one of the best comedies in English, but many conscripted readers may be forgiven if they do not think so. They will have met the play in a schoolroom and read it 'in class'. They will have looked ahead to try to make some sense of their own next speech, lending one ear meanwhile to Subtle who is only just able to keep pace with his script, casting one eye at the notes to see if they have anything to say about a line that might possibly be amusing if it could be understood, and wishing perhaps that they had listened to their teacher's symposia of what was happening 'last period'

Michael Jamieson

When Sir Tyrone Guthrie directed *The Alchemist* at London's Old Vic in 1962, the play was performed in modern dress. In part this was because the desire for wealth

still makes people gullible today, Guthrie gave a further reason in his programme note: modern dress gives more point to the frequent disguises and impersonations used by the trio of rogue. In Jacobean dress, who would know when Face was a Captain or House Servant? But because Jonson used contemporary idiom and place-reference so vividly, some obscurity is nowadays unavoidable, and a director may well want to make cuts.

L.C. Knights (1937)

Recent revivals of *Volpone* and *The Alchemist* occasioned some surprise – surprise that they were such good ‘theatre’. Certainly the reception given to those plays implied a still widespread misconception both of Jonson’s intrinsic merits and of the extent and kind of his indebtedness to the Classics.

M.C. Bradbrook.

Jonson’s Dickensian comedies of the London underworld, *The Alchemist* and *Bartholomew Fair*, have proved much the most popular with modern audiences; the literary as distinct from the theatrical popularity of Jonson has grown. In the universities, where in many cases social and interdisciplinary features of literary history are stressed, Jonson’s plays take a central place.

S. Musgrove

The staging, like the play, is highly concentrated... A problem arises in those scenes where some characters are inside and others outside the house. H.S. and E.K. Chambers visualise a wall built out on to the stage containing a door practicable from both sides, used by Face talking to Mammon in III. V... If this is so, then every character entering from the street must be seen by the audience well before they enter was implied in the text. Lovewit and the Neighbours, for instance, must appear, with nothing to say, before the end of IV. vii; and there are other difficulties. I have therefore followed the traditional editorial view by which the stage turned itself into the exterior of the house for V. i-iii, and probably III. i, but otherwise remains an interior, with the characters in the street heard, but not seen, “within”.

J. B. Bamforth

His technique of accumulation, of heaping one absurdity or humorous clause on another until the audience is almost battered into laughter, works well in the theatre, but is difficult to demonstrate in a lecture-room, and because even his shorter comic passages depend so much for their effect on the context in which they occur they cannot easily be detached by the critic. We do not swap quotations from Jonson as we do from Shakespeare or Wilde, and this perhaps may have contributed to the belief that he is a slow and ponderous writer... A visit to a production of *The Alchemist* should prove an adequate corrective to this belief. It is the most energetic and fast-moving of all Jonson’s robust and vigorous comedies, a non-stop display of ingenuity and invention, centering flawlessly in the quick-change artistry of Face, Subtle, and Dol Common *The Alchemist*, and like all Jonson’s comedy it demands to be played quickly and without pause.

F. H. Mares (1967)

This play is the most circumscribed that Jonson wrote. The whole action is confined within or immediately outside Lovewit’s house in Blackfriars... E.K. Chambers seems to have thought of some kind of permanent set for this play, for he mentions the need for a ‘practicable’ door and seems to suggest that, for example, at the beginning of Act III the Anabaptists would approach this door from one side and talk outside it in the first scene, then knock and go through the door (all the while fully visible to the audience) to meet Subtle for III, ii inside the house... In the theatre this

illusionism is given its visual counterpart in the rapid assumption of different roles-*The Alchemist* presents a different personality to each of his customers-or infrequent changes of costume: Abel Drugger was one of Garrick's most famous and successful parts, and his performance in it was regularly contrasted with his Lear as a measure of his range and versatility... In 1770 an Irish actor, Francis Gentleman, provided a farce called *The Tobacconist*, crudely from Jonson's play, with Thomas Weston in the part of Drugger...

Arthur Colby Sprague

The happiest period enjoyed by this most popular of Jonson's plays began in 1721 and ended, with the retirement of David Garrick, in 1776... Something like an Elizabethan upper stage is useful in certain scenes, most clearly, I should say, at Lovewit's homecoming, when the action takes place outside his house and Face at last appears in answer to the repeated knocking.

Franz Fricker

The large mass of stage directions are, as in *Volpone* and *Epicoene*, additions for the sake of the reader. They are concerned mainly with sound and stage business. Half dozen reflect exits and entrances, the rest deal with disguise and ways of speaking...first, there is the simple kind defining walk-ones and walk-offs in an incidental way such as by means of short reflexive mirror passages... The second kind is much more elaborate, often developing into a dramatic scene invariably created as the careful preparation of a dupe's walk-on...The possibility of observing visitors from the window conveniently lends itself to the discussion of characters before their walk-ons. The device used is frequently that of the transitive mirror passage Summarizing the results of our examination of the mirror passages in *The Alchemist*, we can say that

They are concerned mainly with sound, disguise, and deception;

An allusive quality of the speeches often replaces possible straightforward dramatic control, related to a tendency to prefer colloquial language to rhetoric;

Clear-cut mirror passages tend to occur in satirized rhetoric;

Their function is frequently to express irony;

The playful, often sophisticated, technique offers less guidance to the actor than the straightforward method known from *Volpone*;

The author found it necessary to add stage directions to restore the balance between implicit and explicit theatrical guidance

Herford And Simpson

Jonson's setting of the scene and careful dovetailing of the events of the plot are exceptionally well thought out, even for him. There is no change of scene. Everything takes place in a single room of Lovewit's house of in front of the door that opens on the lane outside. The house has a window which commands a view of the lane; The doors were in an interior wall built on the stage, 'for action Jonson here is a clear innovator, so far as the English public theatre is concerned; no other play of our period reproduces this type of permanent interior setting... The time-sequence is worked out with exceptional fullness.

Robert Gale Noyes

Of all the comedies of Jonson, *The Alchemist* had the most brilliant stage-history... It was acted oftener than any other Jonsonian play, it held the stage the most steadily, almost exclusively as a Drury Lane piece; always there was a curiously false emphasis in considering the most important acting role neither Subtle, *The Alchemist*,

nor the wonderfully imaginative Sir Epicure Mammon, but the pusillanimous tobacco-boy, Abel Drugger... The history of *The Alchemist* was virtually the history of the role of Abel Drugger, Garrić's problem in altering *The Alchemist*, a play very long and highly wrought technically, was to reduce the bulk without changing the progress of events, because once the sequence was tampered with, the carefully graded continuity was almost irreparably destroyed and suspense was ruined. The acting version, therefore, consists of a great number of minor cuts, but no characters are wholly eliminated as in *Volpone*, and no scenes are expanded as in *Every Man in His Humour*.

D.V.K. Raghavacharyulu

One wonders whether *The Alchemist* as a language experiment, does not attain the quality of such plays as Beckett's *Endgame*, Ionesco's *The Chairs* and O'Neill's *Hughie*. In many ways indeed the author of the play is our cousin, Mr. Ben Jonson.

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4.6 QUESTIONS

1. Keeping the stage craft used in *The Alchemist*, discuss the problems, with possible solution, that might arise in trying to make *The Alchemist* acceptable to a modern audience.
2. Write a short note on *The Alchemist* in the theatre.
3. What were the contributions of Jonson the scholar, Jonson the theatre craftsman, and Jonson the imaginative artist to the making of the play, *The Alchemist*.

Annotate the following passages with reference to context:

- i) How scrupulous he is, and violent,
'Gainst the least act of sin. Physic, or mathematics,
Poetry, state, or bawdry (as I told you)
She will endure, and never startle; but
No word of controversy.
- ii) Rain her as many showers as Jove did drops
Unto his Danae; show the god a miser
Compared with Mammon. What? The stone will do't.
She shall feel gold, taste gold, hear gold, sleep gold:
Nay, we will *concumbere* gold.
- iii) Nature
Never bestowed upon mortality,
A more unblamed, a more harmonious feature;
She played the stepdame in all faces, else.
- iv) Above the art of Aesculapius,
That drew the envy of the Thunderer!^o
I know all this, and more.
- v) It is noble humour. But this form
Was not intended to so dark a use!
Had you been crooked, foul, of some coarse mould,
A cloister had one well; but such a feature
That might stand up the glory of a kingdom,
To live recluse! Is a mere solecism,^o
Though in a nunnery.
- vi) I'm pleased the glory of her sex should know
This nook, here, of the Friars, is no climate
For her to live obscurely in, to learn
Physic and surgery for the constable's wife
Of some odd hundred in Essex; but come forth,
And taste the air of palaces; eat, drink
The toils of emp'rics, and their boasted practice;
Tincture of pearl, and coral, gold, and amber;
- vii) Be seen at feasts, and triumphs; have it asked,
What miracle she is? Set all the eyes
Of court afire, like a burning glass,
And work'em into cinders, when the jewels
Of twenty states adorn thee, and the light
Strikes out the stars; that, when thy name is mentioned,
Queens may look pale; and we but showing our love,
Nero's Poppaea may be lost in story!^o
Thus will we have it.
- viii) We'll therefore go with all, my girl, and live
In a free state, where we will eat our mullets^o
Soused in high-country wines, sup pheasants' eggs,
And have our cockles boiled in silver shells,
Our shrimps to swim again, as when they lived,
In a rare butter made of dolphins' milk.

Whose cream does look like opals; and with these
Delicate meats, set ourselves high for pleasure,
And take us down again, and then renew

Our youth and strength with drinking the elixir,
And so enjoy a perpetuity
Of life and lust.

- ix) And thou shalt ha' thy wardrobe,
Richer than Nature's, still, to change thyself,
And very oft'ner, for the pride, than she,
Or Art, her wise and almost-equal servant
- x) O, this's no true grammar^o
And as ill logic! You must render causes, child,^o
Your first and second intentions, know your canons
And your divisions, modes, degrees and differences,
Your predicaments, substance and accident,
Series extern and intern, with their causes
Efficient, material, formal, final,
And ha' your elements perfect—
- xiv) O, your linea fortunae makes it plain^o
And stella, here, in monte Veneris:^o
But, most of all, junctura anularis.^o
He is a soldier, or a man of art, lady,
But shall have some great honour shortly.
- xiv) I'll ha' you to my chamber of demonstrations,
Where I'll show you both the grammar and logic
And rhetoric of quarrelling; my whole method
Drawn out in tables; and my instrument,
That hath the several scale upon't, shall make you
Able to quarrel at a straw's breadth by moonlight.
- xiii) Now lies upon't. It is but one man more,
Which on's chance to have her; and, beside,^o
There is no maidenhead to be feared or lost.
- xiv) Your Spanish jennet is the best horse; your Spanish
Stoup is the best grab; your Spanish beard^o
Is the best cut, your Spanish ruffs are the best
Wear; your Spanish pavan the best dance.
Your Spanish titillation in a glove
The best perfume; and for your Spanish pike,
And Spanish blade, let your poor Captain speak.
- xv) And so we may arrive by Talmud skill,^o
And profane Greek, to raise the building up
Of Heber's house, against the Ismaelite,^o
King of Togarma, and his habergions^o
Brimstony, blue, and fiery; and the force
Of King Abaddon, and the Beast of Cittim,^o
Which Rabbi David Kimchi, Onkelos,^o
And Aben-Ezra do interpret Rome.^o
- xvi) O sir, we are defeated! All the works
Are flown in fumo; every glass is burst.^o
Furnace, and all rent down, as if a bolt
Of thunder had been driven through the house.
Retorts, receivers, pelicans, holt-heads,
All struok in shivers!

- xvii) Lady, you see into what hands you are fallen;
'Mongst what a nest of villains! And how near
Your honour was to have caught a certain clap
(Through your credulity) had I but been
So punctually forward, as place, time,
And other circumstance would ha'made a man;
- xviii) For you're a handsome woman: would yo' were wise, too.
I am gentleman, come here disguised,
Only to find the knaveries of this citadel,
And where I might have wronged your honour, and have not,
I claim some interest in your love. You are,
They say, a widow, rich; and I am a bachelor,
Worth nought. Your fortunes may make me a man,
As mine ha' preserved you a woman. Think upon it,
And whether I have deserved you, or no.
- xix) Ther'es no such thing intended. A good cart
And a clean whip shall ease you of that fear.^o
I am the Spanish Don that should be cozened.
- xx) O, make your approach, good Captain.
I've found from whence your copper rings and spoons
Come, now, wherewith you cheat abroad in taverns.^o
'Twas here, you learned t' anoint your boot with brimstone,
Then rub men's gold on't, for a kind of touch,
And say 'twas nought, when you had changed the colour,
That you might ha't for nothing? And this Doctor,
Your sooty, smoky-beared compeer, he
Will close you so much gold in a bolt's-head,
And, on a turn, convey I'the stead another
With sublimed mercury, that shall burst I' the heat,
- xxi) Then weeps Mammon;
Then swoons his worship. Or he is the Faustus^o
That casteth figures and can conjure, cures
Plague, piles, and pox, by the ephemerides,
And holds intelligence with all the bawds,
And midwives of three shires? While you send in
Captain—what, is he gone?—dansels with child,
Wives that are barren, or the waiting-maid
With the green-sickness? [Seizing Subtle] Nay, sir, you must tarry
Though he be 'seapod, and answer by the ears, sir.^o
- i) This cheater would ha' cozened thee o'the widow.
He owes this honest Druggier, here, here, seven pound,
He has had on him, in two-penny'orths of tobacco.
- ii) Thou art not of the light. That ruff of pride
About thy neck betrays thee, and is the same
With that, which the unclean birds, in seventy-seven,
Were seen to prank it with on divers coasts.^o
Thou look'st like Antichrist in the lewd hat.^o
- iii) The Spaniard hates the brethren, and hath spies
Upon their actions; and that this was one
I make no scruple. But the holy synod
Have been in prayer and meditation of it.
And 'tis revealed no less to them than me,
That casting of money is most lawful.

UNIT 5 CHARACTERIZATION AND LANGUAGE

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Characterization
- 5.3 Language
- 5.4 Critical Reception of Ben Jonson
- 5.5 Questions
- 5.6 Annotation Passages

5.0 OBJECTIVES

The main objective of the unit is to discuss the characterization and language used in the play.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Characterization, as you know, is an important aspect of plays. As characters contribute to the development of plot and attract the attention of the audience. Dexterous playwrights like Jonson and Shakespeare put in efforts to infuse blood into their characters and made them immortals in the minds of their audiences/readers. To make the characters realistic and lively, suitable language should be used by the playwright.

5.2 CHARACTERIZATION

Ben Jonson based his characterization on the doctrine of humours derived from the Middle Ages. The humours were four bodily fluids - choler, blood, phlegm and melancholy - corresponding in their attributes to the four elements; choler, like fire, was hot and dry; blood, like air, hot and moist; phlegm, like water cold and wet; melancholy, like earth, cold and dry. Just as the balance of the elements in a material body determined its kind, so the balance of the humours in a man determined his psychological type. A disturbance of the balance-appropriate for an individual's temperamentto both physical and psychological disorders, Jonson wrote two comedies, *Every man In His Humour* and *Every Man out of His Humour*, where he relied on the doctrine of humanness as a basis for his characters' personalities. Such an approach constituted a scientific justification for the extreme character types that have always been a staple of comedy.

Jonson stated his position in the opening scene of *Every Man Out of His Humour* and the key lines are worth quoting:

".....so in every human body
The choler, melancholy, phlegm, and blood
By reason that they flow continually
In some one part, and are not continent,
Receive the name of humours. Now this far
It may, by metaphor, apply itself
Unto the general disposition;

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

However, humours were not as important in Jonson's later plays as they were in his early plays. In the twelve years between *Every Man In His Humour* (1598) and *The Alchemist* (1610) his emphasis shifted. *The Alchemist*, like *Volpone*'s a few years earlier, was a satirical attack on lust, greed and hypocrisy. In *The Alchemist* "humour" means simply a quirk of character. Surly says "I have a humour/I would not willingly be gulled," which means "I have an odd quirk of character; I do not like to be cheated."

As a dramatic technique, the doctrine of humours has advantages as well as disadvantages. It is a simplifying method. If we compare Jonson and Shakespeare as dramatists, it is at once apparent that Shakespeare's characters are more complex; that their motives are more various than Jonson's; that they are capable of surprising us. In other words, they are more like real people. Jonson's, on the other hand, are like caricatures but not portraits. They are simplified and exaggerated, and just for this reason, they are alienated from our sympathy. We shall explain them by citing an example. It is a serious problem in *The Merchant of Venice* that Shylock is a traditional comic villain who suddenly turns into a deeply informed human being whose desire for revenge, if not pardonable, is at best understandable. This could not happen in *The Alchemist*: we feel little or no sympathy for the characters because we know from the start they are not human; They are both super-human and sub-human: superhuman in the extent and intensity of their passion and sub-human in its singleness and limitation and in the absence of redeeming counter qualities.

Attached to these broad principles of character creation are two devices that can be considered points of craftsmanship. Jonson always supplied a thorough introduction for each character on his first appearance, we come to know Subtle, Face and Dol in the first scene. We also come to know each of the victims as he arrives. After their introduction, characters do not develop during the play. The other device is the language. It is discussed in the following section.

We shall now discuss the important characters:-

A. The Cheats: The three cheats: Subtle, Face and Dol Common operate in different ways and, perhaps out of different motives. When they don the costumes of their roles, they assume the characteristics of the disguises they put on, not just playing the part, but by identifying themselves with the roles.

i) **Subtle:** He is the central figure in *The Alchemist*. As Herford and Simpson put it, he stands with one foot in the region of the prodigious, with the other planted firmly on the ground of contemporary human nature. It is through him that Ben Jonson has exposed and satirised the cheats and swindlers who flourished abundantly in his age.

Alchemy a pseudo-science - was a widespread social malady in the Elizabethan Age. The jargon of alchemy is the basis of Subtle's metaphors and our echo of how he thinks. Throughout the play he is the complete swindler who derives full satisfaction from his job of swindling. To illustrate: in Act III scene ii, when Face is not particularly concerned about not finding Surly in town - as, after all, there is no money to be made from Surly - Subtle has his mind on higher things than money: "O but to have gulled him/had seen a mastery."

Subtle is most interesting when he plays various roles, changes his role at a moment's notice and behaves differently with different duos at the quinine of the play. we

will find Subtle in ordinary clothes - the only symbol his craft being the vial of acid that he carries. But as soon as Dapper arrives he dons his robes, and he is now engaged in magic. He assumes the dignity that is required; he feigns reluctance to take money. He is equally dignified with Druggier when he reads his forehead or his palm. In his dealings with Mammon, Subtle apparently becomes the completely dedicated alchemist, working with his ambition to achieve the philosopher's stone. He proclaims that impure thoughts will result in the failure of the process. He is worthy of the awe with which Mammon treats him, who, except Surly, can doubt that Subtle is not the holy doctor? When he describes the process, he speaks with dignity and authority as though he has forgotten that no experiments are in progress and no work has been done. And when he explains the rationale of alchemy to Surly, he is the very spirit of sweet reasonableness - a man who is secure in his knowledge and has only pity for the skeptic who does not understand. Finally, when the fake explosion takes place, he succeeds in convincing Mammon that it has occurred due to Mammon's sin. With the puritans, Subtle adopts an entirely different image and is consistent in it: he is irascible, stubborn, opinionated, and impatient.

But he lacks the refinement, culture, and poetry of Jonson's Volpone. In this regard, Herford and Simpson wrote: Volpone yields nothing in knavery to Subtle, but Subtle is despoiled of the explicit poetry which breaks in lurid flashes from Volpone, the Fox; he comes before us, not chanting an exultant morning hymn to his shrined treasure, 'the world's soul and mine', but exchanging volleys of gutter language with his partner i.e. Face. And this sordid imposter of north is at bottom far more intelligible than the Venetian patrician. Volpone, so securely incorporated, by his rank and status, with the very body of the Venetian polity, is yet felt to be the alien he is. Subtle is bound by no such ties of ostensible community to the society. He prays upon, and his operations are far more deeply ingrained - with sham; but, we are made, nonetheless, to see that this creature had a natural history, that his is a growth of the soil, a fungus - growth routed in the greed and hunger of London. In words of Caryleian flavour and pungency, Jonson tells us what he preciously was:

"Taking your meale of steam in from cookes,
Where, like the father of hunger, you did walke
Piteously costive, with your pinche'd hrne-mess
And you complexion, of romane wash,
Stuck full of black, and melan cholioue wormes.

And Subtle remains to the end sordid in his making and spending of money."

Subtle, thus, is a powerful representative of the medieval pseudo-alchemists who, - unlike the other alchemists that figured in literature - has some individual attributes. He is shrewd and versatile, perspicacious and persuasive. He is both a type and an individual.

ii) Face: In the play Face has not one face but many: he plays varied roles and wears many masks. In the beginning of the play, he is Jeremy, the butler in the house of Lovewit and so he is at the end. He is also a persuasive rogue who lures clients for Subtle by using his skills and shrewdness. It is he who builds up the image of Dr. Subtle as the man who can make the philosopher's stone; as a magician who has dealing with the world of spirits; as an astrologer who can read signs and lines on the palm and foresee the future. He is here, there and everywhere.

He is sharp-witted, glib-tongued and is always ready with some excuse or plan to save a situation. He is right in saying that he should be given a larger share of the projects as he lures in the clients and dupes and takes more pains than Subtle.

Jonson, in the opening scene, throws some light on the part of Face. The play opens with a quarrel between Face and Subtle, and the latter gives a graphic account of the earliest face of Face before he became Jeremy, the butler. In those days Face was

poor, thin, and had the company of ruffians whom he had met in disreputable taverns. As Subtle puts it:

"Thou Vermine, have I not taken thee, out of dung,
So poore, so wretched, when no living thing
Would keepe thee companie, but a spider or horse?
Rais'd thee from broomes, and dust, and watering pots?
Sublim'd thee; and exalted thee, and fix'd thee
I, 'the third region, call'd our start of grace?
Wrought thee to spirits, to quintessence, with panes
Would twice have won me the philosopher's works
Put thee in words and fashion?
Made the fit
For more than ordinarie fellowships?"

Moreover, Face is a typical rogue who reminds us of Mosca of Volpone. Here is the analysis of Herford and Simpson: "Face is much more nearly related to Mosca than Subtle to Volpone. But he is far from being a replica. The fabric of make believe which he sustains is several degrees more complicated and various; Mosca is a real parasite dependent upon a real patron; Face plays alchemist's drudge, as he plays the Captain in the joint business in which, at least, he is the more masterful partner and has the larger stake. The energetic opening scene, where the two rogues vie in tearing away the last ragged vesture of each other's self-esteem, makes us vividly aware of the natural history of Face no less than that of Subtle; but Jeremy, the enterprising butler, accomplished in all the varieties of back stair pilfering, who compounds with a conjurer for the use of his master's empty house on the terms of equal profits and a bonus horse-race, cock-pit, cards, must have been instantly accepted as a London rascal true to type."

Like Subtle, he responds to the roles he must play. He is Captain Face; he is 'Lungs', the sorcerer's apprentice, and at the end he is Jeremy the butler. As Captain Face he is the rude and over bearing bully. He can fight Subtle in the opening scene of the play, and this role gives him the required fillip to his confidence first and later, success. 'When he is the sorcerer's apprentice, 'Lungs', he is affable and obsequious. As Jeremy he retires from the limelight as soon as his real master, Lovewit arrives. You, as a discerning student, can understand the actor's (i.e. the one who plays this role of a rogue) difficulty in changing personalities while changing roles.

iii) Dol Common: Though Dol is not as active as Subtle or Face, she plays well the part assigned to her. The following are the comments of Herford and Simpson on her role: "If Face is a Mosca of more shifts and better luck; the third member of 'the indenture tripartite' has no equivalent in the earlier play. The female rogue, paramour, and partner of the chief contriver of the harms, was, however, a figure not unknown to Jonson. She is an indispensable member of the 'house' - indispensable to the precious pair whose game she plays and whose dangerous fends she quells, indispensable to the intrigue which she complicates and enriches, indispensable above all to the satire, to the flavour of which her presence adds an ironical pungency not to be otherwise obtained. Even the business of catering for the lust of clients illustrates less drastically the pretension of the alchemist to 'holy living' than do the sordid lotteries and altercations of Subtle and Face for the possession of their common mistress." Even though as the Queen of Fairies, she has no opportunity to improvise, she still stands in the front rank of Jonson's women.

B) The Dupes: The three dupes Mammon, Drugger, and Dapper, have different levels of imagination and are at different levels of evolution.

i) Sir Epicure Mammon: Surly describes Sir Epicure Mammon aptly:

"Heart! Can it be
That a gram sir, a rich, that has no need,

A wise sir, too, at other times, should thus,
With his own oaths, and arguments, make hard means
To gull himself?

Mammon is an imposing figure who stands head and shoulders above the other dupes viz., Dapper, Druggier, and Kastrill. His highly poetic imagination exalts and transmutes even the coarse and the vulgar into something noble and high. His passions are two: craving for money and lust for women. Due to these passions, he becomes a prey to the three cheats in the play, viz. Subtle, Face, and Dol.

Here are the comments of Herford and Simpson on Mammon's opulent imagination! "Sir Epicure Mammon stands apart and aloof. He belongs not merely to a different social rank as it's a different order of imagination. The realism of Jonson's method, elsewhere in this play so pervading and to all appearance so sedulously preserved, here gives way to personage who belongs to the London of Jonson and James I by about as good right - as Marlowe's Faustus to Wittenberg. The sinister romance of Volpone, the hint of poetry in the worship of gold, his god, is resumed and heightened in Sir Epicure's magnificent dreams. Jonson is here for once Marlowesque, but in a kind unborrowed and his own. Mammon is a Faustus of the senses, captivated by the dreams of exploring the utmost possibilities of recondite and requisite sensation, as Faustus by the dream of boundless knowledge and power. The sordid Mephistophiles of the laboratory never fulfils his bond, but Mammon has already taken possession of his kingdom and feasts full at the origins his imagination provides. Volpone's imagination is an instrument of his cunning and cruel brain, employed to discover new ways of explicating and deluding others. Both are magnificent in sin; even their lust is aristocratic and demands a noble prey; but while Volpone almost secures the noblest and chastest lady in Venice, Mammon hails a harlot as a princess, and discovers in the common mistress of Subtle and Face, not only the Austrian lip and the Medicean forehead, but an air,

"That sparkles a diceinitic, beyond an earthy beantie!"

Keeping in view the comments of Herford and Simpson given above, we can analyse his role: we first meet him after he has been a client of the three cheats for sometime and so we can conclude that they have had ample time to convince him. But, what we see is Mammon weaving fantasies - which are above the reach of Face's descriptive abilities - in a language full of poetic colour and imagery. He describes the virtues and the procedures of alchemy with learning and delight. He talks of books written by Adam (in 'High Dutch'); he reinterprets mythology (Jason's fleece) to fit his purposes. The weaving of fantasies never ends while he is on stage. The luxuries he describes are the measure of his character:

"I'll have no bawds
But fathers and mothers they will do it best,
Best of all others. And my flatters
Shall be the pure and gravest of divines
That I can get for money. My mere fools..
Eloquent burgenes
The few that would give our themselves to be
Cant and town-stallions....
These will I beg, to make me eumuchs of "

Moreover, the famous passage about food is fascinating and enticing for Gourmets. Gluttony, a vice usually comic or distasteful is heightened by rich verse:

"My meat shall all come on, in Indian shells,
Dishes of agate set in gold, and studded
With emeralds, sapphires, hyacinths, and rubies,
The tongues of carps, dormice, and Camel's heels,
Boiled in the spirit of sol, and dissolved pearl

Apicius' diet, 'gainst the epilepsy;
 And I will eat these broth's with spoons of amber,
 Heated with diamond and carbunch.
 -----I myself will have
 The beards of barbell served, instead of salads;
 Oiled mushrooms, and the swelling unctuous paps
 Of a fat pregnant sow, newly cut off,
 Desert with an exquisite and poignant sauce"

This poetry, full of imagery, which is evocative of lust and gluttony, peppered with dreams of luxury beyond belief and showing occasional display of omnipotence based on unlimited wealth describes - though partly - the character of Sir Epicure Mammon.

ii) Drugger: He is a simple tradesman with modest ambitions. As he intends to open a new tobacconist's shop, he is in search of a lucky sign; he wants his horoscope read so that he will know whether he will be successful; and he is keen on knowing how to arrange his merchandise and shelves on the best scientific principles, so that the supernatural forces will be favourable to him, so his quest is not for Philosopher's stone, but for lucky signs and days. We will, now, take a look at the analysis of Herford and Simpson:

"In the admirable character of Drugger, on the other hand, Jonson has exemplified the side of alchemy which commended it to the plain, prosaic philistine who wanted to insure his business, or to steal a march upon trade rivals by more 'scientific' methods than theirs. And the scholar's ridicule for pseudo-science is here compounded with the ridicule of a man of shrewd sense for the dabblers in science who try to make learning do the work of mother-wit, and book knowledge to take the place of practice. Drugger, proposing to plan his shop 'by necromancy,' and Kastrill, eager to qualify for the company of the other Angry Boys by learning the rule of duelling suffer equally. They are less innocently amusing creatures than Stephen; but the infusion of gull in their composition, if slighter, is intrinsically of a deeper dye. They are pedants of a bogus craft."

Moreover, had Drugger paid his money for knowing lucky signs and days, he would have succeeded in his business. But, unfortunately for him the team of swindlers lure him with the possibility of marrying a young, beautiful, wealthy widow i.e. Dame Pliant. Thus, the swindlers exploit the superstitious and credulous nature of Drugger to the fullest extent.

iii) Dapper: By profession, Dapper is a lawyer's clerk, but he doesn't have commonsense. He is easily gulled to believe that the Queen of Fairies is his aunt and that she is fond of him. He is inflicted with the most humiliating of personal indignities; he swallows anything including gingerbread gags. Of all the gulls, he is the worst.

C. The Puritans: In Act III we have discussed how Jonson made use of the happenings in contemporary England for the purpose of writing his plays. We find two such historical happenings, which were responsible for Jonson's depiction of the characters of the Puritans. Those are: i) The puritans of Amsterdam, in order to promote their 'holy cause' of converting more and more people of England to their faith, were in need of huge amounts of money; and they thought that they would get it through the Philosopher's stone. When they approached 'the alchemists in England for 'the stone' they were gulled by the latter. ii) The puritans wanted the theatres to be closed down as they considered them dens of inequity and disrepute. The playwrights like Jonson and Shakespeare accused them of hypocrisy and satirised their cant hypocrisy and greed in their plays: Jonson's most famous Puritanical hypocrite is Zeal-of-the-Land Busy in *Bartholomew Fair* and Shakespeare's is Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*.

We will take a look at the analysis done by Herford and Simpson of the two puritans: "The puritan dupes, Ananias and Wholesome, mark a new departure. Jonson, as a professed catholic, during the precious ten or eleven years, can never have felt any attraction for the 'saints of the Reformation', but this was his first undisguised exposure of puritan foibles on the pillory of the stage. His attitude to puritanism was indeed not unlike his attitude to alchemy. Both were, for him, social pests, offensive by their hypocritical pretension and their masquerade of hollow and questionable learning. He treats the two puritans, indeed, with a palpably deeper contempt than any of other dupes, or even than the chemist himself. The debates with Subtle are insidiously contrived to exhibit the similarity of their aims and his. The Philosopher's 'Stone is a more effective and certain way of getting that advantage which the puritans sought through the cumbrous machinery of 'longwinded exercises' and inconvenient dress; and Subtle's praise of it thus naturally takes the form of an ironical recital of the Puritans' practices with which the stone will enable them to dispense. When Ananias introduces himself as 'a faithful Brother', and Subtle affects to understand by this as devotees of alchemy, the two professions at once assume the air of parallel fraternities. And Jonson's erudite humour is thoroughly in its element when he is pitting the two professional jargons against each other as in the second scene of Act III."

i) Ananias: He is narrow and stupid, violent and inflexible. He regards Subtle and his language of alchemy as heathen and his stone 'a work of darkness', and does not want to have any truck with the alchemist. He firmly believes that the seared cause of Puritanism should flourish by good means. But, due to his great faith in the integrity and wisdom of his friend. Tribulation Wholesome, he approaches Subtle. But he disagrees with Subtle and says: 'please the profane, to grieve the godly; I may not'. But being a hypocrite, he concludes that 'casting of dollars is concluded lawful.' When Lovewit threatens to beat him with a cudgel, he grows violent and heaps curses on Lovewit's house:

"May dogs defie thy walls
And wasps and hornets breath beneath thy roof"

ii) Tribulation Wholesome: He also - like his naïve friend, Ananias - uses expressions peculiar to the puritans. But, unlike Ananias, he does not believe in means and he thinks that means are justified by the ends:

"We must bend into all means,
That may give furtherance to the holy cause".

When Ananias is horrified at the idea of appeasing a swindler like Subtle, for Tribulation,

"The children of perdition are oft-times
Made instruments, even of the greatest works."

Subtle-being a shrewd swindler - understands his client, Tribulation extremely well, Having been able to convince Tribulation about getting money by means of Philosopher's stone, Subtle moves from noble causes to those that appeal to the former's baser uses such as it is a cure for gout or palsy or drops; (for health purpose) it can restore 'A lady that is past the feat of body, though not of mind' (for lewd use) and as an offshoot 'you have made a friend/And all her friends' (again for lewd use) and then, 'To buy the king of France out of his realms, or Spain/out of his Indies.' Having been enticed and entrapped, Tribulation says, "We may be temporal lords ourselves, I take it." Thus, the puritans, Tribulation is an epitome of hypocrisy.

D) Minor Characters: Surly, Kastril, Dame Pliant, and Lovewit are minor characters, but as they contribute to the development of the plot - especially denouement - their roles become significant

i) Surly: We first meet Surly with Mammon. He suspects the alchemical cant and the elaborate masquerade, regards Subtle as a swindler, calls their house a bawdy house, and says Dol is a prostitute in league with Subtle and Face to cheat people like Mammon. The discerning comments of Herford and Simpson are as follows: "...he is the all-knowing and well-meaning in the play, a type of character who makes frequent appearance in Jonson's plays. If his function in the plot connects him with asper, his name associates him with Morose, and the one who sees through and exposes imposture is as effectually denuded of heroic quality as Dame Pliant is, of pathos. He is beaten in argument by Subtle. When on the verge of triumphantly establishing his case, carrying out his just vengeance, and reaping his modest reward, he is checkmated by Lovewit's volts-face, and is involved in the discomfiture of the rogues and dupes. Surly corresponds to Bonario in *Volpone*, as Dame Pliant to CeliaBonario's rescue of Celia is a wooden imitation of the chivalry and pathos of romance; the rescue of Dame Pliant by Surly is denuded of romance to the last shred:

You are

They say, widow, rich; and I am a bachelor,
Worth nought: Your fortunes may make me a man,
As mine have preserved you a woman. Think upon it,
And whether, I have deserv'd you, or no".

Surly at this point appears, like Bonario, to have the game in his hands. Subtle, like *Volpone*, is for the moment dumb-founded, but Face, like *Mosca*, promptly recovers the lost ground, and enlists the whole band of dupes against the one shrewd man. Druggier and Dapper testify against him, and he is forced to go away, humbled and disgraced by the support - Lovewit extends to Face. He is a shrewd man and disguised as a Spanish Don he gets inside knowledge of goings on in the house, but all his efforts are frustrated because Lovewit reverses the situation.

ii) Kastril: He is the brother of Dame Pliant and a heir to three thousand pounds a year who has come to town recently. He still retains the mannerisms and coarseness of a villager:

"Ass, my suster,
Go kuss him, as the cunning man would have you;
I'll - thrust a pin in your buttocks else"

Even a cursory reader can notice the way he mispronounces 'sister' and 'kiss' and his coarse language. Jonson based his characters on 'humours' in *Every Man in His Humour*, Kastril's character in *The Alchemist* was also based on a humour called 'Choler'. In the play, he is referred to as 'the angry boy'. He has come to town to live by his wits and to learn the art of duelling. To a modern reader like you the idea of learning the art of duelling may look ludicrous, but - Kastril has some like-minded friends in Shakespeare's plays: In *Romeo and Juliet*, Mercutio talks about Tybalt, who adheres to the rigid etiquette of the duel; one in *As You Like it* Touchstone describes the art of insult - the steps by which a duel is developed. Kastril, thus, is young, brash, purse-proud, and ill-mannered.

iii) Dame Pliant: She is a young, beautiful, and wealthy widow who does not have any individuality. She is offered as a bait to Surly; she is annoyed with Surly as he did not act in time for marrying her. She is meant to be a prize and is bestowed on Lovewit at the end of the play. We will take a look at the analysis done by Herford and Simpson: "Little need be said of the three characters who in various degrees and ways contribute to bring about the denouement, and who, though all at one point or other victims of the imposture, yet stand apart from the main body of the alchemist's dupes. Dame Pliant is in every sense the least important. In his desire to make her character expressive of her name, Jonson, has really made her of 'no character at all'. Even Pope, however, would not have regarded her as like 'most women'; she is little more than a passion, and serviceable abstraction - a ball whose

various movements serve exhibit the quality of the players and mark the progress of the game - projected by the Angry Boy, saved by Surly, struggled for by Surly and Face, and finally secured by Lovewit. It is in this last stage of her fortunes that she at length counts decisively in the plot, when her person and her money serve to buy off the *Nemesis* which threatens the chief rogue and brings about one of these amazing reversal with which Jonson was somewhat too fond of baffling the expectations of his audiences. Her part in the plot somewhat resembles that of Celia; but Jonson has this time taken care that as a character in a comedy, she should not excite any tragic pity. Unfortunately, in denuding her of this improper kind of interest he has made her too unsubstantial to be even matter for mirth."

iv) **Lovewit** He arrives late - i.e. in the last act of the play and describes himself in a single sentence. "I love a teeming wit as I love my nourishment." Like other landlords in London, Lovewit leaves his home in the care of his servant Jeremy, when the plague breaks out. On his unexpected return, he comes to know that his house has been misused by Jeremy in the guise of Face. He loves his servant for his 'teeming wit' and readily forgives him in return for a matrimonial alliance with Dame Pliant. The analysis of Herford and Simpson is pertinent: "Righteous Nemesis at the hands of an indignant mob allied with offended justice appears to impend, too secure for comedy. It is Lovewit, who at a stroke, reverses the situation. Jonson was bent upon avoiding the lofty retribution air by which in *Volpone* he had established his abhorrence of violence; and he has contrived the denouement with great skill for this end. Lovewit is as far as possible from resembling the ideal vindicator of virtue. He comes with an authoritative air; but strikes a bargain with the principal culprit - Face - for the lion's share of the spoils. He effects a revolution in the plot in virtue merely of a temper too easy and humorous, seriously to resent wrongs even when they concern himself, and ready for a jest to overlook a multitude of sins. 'I love a teeming wit, as I love my nourishment,' he declares and indeed his only concern, when he hears of the mysterious goings on in his house, is as to the 'nature of the device which his witty knave may have contrived.' Jonson has placed the jest in the hands of a joy boy'. Not hide-bound, whose easy geniality proves a ready solvent for menacing tragic harms. The witty trickster comes of unscathed, while the fools and dupes suffer." Lovewit - whose name is suggestive of love for wit and witty situations-brings out a merry denouement befitting for a comedy.

The aforementioned discussions of characters is sufficient to make you understand that with *The Alchemist* we are not concerned with 'characters' at the level of psychological realism that often we are in Shakespeare's plays. **Jonson's characters are types, exemplifications of particular attitudes and capacities that are found in society, but rarely found in the isolated and purified form in which he presents them.** His process is what the Elizabethans might have called an anatomy - meaning a dissection, a careful laying-out of the parts of a body, to show their essential nature and function, and their interrelations. *The Alchemist* is an anatomy of the 'humour' of greed, and it demonstrates with beautiful simplicity an obvious truth that is often forgotten; if everybody cheats, everybody will be cheated. **This is not to say that Jonson is not interested in human nature, and that he does not know a great deal about it.** Moreover we don't complain of a newspaper's cartoon that it is a worse picture of a politician than the news photo on the front page. The exaggerations may amuse and delight us in the caricature at the same time as they reveal things not apparent in the photo. **Jonson's characterisation has the ruthless energy and economy of the best kind of caricature.**

5.3 LANGUAGE

Over a period of time the Elizabethan playwrights developed a kind of dramatic verse which reached its pinnacle by the time *The Alchemist* was written. The entire area of development can be traced in Shakespeare's plays from his earliest to the latest

Elizabethan and Jacobean verse is usually called 'blank verse' (please note that it is not 'free verse') A ten-syllable line 'iambic pentameter' is the basic. The line has five feet; each consisting of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables. By the time *The Alchemist* was written, the lines were irregular in stress, frequently contained more or fewer than ten syllables. They were frequently run on; that is, no natural pause in meaning occurred at the end of the line. These irregularities made for a more flexible verse. The lines did not cease to be poetry; the audience had a built in expectation, due to long habit, of the rhythmic line, and irregularity added a feeling of variety. At one extreme, a passage could be more mundane, less lofty, prosaic without being prose, while at the other end, passages become more poetic, flowery, musical without perhaps ever quite being poetry.

Further Jonson's dramatic verse is functional; it is the rhetorical means to the end of his art. *The Alchemist* is in blank verse except for Surly's phrases of Spanish, the concluding lines of the play - where rhyme is used unobtrusively and parts of the two scenes where Dapper is prepared for an then meets the Fairy Queen. Here the mock-ritual is emphasized by the addition of rhyme. The use of the one form of verse for all the varieties of idiom, mood, and social status in the play insists on its essential unity, but within this common form Jonson is capable of very varied effects. He can range from the coarse insults of the opening quarrel to the grandiose fantasies of Mammon. The language and the forms of syntax it takes are always appropriate to character and situation and the blank verse has great variety and rhythmic vitality.

I am a young beginner, and am building
Of a new shop, and't like your worship; just,
At corner of a street. (Here's the plot on't).
And I would know, by art, sir, of your worship,
Which way I should make my door, by necromancy,
And, where my shelves. And, which should be for boxes.
And, which for pots. I would be glad to thrive, sir.
And, I was wish'd to your worship by a gentleman,
One Captain Face, that says you know men's planets,
And thie good angels, and their bad. (I.III.7-16)

In this passage Druggler's stammering nervousness, his clumsy repetitions, and his low and monosyllabic vocabulary dislocate the verse until it scarcely exists. Only two of the lines above have ten syllables: they are consecutive, and linked by a violent enjambement which virtually imposes a different division on the speaker: 'just, /At corner of a street.'

Tribulation, the practised preacher, has by contrast an unctuous fluency:

The children of perdition are, oft-times,
Made instruments even of the greatest works.
Besides, we should give somewhat to man's nature,
The place he lives in, still about the fire,
And fume of metals, that intoxicate
The brain of man, and make him prone to passion.
Where have you greater atheists than your cooks?
Or more profane or choleric than your glass-men?
More antichristian, than your bell-founders?
(III.i.15-23)

This is much more regular and the units of syntax tend to coincide with the divisions of the verse. While he can carry a sentence over two or three lines of verse Tribulation never goes far before coming firmly to rest on a metrical and syntactic pause. The repeated rhetorical questions (a line apiece) indicate the pulpit orator as clearly as phrases like 'children of perdition', 'instruments ...of the greatest works', or 'more profane'. Mammon's syntax, like his range of allusion, is much more

adventurous. His clauses spring from one another and proliferate in apposition as his fantasy moves (by association) to wilder visions:

I am pleas'd the glory of her sex should know,
This nook, here, of the Friars, is no climate
For her, to live obscurely in, to learn
Physic, and surgery, for the Constable's wife
Of some odd hundred in Esses; but come forth,
And taste the air of palaces; eat, drink
The toils of emp'rics, and their boasted practice;
Tincture of pearl, and coral, gold, and amber;
Be seen at feasts; and triumphs; have it ask'd,
What miracle she is? Set all the eyes
Of court a-fire, like a burning-glass,
And work 'em into cinders; when the jewels
Of twenty states adorn thee, and the light
Strikes out the stars; that, when they name is mention'd,
Queens may look pale: and, we but showing our love,
Nero's Poppaea may be lost in story!

(iv.i.130-45)

The natural rhythm of the voice speaking these lines does not destroy the pattern of recurrence in the metre, as so nearly happens in Druggier's lines. Nor, as with Tribulation, does it reinforce it, offering only crude and simple variations. Rather it counterpoints and harmonizes to produce a rich and exciting rhythmic texture. The sixteen lines are all one sentence and can scarcely be divided: the energy of Mammon's vision carries through and unifies the almost Miltonically relaxed syntax. The syntax itself is like a dream or vision, where things shift into each other and change their form.

The syntax of Subtle's exposition of alchemy (ii.iii.142 ff.) is, like the verse, regular, logical, and orderly. As with Tribulation's speech, the verse - and sense-units tend to coincide, but here the linguistic structures are those of reasoned argument, not emotional exhortation. What Subtle is saying is non-sense, for the language of alchemy defines itself, and has no reference, for all its sonority and glamour, to the real world. But the forms the language takes are those of ordered rational discourse, of logical, learned, unimpassioned disputation. This tone is emphasized by the regular but not over-emphatic forward march of the verse. Here in the verse-form and the syntax is a parallel to the concern with disguise and the playing of parts noticed before (see p.xxiii). Subtle disguises his language in the forms of learning and reason, and therein demonstrates his subtlety. Surly cannot dispute with him on these terms, for to do so would be to move into Subtle's self-defining world and argue upon his premises. Accordingly he launches into a catalogue, a violent piling-up of terms (182-98) that

Would burst a man to name

And almost bursts the actor in speaking. The continued appearance of sweet reason in Subtle's response to this irascible and (in form) irrational outburst leaves Surly no reply. In the scene which follows, where Subtle has to deal with the much less sophisticated Ananias, his tone is more authoritative, his rhythm much more staccato. It is, as he says,

In a new tune, new gesture, but old language.
(II.iv.27)

The pattern of the verse is maintained not only in the longer set speeches. It persists in the most rapid exchanges of dialogue:

Sub.		Cheater.	Characterization
Face.		Bawd.	and Language
Sub.	Cow-herd.		
Face.	Conjuror.		
Sub.	Cutpurse.		
Face.	Witch.		
Doll.		O me!	
	We are ruin'd! Lost!	(i.i.106-8)	

Jonson admirably manages effects of interruption and rapid changes of gear:

Sub.	The divine secret, that doth fly in clouds, From east to west; and whose tradition Is not from men, but spirits.
Ana.	I hate traditions:
	I do not trust them -
Tri.	Peace.
Ana.	They are Popish, all.
	I will not peace. I will not-
Tri.	Ananias.
Ana.	Please the profane, to grieve the godly: I may not.
Sub.	Well, Ananias, thou shalt overcome.
	(III.ii.104-10)

Tribulation's 'Peace' fits into the caesura of Ananias's line. His 'Ananias' cuts a line short and completes it, but Ananias's next line is long and he need hardly pause in his delivery (which must be rapid) for Tribulation's interruption. Subtle's much slower line would come after a marked pause, leaving 'I may not' hanging in an embarrassing silence. Mammon and on occasion other characters) interrupts himself:

My baths, like pits
To fall into: from whence, we will come forth,
And roll us dry in gossamer and roses.
(Is it arriv'd at ruby?) - Where I spy
A wealthy citizen,...

(II.ii.50-4)

A most ingenious verse effect is the passage at IV.V.25-32, where against the background of Doll's incantory ravings 'out of Broughton', Face and Mammon have an agitated colloquy about what is to be done.

Jonson's dramatic verse is less easily quotable than Shakespeare's. Set pieces do not detach themselves so readily from context. It is exactly Jonson's 'art', in his sense of the term, the art that he said Shakespeare wanted, that makes this so. His ramatic verse has great range and energy but it is always ordered and controlled by a considered dramatic context, and this is both its strength and its limitation.

5.4 THE CRITICAL RECEPTION OF BEN JONSON

Jonson was a celebrity in his own day. Taking the Englosh stage by storm with Every Man in His Humour he followed it up with the comical satire, Every man out of His Himour. a theatrical success accompanied by considerable controversy His characters were so life-like that to clear himself of the charge of attacking particular persons he had to deelaane his purpise ,viz portraying follies nit individuats. The war of the Theatres and the mature comedies briught his avowed critical principles so mach to the fotesthat it was easier to label his artistry as classical, realistic, etc

rather than take into account its growth and development. Thus, the dynamism of his dramaturgy came to be ignored. Among the playwrights of his age, Jonson was alone in viewing plays as literature. The significance of the publication of Jonson's *Works* in 1616 has been pointed out in Unit-1. Jonson was in the habit of revising a play for publication and in the process expanded the text considerably. The acting versions of the play, on the other hand, reveal several cuts in the long speeches and expository passages. Jonson seems to have followed the Renaissance principle of 'copia' and elaborated so that a point is heavily underlined. Combined with this is his love of technical terminology of diverse kinds, which he was fond of displaying both for purposes of accuracy or realism and to impress others with his learning.

Milton was perhaps the first to pair Jonson and Shakespeare, and the familiar lines from "L'Allegro," as Michael Jaimieson explains, contain "a graceful compliment to Ben Jonson," which is missed by many modern readers. This pairing was continued by Dryden as well. The course of Jonson Criticism came to present an irony of sorts a little later. In the eighteenth century Jonson who praised Shakespeare as "not of an age," was declared not "a universal genius, but of his time only." In 1753 an enthusiastic champion of Shakespeare, Robert Shiells, quietly added his own comments into an edition of *Conversations*. As Shiells's interpolations were not detected till the end of the century, his unfavourable comparisons of Jonson to Shakespeare was regarded as the testimony of one who knew the poet in the flesh. A few years earlier, Macklin, a Shakespearean actor brought out a letter supposedly referring to a pamphlet published in the last days of Jonson's career. Barish cites a passage to establish the malicious forgery:

"It would greatly exceed the limits of your paper to set down all the *contempts* and *invectives* which were uttered and written by Ben ... as unanswerable and shaming evidences to prove his ill-nature and *ingratitude* to Shakespeare, who first introduced him to the theatre and fame [modernised spelling]."

The critical reception of Jonson is coloured by misconceptions about Jonson's views on Shakespeare's art. The 1616 Folio edition of Jonson's *Works* probably paved the way for the publication of the First Folio of Shakespeare for which Jonson wrote the commemorative poem, "To the memory of my beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare". Jonson's tribute reaches out to the quintessential Shakespeare, and his very phrases have been assimilated into all estimates of the bard: Soul of the age! The applause! Delight! The wonder of our stage!

He was not of an age, but for all time! ... My gentle Shakespeare...

But what has stuck in the public mind is the oblique criticism of Shakespeare incidental to the defence of Jonson's own conception of comedy. References to Pericles. 'Tales, Tempests and such drolleries' and his general condemnation of the violation of the Unities, considered along with Jonson's remark cited by William Drummond in the course of conversation. "That Shakespeare wanted Art" had initiated unfavourable comments on Jonson, the man, and the dramatist.

As a kind of literary eminence, Jonson presided over the 'tribe of Ben' which used to assemble at the Devil's tavern. This circle included Robert Herrick and other "poetic sons". The tribute to Jonson's memory, *Jonsonus Virbius* (1638), in spite of the hyperboles, does reveal, remarks D.H.Craig, "something like an alternative literary history, an English Renaissance without Shakespeare. According to the elegists, it is Jonson who has brought English culture, and the English language from obscurity and crudity to one that can match the culture of the ancients". The motivation behind this tirade remains to a large extent a mystery. It was a half-apologetic Edmund Malope who cleared Jonson's name but diffidently. The final cleansing of the blot on Jonson was chiefly the work of William Gifford much later. An unfavourable comparison of Jonson the artist with Shakespeare became in the works of Barish

a conditioned reflex," and Gifford "silenced the chorus of detraction against Jonson as man."

The eighteenth century presents a paradox, while Jonson the man was reviled, his plays enjoyed immense popularity. A feverish contest seems to have run its course "the 18th century critics – those who were involved – competed with each other in ascribing ignoble motives to Jonson." scenes were invented purporting to sketch Jonson's being "forced to acknowledge Shakespeare's superiority." Forgeries were resorted to so that Jonson could be presented as a plagiarist and even a blackmailer. The malicious forgeries of Robert Shiells and the fabrications of Macklin are well known instances. It was the actor David Garrick, who in the role of Drugger, secured for *The Alchemist* a special place in English stage history.

Jonson's self-image did not fit in with the Romantic conception of the artist, a dreamer; in temperament and artistic aim he was the opposite of Shelly and Keats. Hazlitt, for one, deplored what he perceived to be a defect in Jonson, the inability to roam imaginatively, being just a grub. Much stress was laid on artifice. As Barish notes, "To praise Jonson, one had to turn him into a schoolmaster, or an exhibitionist of learning, or a purveyor of exoticism".

The tone of criticism changed somewhat in the Victorian era. Jonson's lyrics were singled out for renewed appreciation, thus accounting for the inclusion of a few pieces in that celebrated anthology, Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*. T.E.Hulme paved the way for an appreciation of classicism and romanticism in his famous essay, and indirectly for a critical re-orientation more responsive to Jonson's kind of art. It was, however, T.S.Eliot with whom there was a turning of the tide. His identification of Jonson's artistry as a matter of overall design rather than of single passages, and his emphasis on Jonson's relevance to the modern times brought about a revival of interest in Jonson. Edmund Wilson, in spite of his general censure of Jonson, isolates *The Alchemist* for special praise. A number of twentieth century critics carried forward the new enthusiasm for Jonson's art and some of them were cited in Unit-III.

The researches of Herford and Simpson over a quarter of a century bore fruit in the massive edition of Jonson's *Works* in ten volumes (1925-52). Most critical studies and editions have been referred to in the preceeding Units and in the Bibliography. A review of Jonson scholarship of the 1980's is provided by Daryl W.Palmer. Besides examining the biographies by Rosalind Miles and David Riggs, he summarises the findings of seven studies of Jonson's oeuvre and of nine critical approaches to isolated aspects. The final word on this survey is furnished by D. H.Craig: "In a special sense, then, Jonson is irreparable from his critical heritage; the student of his works in the late twentieth century must still begin with questions which he himself raised and which his contemporaries and his immediate posterity were compelled to answer."

5.5. QUESTIONS

1. Write a long note on the swindlers: Subtle, Face, and Dol Common
2. Write a long note on the dupes: Mammon, Drugger, and Dapper
3. Write a short note on the female figures in the play.
4. Discuss the appropriateness of the names given to the characters in the play.
5. Show how language reflects the social standing, the temperament, or the intellectual background of various characters.
6. The Alchemist is a satire on human follies and foibles" Discuss

5.6 ANNOTATION PASSAGES

Annotate the following passages with reference to context.

- i) Sure he has got
Some bawdy pictures, to call all this ging;
The friar and the nun; or the new motion
Of the knight's curser covering the parson's mare;
The boy of six year old, with the great thing;
Or 't may be he has the fleas the run at tilt
Upon a table, or some dog to dance?
- ii) But that 'tis yet not deep I' the afternoon,
I should believe my neighbours had seen double
Through the blackpot, and made these apparitions!
For on my faith to your worship, for these three weeks
And upwards, the door has not been opened.
- iii) Sir, you were wont to affect mirth and wit—
But here's no place to talk on't I' the street.
Give me but leave to make the best of my fortune,
And only pardon me th' abuse of your house:
- iv) But the sweet face of your hath turned the tide,
And made it flow with joy, that ebb'd of love.
Arise, and touch our velvet gown.
- v) To leave him three or four hundred chests of treasure,
And some twelve thousand acres of Fairyland,
If he game well and comely, with good gamesters.
- vi) She must by any means address some present
To the cunning man; make him amends for wronging
His art with her suspicion; send a ring,
Or chain of pearl; she will be tortured else
Extremely in her sleep, say, and ha' strange things
Come to her. Wilt thou?
- vii) Good faith, now she does blame y' extremely, and says
You swore, and told her you had ta'en the pains,
To dye your beard, and umber o'er your face,
Borrowed a suit and ruff, all for her love;
And then did nothing. What an oversight,
And want of putting forward, sir, was this!
Well fare an old harquebusier, yet,
Could prime his powder, and give fire, hit,
All in a twinkling.
- viii) That master
That had received such happiness by a servant,
In such a widow, and with so much wealth,
Were very ungrateful if he would not be
A little indulgent to that servant's wit,
And help his fortune, though with some small strain.